

**INFORMATION OVERLOAD?
MUSIC STUDIES IN THE AGE OF ABUNDANCE**

**University of Birmingham
8th – 10th September 2021**

Conference Introduction

For those investigating any musical activity after about 1994, the main sources of research data will not be print archives or discrete media – they will be World Wide Web media. The Internet Archive, the web’s library, today holds over 525 billion archived web pages, while API and post-API archiving initiatives make social web platforms accessible as research databases. At first glance, no other archive is more inclusive in terms of whose voices it represents, and none more comprehensive in terms of the insights it provides into the thoughts, desires and musical tastes of ordinary people. To paraphrase the web historian Ian Milligan, whose recent book provides the title and framing for this conference, we might suggest that in its scale, granularity and plurality, the web represents the music historian’s dream (Milligan 2019: 1). Many researchers are now using the abundance of musical opinion data online as way of examining the reception of musical works and performances (Cook 2013; Edgar 2016; Spencer 2017; Mangaoang 2019; Moore 2019; Bell 2020; Lamont et al. 2020), while others have introduced digital methods to analyse net-native music genres (Born & Haworth 2018) and harvested user-generated music videos with preservation and future research in mind (Smith-Sivertsen 2020).

Yet there is good cause to be sceptical of claims to a more ‘democratic’ archive in an age of surveillance capitalism. Contrary to early hopes that the internet would bring about greater egalitarianism and democracy (Turner 2006), Shoshana Zuboff argues that the political economy of contemporary digital communications is characterised by ‘radical indifference’ in the service of maximising data flows (Zuboff 2019), and McKenzie Wark sees tech oligopolies as a ‘new ruling class’ (Wark 2019). The harms that algorithms perpetuate through biased and incomplete training data suggest that visibility within the archive remains strongly patterned according to race, gender, prosperity, ability and geography (Apprigh et al. 2018; Noble 2018). Intersecting with these concerns is a question of how the superficial ‘abundance’ of stories to be told about music in the last twenty-five years impacts on questions of historical theory. If we accept the claims of cultural theorists of neoliberalism (cf. Beradi 2009, Gilbert 2015), then is it possible that a surfeit of available paths through the data compensates for a lack of meaningful historicity over the same period?

With this conference we seek to gather researchers who are interested in the epistemological, methodological, ethical, and disciplinary problems that arise when studying music in the age of abundance.

Complete Programme

Day 1 (Wednesday 8th September)

ALL ONLINE VIA ZOOM

9:15am Welcome and Opening Remarks (Christopher Haworth, Danielle Sofer, & Edward Spencer)

PANEL ONE (9:30am to 11am)

Epistemological, Methodological, Ethical, and Disciplinary Discussions Part 1

Kirsty Fife (University College London)

Presence, absence and deletion: Implications of digital memory work in UK DIY music

Activist communities have adopted digital technologies to democratise cultural memory frequently through recent history. Informal archives are created using digital tools and unconventional methods, including Twitter hashtags (Rikam, 2015; Jules, Summers and Mitchell, 2018); Facebook groups (Smit, Heinrich and Broersma, 2018; Yaqub, 2016 and Youtube videos (Kølvraa and Stage, 2016). In the context of my research (UK DIY music communities), digital technologies are used to prolong the memory of precarious and/or short-lived musical projects, venues and promoting collectives. The intentional creation of these digital sources can be understood as an informal act of “information activism” (McKinney, 2020) in response to the perceived disposability or undervaluing of popular music within formal heritage (Baker and Huber, 2016).

This paper responds to the themes of *Information Overload?* through examining how web-based technologies are used by individuals within a specific music community context to undertake small documentary or archival projects – or as I refer to it, digital memory work. Rather than present a narrative which emphasises the emancipatory potential of social media platforms, I emphasise the tensions inherent in undertaking this work, including the potential for surveillance and censorship on social media platforms (Zuboff, 2019), the deletion of content on music platforms (Pearson, 2019), and the precarious individual labour that alternatives made outside of these structures rely upon. The resulting analysis highlights potential threats to the records that will no doubt form sources for web historians in future eras.

Steven Gamble (University College Cork)

A hybrid methodology of social web data analytics and digital ethnography for internet music studies

Music researchers are currently in an ethical quandary regarding the use of data archived online, particularly those generated across social web platforms. The methodological ideal of knowledge construction (with participants) too frequently collapses into knowledge collection (extracting data). How can music studies benefit from the use of internet data without (a) falling into the same traps that popularly characterise social media – ubiquitous opinion sharing, context collapse, ‘shouting into the void’ – and (b) repeating the privacy and surveillance violations that inform the ‘Big Tech’ economic model?

This paper first problematises the ‘abundance’ perspective developed by Milligan (and others) by asking, ‘whose abundance?’ Such a framing is steeped in the concentration of oligopolistic (e.g. GAFAM) instrumentarian power based in Global North/Western geographical axes. Second, drawing principally from Tan’s (2019) work on global internet access inequities and Campos’ (2019) research on the specificities of online musicking, I consider how critical examinations of ‘digital democracy’ reveal unequal participation and are able to identify (with a view to holding to account) abuses of privacy and the maintenance of behavioural futures markets. Building upon these interventions, I sketch out a middle-ground approach that emphasises the value of web text analytics and digital ethnographic readings in combination, rather than altogether dropping the qualitative approaches that form the basis of conventional music studies. I provide a case study of global hip hop knowledge mapping to illustrate what a post-abundance digital methodology might look like, serving the interests of users and participants of music communities.

Sureshkumar Sekar (Royal College of Music)

Self-isolation: Ethics, and Extraction of the Self, in Auto-Netnography

In 2018, I posted this tweet:

“That such an intricate, propulsive orchestral piece could be written out of the dreary industrial sound of a printing press was a revelation. Williams found music for the riveting drama unfolding around a piece of machinery from within the machinery itself.”

