



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



# Identity and Vinyl Culture

Royal Musical Association Study Day

Saturday 18 November 2017

University of Birmingham

Keynote Speaker:

Professor Paul Long, Birmingham City University



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### Study Day Programme

<i>08:30-09:00</i>	<i>Arrivals and registration</i>
<i>09.00- 09:10</i>	<i>Welcome</i>
<i>09.10-10.40</i>	<i>Session I: Materiality and Self</i>
<i>10.40-11.00</i>	<i>Coffee</i>
<i>11.00-12.40</i>	<i>Session II: Digital backlash</i>
<i>12.40-1.40pm</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
<i>1.40-2.40</i>	<i>Keynote</i>
<i>14.40-15.0</i>	<i>Coffee</i>
<i>15.00-16.30</i>	<i>Session III: Patterns of Consumption</i>
<i>16.30</i>	<i>Conclusions and drinks at Joe's Bar</i>

# Session I: Materiality and Self

## What's New?: The Turntable in Contemporary Culture

**Gabrielle Kielich (McGill University)**

The extensive discussion around the resurgence of vinyl records has taken for granted the instrument necessary for their playback — the turntable. The turntable has moved into a generation that is “culturally and historically distant from its place of origin” (Akrich 1992). Its contemporary presence tends to be explained as an act of nostalgia and due to a cultural fixation with the retro and the past. However, that perspective limits the turntable’s ability to be understood as part of the present and as a product of contemporary factors. For the millennials embracing this technology for the first time, the turntable is *new*. This view is supported by the “discursive rules” (Spigel 1992) shaped by popular media that prioritize instructions for the turntable’s proper use and care. They also work against the turntable’s perceived difficulty of use through a descriptive emphasis on ease and simplicity. Equally significant is its status as a desirable decorative item and an expression of identity. The turntables for sale in retail stores, which are available in an array of colours and portable designs, have been called “lifestyle choices” and described as being significant factors in millennials’ home decoration (Petridis, Gibsone and Paphides 2016). These design choices are reflected on social media, where users share pictures of their turntables alongside vinyl albums and other décor, with over 100,000 posts referencing the most popular brand, Crosley. These types of images are also visible in turntable marketing campaigns, which means that users’ social media behaviour facilitates exchange and belonging among users while functioning as a form of free labour for interested businesses (Terranova 2000). This paper explores the turntable’s introduction to a new generation of users and examines its use and value as the product of contemporary listening practices that is uniquely dependent on the current cultural context.

*Gabrielle Kielich is a PhD student in the department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University. While her research focuses on labour in the creative industries, this turntable paper is her “side project” that relates to additional interests in the temporalities of popular music culture.*

## Collective Value and Individual Difference: The Case of *We Buy White Albums*

**Iain Taylor (Birmingham City University)**

Occupying a conceptual space somewhere between exhibition, installation, and collection, *We Buy White Albums* is the work of American artist Rutherford Chang, who, at the time of writing, owns 1803 first run pressings of the Beatles’ eponymous ninth album. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> August and 14<sup>th</sup> September 2014, Rutherford’s collection was being displayed in its entirety at FACT in Liverpool, located in a re-appropriated loading bay just off Liverpool’s Bold Street, and arranged and presented in the style of a record store. Many of the albums in Rutherford’s collection are scratched, defaced, and in some instances decomposing. As individual artefacts, they might be considered worthless. Yet, when collected together, they acquire a completely different sense value, one where value resides not in the individual objects but in the countless variations between and amongst multiple copies of the same artefact. Every record is the same, but each record is different.

In this paper, I will argue that *We Buy White Albums* is illustrative of a very particular kind of value that is inherent only to physical artefacts. Collections of physical *stuff* like vinyl records possess a symbolic value which is often greater than the sum of their parts, with meaning generated and understood in relation to interrelated notions of physicality, temporality, and distinction between individual artefacts. In this paper I will explore these concepts in relation to *We Buy White Albums*, before reflecting on what the collection can tell us about the nature of value in relation to musical materialities more generally.