The tweet was replied to once, retweeted twice, and liked five times. Anyone who can access the tweet can access the personal information of all those who reacted/responded to it. “Researchers do not exist in isolation” (Ellis et al., 2011), and they certainly do not on social media. The personal information of others who engage with you online become a part of your data. Your social media data is not yours alone. So, when conducting “auto-netnography” (Kozinets & Kedzior, 2009)—studying one’s own online interactions to understand cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices—using the data of the self is not entirely without ethical questions.

In my orchestral music audience research, to uncover my biases and establish my positionality, I have been systematically analysing nearly 500,000 words of my scrappy notes on music on Twitter, Facebook, and Blogger. In this paper, I discuss (i) unclear ethical boundaries in auto-netnography, (ii) how perpetually changing and expanding multimodal features of social media make it difficult to extricate the others from the data of the self, and (iii) tools I used to create a reasonably isolated dataset that does not explicitly include or implicate the others.

--- coffee break for 15 mins ---

PANEL TWO (11:15am to 12:45pm)

Archaeology, Recovery, Maintenance

James Vail (Queen Margaret University Edinburgh)

Archival Record Labels, Digital Music Studies, and the Archaeology of the Present

Faced with a media environment characterised by musical abundance, ephemerality, and precarity, many contemporary independent record labels have adopted a reflexively archival approach to releasing music. As Benjamin - owner of the DC-based label and collective

BLIGHT - states, 'Digital platforms are really ephemeral and things in the digital world just have a shorter shelf life than anything else. It's a good idea to archive things. [...] I think to me, BLIGHT is somewhere between a community and an archival system.'

This paper asks, how should we think about the history of the last 15 years of digital music when many of those releasing music have themselves become historiographers? What does this mean for the ways in which we locate the 'contemporary'? Drawing on the work of Elodie Roy (2015), Wendy Chun (2016), and Wolfgang Ernst (2012), I explore the ways in which an archaeological approach to digital media can grasp the diverging temporalities of a digital music media world characterised both by ephemerality and emerging forms of mediated memory.

Lilli Elias (University of Amsterdam)

Archiving the (Digital) Airwaves: Can Communities Maintain the Online and Offline Heritage of Internet Music Radio?

Emerging in an age of abundance, hundreds of independent online music radio stations stream music 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. The feasibility of archiving the entire catalogue of digital-born content is onerous, given the financial restraints of most stations, and the overwhelming amount of audio files and metadata that they accrue. Presenting research from my recently submitted MA thesis, this paper synthesises the results of a qualitative case study on archiving the contents of independent online music radio stations, and explores the under-researched field of internet radio. My paper argues that independent online music radio stations are valuable and overlooked points of transmission and interlocution for music communities, which has especially been made clear during COVID-19, when independent online music radio stations have often been the sole points of connection for various dispersed and local special-interest music communities.

In this study, I question whose responsibility it is to manage these materials, and further, question the necessity of digital archival practice with the prospect of the digital dark age at the fore. Drawing on the methodological frameworks of *Interdependence* and *Networks of Care*, I suggest that the creation of a more equitable and sustainable archive lies in the hands of the networks of communities that create, listen to and interact with such programming. Finally, I call for collaborators to imagine the future of online music radio preservation as occurring in coexistence with third-party sharing and storage platforms, but not completely dependent on them.

Eamonn Bell (Durham University)

The decline and fall of The Voyager Company's *CDLink* platform: confronting digital ruin in the Web history of late-twentieth century digital audio media

The US-based Voyager Company realised the creative and commercial potential of optical media formats—Laserdiscs and mixed-mode CD-ROMs—for early-1990s interactive multimedia. Starting in 1989 with the release of a HyperCard-based interactive listening guide, Voyager wove rich multimedia, hyperlinked text, and high-quality audiovisual recordings into over 50 software releases for Mac and PC. Voyager's CDLink platform (1995) offered a protocol to synchronise the textscape of hyperspace to the data planes of the CD's iridescent surface, in an attempt to circumvent what its creators called the internet's "bandwidth bottleneck". CDLink enabled and inspired commercial ventures and amateur productions alike within the larger "extended CD" ecosystem, which flourished in the late 1990s and into the 2000s. All this came at the cusp of the widespread adoption of perceptual codecs (for example, MP3) for online multimedia distribution, which swiftly rendered CDLink outdated. Today, the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine preserves evidence of approximately 75 CDLink-enabled sites consisting of time-synced HTML pages, hyperlinked fan commentaries

on popular records, and even experimental sonic net.art. I briefly chart the technological history of CDLink, provide a flyover view of this archive, and describe the value of recovering these early-Web digital music experiences. Owing to their largely obsolete hardware and software dependencies and the ever-fading traces of the mid-1990s Web, these pages pose technical challenges to preservation, access, and analysis. CDLink, like all obsolete and oft-forgotten platforms, provides an object lesson that the apparent abundance of the digital record today is always mediated by the retrieval techniques of tomorrow.

--- lunch break for 1 hour ---

PANEL THREE (1:45pm to 3:15pm)

The Sound of Platform Capitalism

Kate Galloway (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute)

Extractive and Curatorial Abundance in Game Sound

I'm catching bugs and digging up fossils in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* and donating them to Blathers at the Natural History Museum on my recently colonized island, flying as the thunderbird reviving animals harmed by the extractive industries and sabotaging pipelines across the Albertan tar sands in *Thunderbird Strike*, and clearing rocks and grass for my expansive farm outside Pelican Town in *Stardew Valley*. Each of these entertaining causal games uses an overabundance of sound, music, and sound signals to simulate and sonify the actual world issues of settler-colonial capitalist resource extraction and labour. Players are overloaded with an abundance of sonic material produced by in-game extractive and curatorial activities, but rather than attune their ears to the soundscaping their gameplay participates in, this sonic information overload is often dismissed by players as an aural wash of information in the background of gameplay. I ask: How is actual world resource extraction scored and represented through sound effects and design in games? In these contexts, I'm evoking the removal of industrial contaminants embedded in the nonhuman environment by human industry, but I'm also referencing traumatic acts of natural resource removal by settler-colonial extraction industries. For example, this includes the sonic environments of animated "foreigners" discovering remote islands, settling, exploiting their natural resources in games with narratives focused on community settlement, agricultural development, or the energy and extractive industries. These are instances where animated representations of actual world environmental issues and human-nonhuman-natural resource relations/power dynamics are played out in interactive audiovisual environments.

Andy Stuhl (McGill University)

Buffer Underflow: Delay as Technique in Music's Logistical Currents

In between our selecting a song from the boundless, ready-to-hand reservoir of a streaming platform and our hearing it, the music resides as microsecond-sized chunks in a buffer. Buffering simultaneously facilitates and negates the premise of instantaneous, on-demand distribution. As that premise increasingly animates not only listening services but also the circulation of material goods, it becomes more urgent to understand buffering as a technique that strives to render itself imperceptible – and the buffer as a site for critical investigation. This paper connects historical precedents and contemporary experiences of temporal friction – what Neta Alexander calls the "digital dams" of buffered media – in asking what it means for ecological, political, and phenomenological aspects of music studies to emphasize music's relation to buffering. Musicians in the postwar counterculture used tape echo and delay pedals to aestheticize the strange temporal textures that electric mediation added to communication. In broadcast media, tape delay provided an emergency censorship mechanism to studio engineers by letting them "dump" the delay to avoid airing an expletive, establishing a

link between buffering and risk management. When designed in the architecture of a streaming platform, the buffer presents an analogous problem to inventory control in supply chain logistics: circulating as little excess as possible without allowing an unexpected pause to rupture the impression of continuous flow. My presentation will supplement the paper with live experiments in the Pure Data software environment, delving into the audio buffer as a spacetime of sonic-computational-logistical interchange.

Ryan Nolan (Aarhus University)

Music off the scale: The ‘music-stack’ in the production of contemporaneity

Attentiveness to ‘scale’ has perhaps never been more necessary than in the current conjuncture, which is defined by the coming together of convergent histories and the projection of a geopolitical totality on the one hand, localised histories and the microtemporal processes of planetary computation on the other. What has been described as ‘the contemporary condition’, or ‘contemporaneity’, is an attempt to understand the conjunction of this scalar reality in critical terms.

Current research on the topic of contemporaneity and art’s relation to it has primarily focused on visual forms, and, where music does come into the discussion, it is in the name of situating it historically in relation to a generically conceived ‘contemporary art’. That is to say, music is read into the history of conceptual art and that is taken as the basis of its critical contemporaneity. In this talk, I will take a broader perspective to analyse the deeper connections between music and the production of contemporaneity’s ontological conditions—paying particular attention to music’s role in what the philosopher Peter Osborne (2013) describes as the ‘disjunctive coming together of co-present times’ on a global scale.

The proposition is that, like contemporaneity, music takes different forms at different scales. But more significantly, I propose that understanding how music’s multiple scales co-exist and interact is central to approaching music as an epistemological object today. Borrowing from Benjamin Bratton, a schematic model for this line of inquiry is proposed that I call the ‘music-stack’.

--- tea break for 15 mins ---

KEYNOTE ADDRESS(3:30pm to 4:30pm; Q&A 4:30pm to 5pm)

Robin James (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

No Genres, Just Vibes: perceiving ourselves how AI and finance perceive us

In the last decade, the discourse of vibes (and its analog “mood”) has migrated from its historical place in various countercultures (think hippies, DJs, and *VIBE* magazine) to a place of prominence among mainstream social media users, brands, and music streaming services Spotify and Apple Music. Across those platforms, users are inundated with messages such as “pop isn’t just a genre...it’s a mood” or “[Genre-less. Quality First Always.](#)” My talk studies the contemporary use of vibe as a musical category and argues that vibes are translations of what anthropologist Nick Seaver calls “[the ‘postdemographic’ ideology of algorithmic recommendation](#)” (16) into qualitative musical terms. As such, they don’t fix or transcend genre’s identity-laden baggage, but remake the race, class, and gender relations the music industry has traditionally managed with the discourses of genre and format into terms compatible with the speculative financial logics that dominate contemporary capitalism.

Day 2 (Thursday 9th September)

ALL ONLINE VIA ZOOM

9:15am Day 2 Introduction (Christopher Haworth, Danielle Sofer, & Edward Spencer)

PANEL FOUR (9:30am to 11am)

Epistemological, Methodological, Ethical, and Disciplinary Discussions Part 2

Samuel Chan (New York University)

Digitality, Globality, and Banality in Music Studies

As the rise of platform economy prompts us to reconsider the scalabilities and localities of our digital musical lives, the emerging musicological interest in globality similarly challenges not only the compartmentalization of musical knowledge but also the very significance of regional expertise. What theoretical insights are possible if such musicological attention towards digitality and globality are considered in tandem? What happens when the intersections between music, digitality, and globality influence not only the means, but also the ends of music studies? How do we approach the abundance of digital musical activities that seem to transcend the geopolitical specificities that we value? Particularly, how do their interactions interrogate ethnomusicology's fascination with the local, the communal, the cultural, the body, and the affective?

In this paper, I examine the ethical and epistemological stakes in methodologically reassessing digitality and globality within music studies through the lens of the banal—the supposed arena of ethnographic research. Inspecting examples in contemporary Hong Kong and drawing from digital humanities, digital anthropology, and area studies, I argue that formulating these intersections as renewed banalities instead of historical ruptures allows use to explore a novel set of disciplinary inquiries: How does the emergence of digital methods challenge the nature and necessity of our sub-disciplinary separations that are based on the academic disjunctures of localities and spatialities? What does regional musicological expertise entail without the possibility or necessity of global travel? What new ethnomusicological questions can a global perspective on the affect, labor, and materiality of digital musicality generate?

Alisha Nypaver (Temple University) & John David Vandevort (University of Bristol)

Musicology Unbound: Reconsidering Musicological Primary Sources in the Neo Information Age?