*Iain Taylor is a Lecturer in Music Industries in the Birmingham School of Media at Birmingham City University, and is currently in the painfully late stages of PhD study at University of the West of Scotland. His research is concerned with the negotiation of value around music formats, and the nature of value in an age of increasing digital intangibility.*

## ‘You Don’t Collect Vinyl?’: Vinyl, Identity, and Normativity

**Stan Erraught (Bucks New University)**

HH: “It always pisses people off where they’ll say, ‘What? You don’t collect vinyl?’ I move around a lot, so it makes no sense”

The above quote, from an interview with Holly Herndon in the *Quietus*<sup>1</sup> has stayed with me since I first read it. For a few reasons: the posited normativity of vinyl collecting, of investment – both material and emotional – in the *ur*-physical format as something that an artist with her particular parcel of cultural capital ‘should’ do. Secondly, her quite sensible point that, when, as a performer/academic/ recording artist – roles she combines- she’s going to move around a lot, and, if nothing else, records take up space and require a permanent address.

In this paper I’d like to tease out these two questions a little: where does the expectation that a contemporary artist whose audience we might expect to be composed of the sort of people who do collect vinyl should herself be a collector come from? What particular assemblage of notions of authenticity, of embeddedness in whatever tradition or traditions is meant to inform her work, or even simply the view that, as someone who is clearly ‘nerdy’ in many ways – techy, interested in the history of electro-acoustic music should, as it were, complete the picture by being a vinyl fanatic,

The second point, the fact that collecting records in any great quantity – and quantity does seem to be a *telos*, and not merely a by-product of collecting these days – demands a certain security of abode and the sort of space that is rarely available to young renters in culturally central cities anymore. It’s hard to couch surf dragging boxes of vinyl around with you.

This would seem to open up a larger set of questions about the claimed or perceived normativity of vinyl as a) the ‘proper’ medium for at least certain kinds of music and b) collecting as a component of creativity.

*Stan Erraught is Principal Lecturer in Music Management at Bucks New University. After a long, if unspectacular career as a performing and recording musician, and songwriter, Stan returned to academia and received his PhD in philosophy from University College Dublin in 2010, supported by a full scholarship from the Irish Research Council. His research interests include critical theory, German idealism, particularly Kant, philosophy of music and the social economy of popular music. A monograph, *On Music, Value and Utopia: Nostalgia for an Age Yet to Come?* will be published by Rowman and Littlefield International in January 2018.*

*He has far too many records.*

# Session II: Digital backlash

## Noisy Island?: Irish Popular Music in the Digital Age and the Re-emergence of the Vinyl Record

**Michael Lydon (National University of Ireland, Galway)**

This proposed conference paper will examine Irish popular music in the post 1992 era of digital reception and production, questioning an emerging dissatisfaction with digital music and the use of audio and environmental noise by Irish recording artists, including Cathy Davey, Damien Dempsey and Fionn Regan. It will also look to position this use of noise by artists alongside the re-emergence of the vinyl record while questioning a perceived authenticity of audio technology and noise within Irish popular music.

The work will initially look to place Irish popular music within an existing and growing global narrative of dissatisfaction with digital music, drawing upon existing academic works by Paul Hegarty and Damon Krukowski's on the history and use of noise in popular music, and Dominik Bartmanski and Ian Woodward's work on the re-emergence of the vinyl record as the 'king format' in the digital age. In addition, this paper will position these works alongside academic work from the field of Sound Studies, looking at Jonathon Sterne theory on the demystification of noise within the digital era, Laura U. Marks' theory on noise in enfolding-unfolding aesthetes, and Salomé Voegelin's theory on sonic possible worlds.

Gerry Smyth's well known assertion that the island of Ireland is 'full of noises, and it behoves the Irish critical community to begin listening to them, and not only to the noises that are sweet, but also the ones we are routinely encouraged to believe are not, underlines much of this proposed paper as it looks to question dissatisfaction with digital media and its implication on Irish popular music and its authenticating of noise and vinyl culture.