Due to ongoing COVID-19 lockdowns and mandatory stay-at-home policies, the involuntary confluence of personhood and digital-media, along with the unequal, dialogic inescapability of 'technoscape' (Appudurai, 1996) entrapment, has gestated a massive upsurge in global internet users, 316 million new patrons being documented since January. Because of the burgeoning rates of social-media usage and increased daily screen-time per person, users' dependency on internet-based content to provide them with topical news, current events, general updates, educational research, and entertainment has contiguously grown in quick succession. Data compiled from multiple studies reveals that the primary reason for internet-based interaction among users aged 16 to 64 is 'to find information' (Kemp, 2021). Upon this generalized realization, questions of academia's, and more specifically, musicology's, role within this

perpetually evolving, democratically-tinged neo Information Age are being given center stage via multi-dimensional, pedagogical discourses on digitally-integrated ‘best practices.’

Knowledge’s ontology is now understood, albeit imperfectly, as no longer bound by traditional ethnographies of socioeconomic stratification, institutional separatism, or asymmetrical educationalism. However, accompanying musicology’s and music education’s growing employment of digitalization in the name of methodological and pedagogical improvement, therein lies an unexplored bifurcated question of the epistemology of music literature’s creation itself as colored by digital heuristics. Through exploring the two-fold inquiry of what it means to perceive published, web-based medias and digital, non-academic music ‘literature’ as viable *primary source*, while also revising antiquated conceptions of ‘academic’ authorship and equitably embracing the ‘ordinary’ perspective, the traditionally ‘academic’ then becomes a moldable construct, not a concertized locality.

Garrett Schumann (University of Michigan) & Joseph McHardy (Independent Scholar & Conductor)

Understanding Vicente Lusitano’s Life and Music: A Case Study in Digital Music Studies

Sixteenth century Afro-Portuguese composer Vicente Lusitano’s legacy is a fascinating case study in music epistemology that has been heavily impacted by digital research methods. For centuries, Lusitano was essentially treated as a footnote in Renaissance music, but this changed dramatically in the last ten years, particularly in 2020. Thanks to social media as well as other digital tools and practices, a new flurry of Lusitano scholarship and performance has exploded online, and, to a more limited extent, in traditional academic outlets.

The proposed presentation will consider the exciting and fraught implications of this recent attention paid to Lusitano. For example, new open source and for-profit digital editions of Lusitano’s compositions have, most likely, enabled an unprecedented numbers of performances of his music. Yet, these editions challenge norms in Early Music editorial and performance practices. Similarly, despite Lusitano’s newfound notoriety and increased attention paid to the documentation of his identity, traditional sources and academics continue to equivocate about Lusitano’s place in the history of African-descended composers.

The presenters, Garrett Schumann and Joseph McHardy, will also discuss digital collaborative practices in their in-progress research project on Lusitano for the *Journal of Musicological Research*. Schumann and McHardy have used digital tools to work closely together across borders and produce innovative research situating Lusitano in a contemporary context. By presenting new findings, consolidating the scholarly record, as well as addressing important implications of epistemology and performance practice, Schumann and McHardy hope to contribute to a re-defining wave of appreciation for Lusitano and his music.

--- coffee break for 15 mins ---

PANEL FIVE (11:15am to 12:45pm)

Critical Interventions (Chair: Alexander M. Cannon, University of Birmingham)

Saloka Sengupta (Indian Institute of Technology)

The Dimension of Inaccessibility: Theorization of digital access and the case of Nachnis, Purulia

This paper explores the ramifications of internet access for indigenous music in Purulia, a district in West Bengal, India. Based on ethnographic research on the Nachnis, a community of female dancers, this paper looks at how the internet has exploded with videos

of Nachni performances, thus creating a massive challenge for both the artists and the art form. The Nachnis perform a genre called Jhumur popular in parts of Bengal, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha; the district of Purulia is considered the centre of this art form. However, in terms of acceptance, nachnis are overshadowed as artists, and their art form is constituted as erotic rural performance. As an unfathomable amount of data has created a massive buzz around resistance (Turner 1992), piracy (Phillip 2014) and methods (Born 2010) with respect to internet, the inaccessibility of such media for performers, especially those from indigenous groups in rural districts, and particularly women also needs to be discussed. Departing from Born and Haworth's (2018) social mediations of music, genre and historicity, in this paper, I argue that a robust qualitative approach is required to continue studying indigenous music and digital practices. When the boundaries between genres are blurred, and 'cultural appropriation' results in women performers sidelined and only used to sensitise content, how do we as researchers start to look at digital practices beyond 'likes' and 'subscribers'? Furthermore, what new perspectives might we need to look at digital musical studies where existing frameworks assume that indigenous music and performance are already available on the internet?

Kyra D. Gaunt (University at Albany, State University of New York)

Twierking at the Intersection: Music, Misogynoir, and the Public Health of Black Girls on YouTube

The wickedly complex interactions around very young girls' bedroom musical play is hidden by not only YouTube's massive archive and its role as the number one music discovery channel via search. The role of bedroom musical production also masks the exploitation of Black girls and the stigmatization and sexualization of their bedroom play at younger and younger ages.

Industry creatives, con artists of consent and predation, and conglomerates across the musical Internet track, restrict, block, monetize, and latently exploit girls' hidden musicianship as global tastemakers as music and tech intersect in a human-computer interface.

This paper is a clarion ethical call to unmask the public health crisis, sexist sound and misogynoir present in the shadow pandemic of dating, sexual, and intimate partner violence targeting Black girls and women through music.

Darci Sprengel (University of Oxford)

Knowing Global Listeners: The Limitations of Big Data for Diversifying Streaming Services in the Middle East

In 2018, Spotify launched its 'Global Cultures Initiative', which it insisted would make it a 'leader' in the field of audio streaming by moving the platform beyond its traditional focus on North American and European musics. In expanding to new markets around the world, Spotify has faced several challenges. Among them is the fact that listening practices and needs vary widely from one location to another. To address this variance, Spotify sometimes hires local consultancies or sends its own employees, who depend on translators, for brief fieldwork excursions. Their methods to know diverse users primarily rely on quantitative data and observations within limited environments, such as at local offices, instead of long-term and sustained research among users in their daily lives. Using Egypt as a case study, this paper explores how such limited research methodologies result in the continued perpetuation of Western epistemologies of listening, privileging the needs and perspectives of Western users as they 'discover new music from around the world'. It further examines the role of quantitative data in how MSS develop initiatives to 'localize' and 'support' local artists in the Middle East, demonstrating that these initiatives extend neoliberal logics of entrepreneurship by encouraging artists' to interpret data provided by the platform. Building on nine months of recent ethnographic research among MSS users in Egypt, this paper thus broadly analyses how globalizing MSS use big data in ways that engage global hierarchies of race, gender, and class, indexing longer colonial histories and the racial logics of the previous World Music industry.

--- lunch break for 1 hour ---

PANEL SIX (1:45pm to 3:15pm)

Subsurface Investigations of Music Streaming Services (MSS) (Chair: Thomas Hodgson, University of Oxford)

Ryan Blakeley (Eastman School of Music)

Unheard Streams: Evaluating Spotify's Surplus Sounds with Forgotify

The music streaming service Spotify revealed in 2013 that as many as 20% of the songs it hosts had not been streamed even once. This prompted the creation of Forgotify, a website that uses Spotify's API to randomly select a song that has never been played, thereby granting users access to Spotify's most obscure corners. While surplus content such as that found through Forgotify is perhaps an inevitable consequence of digital content aggregation, it raises a number of questions about what lies on the digital fringes, how it can be accessed, and what value and meaning can be gleaned from content that has never been consumed.

In this paper, I use Forgotify to investigate music streaming services' surplus content. I begin by using Forgotify to access and assess Spotify's unheard music, demonstrating that there is little aesthetic consistency among the service's least-played tracks. I then consider the broader implications of Spotify's unheard music through the lenses of access and circulation, the appeal of niche content, economic value, and streaming services' potential function as digital archives. Ultimately, I argue that surplus content on Spotify has latent cultural, historical, and economic value, despite the platform's user interface and algorithmic recommendation systems making it challenging for users to access. I also indicate how streaming services' abundance and limited discovery features perpetuate inequities for musical artists. This paper thus contributes to scholarship on digital music industries and streaming services, paying particular attention to those sounds most overlooked: the ones that have never been heard.

Raphaël Nowak (University of York) & Benjamin A. Morgan (RMIT University)

Reproducing Narratives of Democratization in Music Streaming Debates

At the turn of the 2020s, music is largely distributed and consumed via streaming services. This new "moment" in recorded music has attracted a lot of attention from scholars, with the aim of identifying the nature of transformations that are occurring at an economic and/or cultural level. Through a critical literature review on scholarship that analyses the economic and/or cultural aftermath of the emergence of a "platform model" to music distribution and consumption, this presentation interrogates how scholarship replicates some old myths or stories about what music ought to be—as a valued cultural object for instance and/or as an object worthy of economic retribution for artists. Critical discourses on this "new model" are often anchored onto "old stories" regarding the economic and cultural value of music.

We focus on recent scholarly accounts which address the issue of "democratization" as a key indicator to evaluate the distribution of music content on streaming platforms. We explore economic debates of fairness and access related to revenue flows, and a cultural perspective focusing on listening practices and the use of music. We describe how critical accounts tend to work with specific assumptions underpinning the association between culture and technology, in particular in relation to the concepts of democratization of culture as opposed to cultural democracy, a dichotomy outlined by Yves Evrard (1997). We argue that music streaming services become a leitmotiv to anchor discourses about what music should ideally be, thus reproducing narratives that predate the emergence of music streaming.

Tamas Tofalvy (Budapest University of Technology and Economics) & Júlia Koltai (Central European University)

The Reproduction of Geographic Inequalities in Spotify's Recommendation System

With the diffusion of new media technologies the notion emerged that the music industry would become more democratic and geographic inequalities would disappear in the age of hyperconnectedness and abundance. However, the online music industry is still heavily dependent on and intertwined with offline inequalities. Still relatively few actors dominate the market, the leading major labels are still on the top of the pyramid (McLean, Oliver, & Wainwright, 2010), and the disproportionate distribution of revenues still stands. Instead of a disintermediated industry, we see the prevalence of mediation (Galuszka, 2015) in an oligopolistic market. Digital distribution forms its centers and regional peripheries (Szczepanik, Zahrádka, Macek, & Stepan, 2020), and artists operating from a center still have way more opportunities to distribute and communicate their work (Verboord & Noord, 2016). In our talk, we demonstrate how geographical power relations are represented in Spotify's recommendation system. Through a small-scale network analysis case study, we argue that by mirroring the music industry's center-periphery dynamics, digital music platforms represent and reproduce existing inequalities through their (mainly) algorithmic distribution and decision-making processes. We examined Hungarian extreme metal bands' (n=23) connections with other bands through Spotify's "related artists" feature. Our results suggest that the origin of a band's music publisher has a strong effect on the band's international connections and thus access to wider audiences. Those bands signed with international labels have more reciprocal connections and are more likely to be recommended based on genre similarity.

--- tea break for 15mins ---

KEYNOTE ADDRESS(3:30pm to 4:30pm; Q&A 4:30pm to 5pm)

Nick Seaver (Tufts University)

Too Much Music: Informatic Cosmology and the Myth of Overload

If you ask the people who make music recommender systems why they do it, they will almost universally give the same answer: listeners today have access to so much music that they are overwhelmed. Algorithmic recommendation promises a solution to this problem, helping listeners decide what to listen to, discover new music, and take advantage of the tens of millions of songs that streaming services have made available at the touch of a button. Overload is so taken for granted as a basic condition of contemporary life that it is hard to draw into question. This talk explores what happens when we consider claims about overload not as factual, but mythical. Invocations of overload, I argue, are rarely concerned with objectively overwhelming quantities of material. Rather, they are stories about how the world works and the position of humans within it. Drawing on many years of ethnographic research with developers of music recommender systems, I take an anthropological approach to myth: claims about overload are productive and world-enframing for the people who tell them, depicting a universe of information filters and flows populated by omnivorous and overloaded subjects. By attending to overload as a central myth of algorithmic recommendation, we can make better sense of the worldview that guides these systems' construction.