*Michael Lydon is in his second year of PhD research under the supervision of Dr Méabh Ní Fhuartháin at the Centre of Irish Studies, National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). He is a recipient of a Doctoral Fellowship in Irish Music Studies, and graduated with a First Class MA from Cardiff School of Music in 2015, and a First Class BA from NUIG in 2013. He was installed as a committee member for the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) UK and Ireland branch's Postgraduate Conference at Cardiff's School of Music in September, 2015 and is the inaugural Student Representative for the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS).*

## Who Owns the Vinyl Version?

**Jeffrey Izzo (California State University Northridge)**

In May of 2016, a US Federal District Court (*ABS Entertainment, Inc. v. CBS Corporation, et al.*, USDC, C.D. California 2016) ruled that in certain instances, a so-called "re-mastered" recording can qualify as a derivative work under US Copyright Law (A "derivative work" is a work based upon one or more preexisting works...in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted). Whilst this ruling is non-binding outside of the immediate jurisdiction – in other words, it does not set legal precedent obligating other federal or state courts to abide by it – it did throw up several red flags for rights

holders, especially those of pre-1972 sound recordings (which are not protected under federal copyright law). For instance, an author who transferred her copyrights to a third party may recapture those rights between 35 and 40 years after the effective date of such transfer. However, US copyright law also provides that any derivative works created by the transferee during that period may continue to be exploited under the terms of the original grant – so while copyright to the underlying sound recording may be recaptured by the artist, the individual who re-mastered such recording may continue to exploit it.

Since a fairly significant slice of the vinyl market consists of reissues from “heritage artists,” the question as to who owns the copyrights to these recordings should they be deemed derivative works can become hazy if the ABS case achieves precedential status.

My presentation would take an in-depth look (from a US legal) perspective at the re-mastering issue, as well as other legal and business concerns that may arise during the vinyl recording process – including creating digital versions of the recordings, and how non-inclusion on iTunes (and its ilk) and streaming sites might affect the artist’s revenue stream.

*Jeffrey Izzo is an Assistant Professor and the Mike Curb Endowed Chair of Music Industry Studies at California State University Northridge. Before he entered full-time teaching, Jeffrey spent over 20 as an entertainment and media attorney, representing songwriters, performers, independent record companies, authors, and filmmakers, as well as working as general counsel for a Seattle multi-media organization. He earned his Juris Doctor at Seattle University School of Law, and is admitted to the bar in the states of New York, Massachusetts, and Washington.*

*In addition to being an entertainment lawyer, Jeffrey is an accomplished composer, lyricist, vocalist, pianist, guitarist, and bass player. He holds a Bachelor of Music in Composition from Berklee School of Music and a Master of Music in Composition from the University of Edinburgh, and has composed everything from pop songs and jingles to symphonic, chamber, and choral works -- but his passion remains music for the stage. He is an ASCAP composer/publisher affiliate and a member of numerous entertainment and academic organizations, including The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, The Society of Composers and Lyricists, the Dramatists Guild, The Songwriter’s Guild of America, the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, and the College Music Society.*

*Jeffrey is a contributing author to Music Entrepreneurship (edited by Allan Dumbreck and Gayle MacPherson, both of the University of the West of Scotland), a book featuring case-study analyses of the music industry environment and examination of the value of the entrepreneur within it.*

## **Vinyl Play: Vinyl recordings, mobility and counter public formations**

**Dr. Tim J. Anderson (Old Dominion University)**

Associated with forms of media such as newspapers, cinema, and television, the issues of the public sphere and counter publics as spaces of communal formation and contestation have long been key critical concepts for those invested in popular culture. In the case of music, while Michael Chanan has explored issues of architectural space in music as a mode of publicity (1994), the issues of the public sphere and counter publics has remained severely under investigated by those in popular music. This paper draws from the work of Negt and Kluge (1993), Miriam Hansen (1991, 2004) and Michael Warner (2005) to make an argument that establishes an adequate purchase

for the concept of the public sphere that is media-specific for the needs of popular music studies. First, the public sphere as it relates to popular music should be oriented around issues of affective modes of communal and political purchase. Second, one must the cultural material practices key to the alteration of communicative space, which is most often tactical and always dependent on the deployment of specific musical materials. I specifically argue that the record's post-1948 "vinyl lite" and contemporary formats are media that have radically altered public affections. Unlike earlier forms, these formats and systems are more mobile, plastic objects that afford for more playful moments of innervation, movement, and imaginary alterations. Whether this play occurs in bedrooms or clubs, I argue that this theorization allows us to understand how playing records assists communities to explore those sensational knowledges that compose ways of feeling so fundamental to issues of identity, subcultural or otherwise.