Day 3 (Friday 10th September)

ALL ONLINE VIA ZOOM

10:15am Day 3 Introduction (Christopher Haworth, Danielle Sofer, & Edward Spencer)

PANEL SEVEN (10:30am to 12 noon) [Same Zoom Link as for Day 3 Introduction]

Subculture Between Music and Internet Studies

Danielle Sofer

“Seattle Was a Riot”: Musical effects of urban policies, geographies, and technologies

Racially motivated changes to the geographical landscape of Seattle, Washington throughout the twentieth century have had consequences on the region’s musical developments, especially its experimental traditions. Urban developments, including the stringent red lining through the 1960s to the complete overhaul of the city’s transportation and highway systems in the construction of Microsoft’s original campus in nearby Redmond in the 1980s, and the subsequent Teen Dance Ordinance, severely limited public access to music venues. These developments significantly impacted who could make music—based on one’s race and/or gender—and because of this, where they could make it. With musicians working in smaller, more independent home studios, this paper hypothesizes that these new music-making habits inspired Microsoft’s engineering decisions at the dawn of personal computing.

Christopher Haworth

Total Immersion: Musical occulture from the early web to the present

‘Occulture’ is now a routinely used emic term in popular music and cultural studies scholarship (Mackay 1996, Partridge 2004), where it affirmatively describes either a nebulous quality of the sacred in (white) secular culture, or those ‘hidden’, ‘rejected’ and ‘oppositional’ beliefs that descend from ‘esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age (and) Paganism’ (Partridge 2004). However, tracing the etymology of the term through the contexts in which it emerged provides a lesser-known perspective on the subcultural embrace of the World Wide Web in the UK and Europe in the 1990s. Coined in the punk-turned-parapolitical fanzine Rapid Eye to describe a subculture that was at once ‘apolitical’, ‘amoral’, and ‘experimental’ (Dwyer 1989), occulture was carried over to the web via early print directories like the *Internet.Underground.Guide* (1995), and then via links pages that emphasised the strange, esoteric, and obscure information that was newly available online. The data aesthetic that prevailed in these resources was not so much the sublime-inflected quality of ‘overload’ as that of ‘immersion’ in esoteric phenomena. Knowledge acquisition could be at once a personal adventure in gnostic study and a voluntary suspension of criticality and reason.

This paper mixes archival methods and digital methods to map a genealogy of musical occulture and the web that progresses from the 1980s through to contemporary net-native genres and artists like vaporwave, PC music, and Bladee. I contest that focusing on the ‘dark’ side of the web as opposed to the ‘light’ side of the Californian Ideology--the 1969 ‘end of the sixties’ side as opposed to the 1967 ‘summer of love’ side, we might say--offers a means to better understand how, after 2016, some of these scenes were subject to far-right infiltration.

Edward Spencer

“How many layers of irony are you on?”: Revisiting subcultural theory and musical meaning in the age of 100 geecs and Fraxiom

Questions of irony, authenticity, and ambivalence permeate the online reception of ‘hyperpop’, a trending internet-mediated music genre. Such concerns are especially prominent in YouTube comment sections: “This is ironic right? Somebody please tell me that this music is ironic”; “I am absolutely disgusted that I unironically like this”; “I started listening to this song ironically but I ended up enjoying it unironically...I guess that’s the irony”. Since this music has also been heard as the sound of Gen-Z’s condition and LGBTQ+ empowerment, there is a need to consider how hyperpop’s (post-)irony intersects with generational sociality, web-based identity politics, and longstanding questions of musical meaning.

Using mixed methods, this paper explores these relationships with reference to two hyperpop acts: 100 geecs and Fraxiom. In case study one, all user comments on the 100 geecs YouTube channel to date are retrieved using Rieder’s (2015) data tools and coded deductively using appropriate keywords. Case study two concerns Fraxiom’s lyrics and testimonial narratives in related opinion data. In order to bring the conjuncture of generational sociality, identity politics, and musical meaning into greater critical focus, I place these analyses in dialogue with the Birmingham paradigm of subcultural theory and its renaissance in internet culture research. Reading this alongside and against the recent turn to genre theory in music studies (Brackett 2016; Haworth 2016; Haddon 2020), especially in work on music and the internet (Born & Haworth 2018), I argue that subcultural perspectives need to be reconsidered so as to elucidate hyperpop’s generational and societal significance.

--- lunch break for 90 mins ---

RESPONDENTS’ ROUNDTABLE (response papers 1:30pm to 2:30pm; discussion 2:30pm to 3:30pm)

Paula Harper (University of Nebraska)

David Hesmondhalgh (University of Leeds)

Noortje Marres (University of Warwick)

--- tea break for 15 mins ---

OPEN ROUNDTABLE & CLOSING REMARKS (3:45pm to 4:45pm)

Speaker Biographies

PANEL ONE

Epistemological, Methodological, Ethical, and Disciplinary Discussions Part 1

Kirsty Fife (they/them) is a final year PhD student in the Department of Information Studies at UCL and a part-time Lecturer in Popular Music at Leeds Conservatoire. Their PhD research focuses on forms of documentary and archival work in current and recently active UK-based DIY music communities. Prior to beginning their PhD project, they worked as an archivist and curator for organisations including the UK Parliamentary Archives, the National Science and Media Museum, and Hoxton Hall. They are also active as a musician, zine maker and cultural organiser in DIY and queer/feminist communities within the UK.