***Tim Anderson** is Associate Professor of Communication and Theatre Arts at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia (USA). Dr Anderson has published numerous book chapters, refereed journal articles, and two monographs. His latest research project focuses on recordings, musicians, listeners and the public sphere. More information about Dr. Anderson and his publications can be accessed at his website, [timjanderson.com](http://timjanderson.com)*

# Keynote

Professor Paul Long (Birmingham City University)

## ***'You went away you can't come back'***

### **How vinyl is back but not *back back***

*Madeleine turns the crank on the phonograph [...] I recognize the melody from the very first bars. It is an old rag-time with a vocal refrain. I heard American soldiers whistle it in 1917 in the streets of LaRoche. It must date from before the War. But the recording is much more recent. Still, it is the oldest record in the collection, a Pathe record for sapphire needle. Sartre, Nausea.*

In this paper I want to consider the status of vinyl in the context of changes in the business and culture of popular music and reflections on endings and *The End*. Motifs of endings – of love, life, of *music* itself - are legion in popular music. Likewise with industry and academic analyses: in 'The Industrialization of Music' (1988), Simon Frith writes that: 'We are coming to the end of the record era now (and so, perhaps, to the end of pop music as we know it)'. Frith's observations anticipate a relatively recent and profound sense of ending attendant on the disappearance of record stores, the decline in particular formats: the 45, 'B' sides, mixtapes and *albums*. Practices, sites, artefacts and *ideas* that have long been central to pop and its experience now seem less important, less vital.

As Frith's comment signals, vinyl recordings (and let's include shellac here)– 78, 45 and 33 RPM – have long been central to the economies and culture of popular music. Operating as commodity, artefact and symbol, vinyl's mass produced status attests to both the ephemerality and durability of pop music (and in different ways for classical, jazz and folk forms etc.). Superseded by the compact disc and digital files and in terminal decline, repeated sightings have been made claiming a return for vinyl which reminds one that attendant upon the theme of ending is another feature of pop discourse: the notion of the revival; after all, Punk's *not* dead!

Nonetheless, I want to suggest that whatever the metrics of vinyl's revived sales, what it represents is already over. Subject to wistful commemoration, connoisseurship and envelopment by heritage discourse, the status of vinyl signals a wider archival culture focussed upon particular paradigms of pop and indeed changes in the organisation of capital. As I suggest, vinyl's role now might be 'merely' historical, an object inviting reflections and investigation on its role in underwriting a particularly specific moment of modernity and cultural being.

**Paul Long** is Professor of Media and Cultural History in the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University. His current research encompasses the global dimensions of popular music heritage in terms of cultural translation and the nature of popular music as historical object.



# Session III: Patterns of Consumption

## From Shoreditch To Sainsbury's: The Vinyl Revival and the Music Industry

**Pete Gofton (Goldsmiths University)**

Over the past decade or so a growing market has emerged for vinyl records, with specialist record labels and industrial-commercial practices catering for it. I am undertaking an ethnographic study of this industry, incorporating an examination of the format, the record labels that sell it, the marketplace they operate within, and their relationship to the consumers.

Through use of physical product, situation within culture, and a changing society, an interesting paradigm has emerged, rife with contradictions: industrial scale, yet also grounded in locality and identity. Artisanal and oppositional, yet married to post-digital industry. Borne of the politics of both cultural and physical gentrification, yet an expression of individual politics and identity. Why do we still buy records when we can get it for free?

By examining the links between the industry, the format, its shifting identity in culture, and the increasing corporatisation of that culture, we may come to a greater understanding not only of the music industry, but of the way in which, post-digital, cultural production used as a primary economic engine.

*Pete Gofton is in his second year of his PhD at Goldsmiths, conducting an ethnographic study of the post digital music industry, focussing on the vinyl 'revival'. He is a professional musician for almost twenty years. He has released a number of albums, appeared on Top Of The Pops (twice), and been both numbers one and three in John Peel's Festive Fifty. He is a music educator of a decade standing, and DJ (vinyl only). His prize possession is Rick Wakeman's Mellotron.*

## Subverting the Vinyl Stereotype: Is this Medium of Music Gendered?

**Karlyn King (University of Birmingham)**

In December 2016, vinyl album sales outsold digital downloads for the first time (Savage, 2016). This is also the year that vinyl sales made more money for British artists than streaming services (Plunkett, 2016). Deemed obsolete in 1988 with the decline of cassette tape sales and the increase of CD sales, vinyl was termed "certain death" (Plasketes, 1992). However, Record Store Day celebrated its 10th birthday in April 2017 and vinyl is sold everywhere from lifestyle and clothing stores to local supermarkets, as well as in traditional independent record stores and record fairs.

In terms of record collecting, Straw (1997) discussed traditional collector behaviour as a set of gendered cultural habits: man collects for status; woman collects for domestic adornment. Early male affiliations with hi-fi equipment could be partly explained by the electronics training predominantly received by men during both world wars. However, the post war battle appeared to be between the sexes, with the 1950's gramophone in the listening room being marketed as a haven for the hardworking man to achieve respite from the prescribed heteronormative lifestyle.

Given the current rediffusion of vinyl as a consistently growing means of music consumption, this research will examine how female consumers have interacted with this format with a short review

of the existing literature. Pilot research carried out in the past year can be analysed in a gendered framework, revealing how men and women identify with music as an object of consumption in a time of “excorporation” (Grossberg, 1984), where music sales are most definitely still a part of the capitalist agenda.

**Karlyn King** MA (Hons) is an MA by Res/PhD student at the University of Birmingham researching the rediffusion of vinyl records. Following an MA Hons in Psychology from University of Glasgow, she pursued a Postgraduate Diploma in Music Innovation & Entrepreneurship at University of the West of Scotland. She is currently lecturing Popular Music Studies at BIMM London and writing for *Nightshift Magazine*.

## **Bebop [R]evolution: Understanding the New Sound of Jazz in Postwar France**

**Jeremiah Spillane (Goldsmiths, University of London)**

*‘The first records we received in France after the liberation were those Dizzy made with Charlie Parker for Guild. I happened to receive a copy and that was a real revolution in Paris, because when I got those records, the Hot Club was a place where all the musicians and jazz fans met to hear jazz records daily and spend a few hours during the day. And when these records arrived they were the talk of the city, the very same day.’* Charles Delaunay

The arrival of bebop heralded a new dawn for jazz, a move away from the dominance of the commercial big band sound to small ensembles playing a more complex music with advanced reharmonisations and jarring chromatic dissonance. Originating with a small group of musicians in New York bebop would soon gain traction globally and a new jazz identity would emerge. The early recordings of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, as leaders of this new movement, would prove revolutionary and access to these recordings would be integral to the reformulation and development of jazz globally.

By examining these early bebop recordings, and their dissemination on 78rpm, this paper considers issues around the consumption of popular music in the 1940s, its reception and the problems faced by encountering a new musical style on record. Furthermore, it examines the transmission of bebop and the impact of these seminal recordings on the Parisian jazz scene and in particular on the jazz guitarist, Django Reinhardt (1910 - 1953).

**Jeremiah Spillane** is a PhD researcher at Goldsmiths, University of London. His current research, entitled *Identity, Improvisation and Influence: the Stylistic Development and Enduring Legacy of Django Reinhardt* focuses on the aforementioned Manouche jazz guitarist and aims to develop a clearer picture of his stylistic development.

*This research examines Reinhardt via a critical engagement of his socio-cultural milieu, and within the frame of his geo-historical context. This work pays particular attention to the intersections of genres and the diverse interactions between musicians and styles at a global level.*





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