Dr. Steven Gamble is a Marie Curie Research Fellow in Music at University College Cork, researching hip-hop and the internet. He is the author of the Routledge monograph *How Music Empowers: Listening to Modern Rap and Metal* (2021). Following study at the Universities of Surrey, Oxford, and Kingston (London), he taught and established an academic skills department at BIMM Institute, Brighton. He is an active member of popular music studies communities, serving on the *International Society for Metal Music Studies* board and having published work in *Popular Music*, the *Journal on the Art of Record Production*, and *Metal Music Studies*.

Sureshkumar P. Sekar is a second year PhD student from the Royal College of Music, London. He is conducting an empirical study on the experience of an audience member attending Film-with-Live-Orchestra concerts in the UK. He recently presented papers on a new theory, the theory of “aLiveness”—that explains the experience of the audience in live music concerts—at *BFE-RMA Research Students’ Conference 2021*, University of Cambridge, UK, and at *Towards 2040: Classical Music Futures Symposium*, University of Maastricht, Netherlands.

PANEL TWO

Archaeology, Recovery, Maintenance

James Vail is a researcher working across film and music media currently based at Queen Margaret University Edinburgh. His research focuses on the relationship between the media industries, media history, and technological practice. His Ph.D. dealt with the changing forms of media circulation that characterise the resurgence of the cassette tape in underground music networks. He is currently working as part of team researching the impact of Covid-19 on film festivals and festival audiences across Scotland.

Lilli Elias is a recent graduate from the Master’s program in Archival and Information Studies at University of Amsterdam, and has a BFA in Recorded Music from New York University. She is a native of Los Angeles and currently resides in Amsterdam.

Dr Eamonn Bell is Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Durham University having previously been a Research Fellow at the Department of Music, Trinity College Dublin (TCD). His current research project, “Opening the ‘Red Book’” (2019–2021), explores how the digital audio Compact Disc (CD) format was designed, subverted, reproduced, and domesticated for musical ends. Most generally, his research examines the history of digital technology in relation to contemporary musical production, consumption, and criticism. He holds a doctoral degree in music theory from Columbia University (2019) and a bachelor’s degree in music and mathematics from TCD (2013).

PANEL THREE

The Sound of Platform Capitalism

Kate Galloway is on faculty at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute where she teaches in the Electronic Arts, Music, and Games and Simulation Arts Studies programs. Her research and teaching address sonic responses to environmentalism, sound studies, digital culture and interactive media, and Indigenous musical modernities and ecological knowledge. Her monograph *Remix, Reuse, Recycle: Music, Media Technologies, and Remediating the Environment* examines how and why contemporary artists remix and recycle sounds, music, and texts encoded with environmental knowledge. Her work is published in *Ethnomusicology*, *MUSICultures*, *Tourist Studies*, *Sound Studies*, *Feminist Media Histories*, and *Popular Music*.

Andy Kelleher Stuhl is a PhD candidate in Communication Studies at McGill, where he is researching the cultural meaning of automation in radio and sound art in the 20th century. His work in media research, software development, and audio experimentation explores sites of encounter among technology, humanities, and sonic expression. He holds a master’s degree in Comparative Media Studies from MIT.

Ryan Nolan is a PhD researcher at Aarhus University (Denmark), interested in media and cultural theory, contemporary art, and music. Recent publications include ‘The Contemporaneity of Class Relations’ (2021) for *Sociological Review*, ‘Lac Bugs, Petrocapitalism, and Data: Musicology Without Music’ in the *Journal of Media Art, Theory and Study* (2020), and ‘The Crackle of Contemporaneity’ in *Futures of the Contemporary* (2019) edited by Paolo de Assis and Michael Schwab. He is affiliated with The Contemporary Condition, a research project at Aarhus co-led by Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund, and is a visiting doctoral researcher at CSNI.

DAY ONE KEYNOTE

No Genres, Just Vibes: Perceiving ourselves how AI and finance perceive us

Robin James is Associate Professor of Philosophy at UNC Charlotte. She is author of three books: *The Sonic Episteme: acoustic resonance, neoliberalism, & biopolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019), *Resilience & Melancholy: pop music, feminism, and neoliberalism* (Zero, 2015), and *The Conjectural Body: gender, race and the philosophy of music* (Lexington Books, 2010). Her work on feminism, race, contemporary continental philosophy, pop music, and sound

studies has appeared in venues such as *The Guardian*, *LARB*, *BELT Magazine*, *The New Inquiry*, *SoundingOut!*, *Hypatia*, *differences*, and the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*.

PANEL FOUR

Epistemological, Methodological, Ethical, and Disciplinary Discussions Part 2

Samuel Chan is a PhD candidate and Henry MacCracken Fellow at New York University. He has presented at the annual and chapter meetings of the American Musicological Society and the Society for Ethnomusicology, and has received the Hewitt Pantaleoni Prize and the Hollace Anne Shafer Memorial Award for his work on voice, sound, and media across Asia/America. He graduated with an MA from the Integrative Studies program at UC San Diego as a Hong Kong Jockey Club Scholar, and a BA with First Class Honors from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where he was awarded the Bernard van Zuiden Music Prize.

Alisha Nypaver specializes in teaching general education classes and creating online and hybrid courses. Her current research interests focus on testing and integrating cutting-edge educational tools in both traditional and online classrooms, finding new ways to teach digital citizenship, pedagogical practices for music in higher education, redefining the standard undergraduate music curriculum, and the history of music in Philadelphia. In addition to her work in teaching and new course development, Nypaver serves as a Quality Matters online course reviewer, instructional designer, and is the online course coordinator for the Department of General Education at Temple University.

John David Vandever is a graduate of Westminster Choir College and will be pursuing a Masters in Musicology student at the University of Bristol in the fall. He plans to work on research geared towards surveying the tenets, underlying causes, and future implications of sociocultural stratification, with the additional angle of observing the vital role that counter-hegemonic music culture plays in societal equilibrium. He has written and presented on a variety of topics including Ravel's Pavane for a Dead Princess and the Russian rapper Husky. He currently works as Grant Research Coordinator for the online music company, Opera NexGen.

Dr. Garrett Schumann is a composer and scholar based in southeast Michigan. Since 2019, Schumann's research has focused women composers and composers of color around the world from the Renaissance to the present, including a groundbreaking April 2020 article about Vicente Lusitano in *VAN Magazine*.

Joseph McHardy is an Early Music specialist who serves as Director of Music at HM Chapel Royal, St. James Palace. McHardy has worked with Vicente Lusitano's music since the summer of 2020 and is currently collaborating with the Chineke! Foundation to produce the world's first full-length recording of Lusitano's motets.

PANEL FIVE

Critical Interventions

Saloka Sengupta is currently pursuing Doctoral research in Cultural Anthropology at the Department of Liberal Arts, Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, India. Her research interests lie in performativity, gender, caste, and ethnomusicology. She has published her work at the Indian Journal of Gender Studies in 2020. Saloka has also presented her work at the Annual South Asia conference at University of Wisconsin Madison, AAA, ASA and Syracuse University.

Kyra Gaunt has been a cutting-edge scholar in the field of embodied ethnomusicology for over 20 years. Her book [*The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop*](#) (NYU Press), funded by NEH and the Ford Foundation, which won the 2007 Alan Merriam Prize for most outstanding monograph from The Society of Ethnomusicology, along with her subsequent publications contributed to the emergence of hip-hop music studies, black girlhood studies, and hip-hop feminism. Her current research explores the intersections of music, tech, and violence against girls in case studies of tween twerking on YouTube.

Darci Sprengel is an ethnomusicologist and Junior Research Fellow in Music at the University of Oxford. Her research examines contemporary music in Egypt at the intersections of technology, capitalism, and politics. She has published in *Popular Music, Culture, Theory & Critique, International Journal of Middle East Studies, International Journal of Cultural Studies*, and *Sound Studies*.

PANEL SIX

Subsurface Investigations of Music Streaming Services (MSS)

Ryan Blakeley is a PhD in Musicology candidate at the Eastman School of Music and holds a Master of Arts in Music from the University of Ottawa, Canada. His research investigates how music streaming services' abundance and on-demand access are reshaping music industries and practices. He also studies genre in popular music, with an emphasis on genre fusion.

Raphaël Nowak is a lecturer in sociology at the University of York (UK). He is a cultural sociologist conducting research on digital technologies and media, music consumption and taste, music genres, and cultural heritage. He is the author of *Consuming Music in the Digital Age* (Palgrave, 2015), co-editor with Andrew Whelan of *Networked Music Cultures* (Palgrave, 2016), and co-author with Sarah Baker and Lauren Istvandy of *Curating Pop* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

Benjamin A. Morgan is completing a PhD exploring music streaming services in the Australian music industries at RMIT University. He is a veteran of the U.S. music business and consultant to government institutions who is interested in creative practice and labour across different cultural contexts. Looking ahead, his interest lies in institutional development policy and the global cultural economy in those regions where cultural and media industries are still nascent.

Tamas Tofalvy, PhD is Associate Professor at Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Department of Sociology and Communication, head of the Communication and Media Studies major's Digital Media program. He is also project lead at the MODEM (Hungarian Online and Digital Media History) Project. Between 2010 and 2014, he was the co-founding chair of IASPM Hungary and its sister organization, the Music Networks Association. His latest publication (ed., with Emília Barna) is *Popular Music, Technology, and the Changing Media Ecosystem: From Cassettes to Stream* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

Júlia Koltai, PhD is a sociologist, computational social scientist. She is a researcher at the Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence, and Assistant Professor at Eotvos Lorand University. Currently, she serves as a visiting professor at Central European University, Department of Network and Data Science. Her main research focus is quantitative methodology and statistics, especially large-scale data and network analysis and natural language processing. She is the author of more than 30 book chapters and papers published in journals including *Social Networks*, *International Journal of Sociology*, and *European Societies*.

DAY TWO KEYNOTE

Too Much Music: Informatic Cosmology and the Myth of Overload

Nick Seaver is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Tufts University, where he also teaches in the Program on Science, Technology, and Society. His ethnographic research on the developers of algorithmic music recommendation has appeared in *Cultural Anthropology*, *Cultural Studies*, and *Big Data & Society*. He is co-editor of *Towards an Anthropology of Data* (2021) and author of the forthcoming *Computing Taste*. His current research explores the use of attention as a value and virtue in machine learning worlds.

PANEL SEVEN

Subculture Between Music and Internet Studies

Danielle Shlomit Sofer's (they/them) scholarship examines various means of electronic mediation, exploring how gender cuts dynamically across current social justice activism, postcolonial resistances, as well as historical and systemic constitutions of race and sexuality—topics featuring extensively in a forthcoming monograph, *Sex Sounds: Vectors of Difference in Electronic Music* (MIT Press 2022). Other publications appear in *American Music*, *Organised Sound*, *Contemporary Music Review*, and the *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie*, and this research has been funded by the AMS 75 PAYS Endowment, the NEH, and the FWF, among others. Danielle has toured as a violist, fiddler, chorister, répétiteur, and sound technician.

Christopher Haworth is Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Birmingham. He researches electronic music as it is practiced, theorised, taught and experienced, using a mixture of historical, ethnographic, interpretive and data-driven methods. His research has been published in *Music and Letters*, *Computer Music Journal*, *Contemporary Music Review*, *Organised Sound*, *Leonardo Music Journal* and a variety of edited collections. From 2019 to 2021 he is Principal

Investigator on the AHRC early career leadership fellowship, 'Music and the Internet: Towards a digital sociology of music'.

Edward Katrak Spencer is Lecturer I in Music at Magdalen College, University of Oxford, and a Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham, where he works on the AHRC project 'Music and the Internet' led by Christopher Haworth. His research examines electronic music and its entanglements with the internet, with a focus on memes, musical trolling practices, and the 'bass music' genres of dubstep and trap. His publications include an article in *Organised Sound* that analyses YouTube comments on electronic dance music uploads and a chapter on ASMR YouTube content in the volume *Sound Art and Music: Philosophy, Composition, Performance*.