

# **Black Gold: The Cultures & Practices of Record Collecting**

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# Abstract

This thesis considers the positioning and re-positioning of vinyl records and those that collect them. It does so in the context of vinyl's decline as the primary carrier of music. It is constructed within a theoretical framework of material culture and broader cultural studies. It draws on qualitative data collected through a standard survey from 344 record collectors in 21 countries.

The data is discussed and presented in theoretically conceptualised chapters. I consider vinyl as a physical artefact, as 'thing' and contrary to historical and contemporary engagement with music as ephemeral, as experience. I discuss vinyl in terms of eras; of both disc manufacture and what I have termed three eras of collecting. I argue that the economic and cultural trajectories of vinyl lead to differing states of desirability along these journeys. Vinyl is then positioned as a collectable object, contrary to established collecting theory, drawing on the varying states of desirability. Notions of the past are considered in relation to vinyl's historical position as primary carrier during the 'golden era' of popular music. The differing patterns of nostalgia are discussed in relation to how they enable record collectors access to the pasts of popular musics and defines markers of collecting that allow identification of differing nostalgias. I argue that the sensory nature of the vinyl experience, how these objects are positioned as markers of collectors' taste, contribute to attitudes regarding condition through the idea of patina. This taste and accompanying practices are further discussed as contribution to the social aspects of collecting, to status, shared cultures and knowledges.

The practices of collectors are varied and complex but with common focal points and issues. Collectors value the physical engagement with vinyl, the large artwork and the attentive, prolonged 'slow' engagement with the format. Nostalgic practices of record collectors vary dependent on their length of engagement with the culture as well as their age. Collectors' experience of vinyl as either the primary or as a marginal deliverer of music also contributes to differences in practice. These markers impact on their attitudes to condition of second hand records and the trace of previous ownership. This work crosses between, and contributes to, discourses of material culture, cultural theory, and poses challenges to established ideas of collecting.

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Finally I would like to give love and thanks to Odry for creating the perfect environment in which to read, think, research and write.

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at Buckinghamshire New University, Brunel University or any other institution.

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# The Intro

All philosophy is homesickness  
(Novalis in Lachman 2003 p. 73).

Recordings offer new fields of enquiry which will require the development of new techniques of research and the acquisition of knowledge and expertise about the artefacts themselves (Day 2000 p. i).

This thesis originates from the personal, from *my* personal history. As Holt noted, 'The movement toward personalized research reflects calls to place greater emphasis on the ways in which the ethnographer interacts with the culture being researched' (2003 p. 2). Whilst the origin comes from my personal history, my story, it is not about me, it is about other record collectors and their collections, or more precisely the varying cultures and practices of these record collectors, introduced in detail in the next chapter. It is, in part about history, historiography, *historiophonography*<sup>1</sup> - the act of writing history through collecting records. As Karen Kelly suggests 'In the popular imagination, music narrates history' (Kelly in Kelly and McDonnell 1999 p. 231).

Whilst I was considering the historical starting point of my personal role in the creation of this particular narrative of record collecting and how 'music narrates history', I came to think of the moment of self-definition; the moment that I confessed to myself that I was a record collector. This moment was one where many of the themes that make up the conceptual framework of this study came into being. The moment that the strange unsettling feeling that my CD issue of 'Kick Out The Jams' (1969) by Detroit's proto punks The MC5, became, as an object, not enough for me. It had become an increasingly irritating psychological thorn in the physical accumulation of music that had driven much of my youth, my leisure, my adulthood, my notion of self. The CD seemed to represent something very specific. It simply represented that I did *not own the vinyl*, it represented *not having* more than it did *having*. It represented lack. In fact it was more painful than not owning that music at all. In the end, and to great relief, I paid eighty five dollars for an original Elektra

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<sup>1</sup> This term - Historiophonography - is one that I first used at the 2009 IASPM Biennial conference in Liverpool. It will be expanded upon in subsequent chapters. The paper is presented in the appendices.



Records vinyl first pressing with the wonderfully offending swear words included and the revolutionarily vitriolic liner notes, that lead to its withdrawal, intact. 'There is no way to get at the music without taking in the whole context of the music too - there is no separation', John Sinclair wrote on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December 1968 (Ibid) in the liner notes to the album, as if to pre-empt my concerns four months and one day before I was born. The MC5 were 'here now for you to hear and see and *feel* now!' the notes told me 'it's time to testify, and what you have here *in your hands* is a living testimonial to the absolute power and strength of these men' (Ibid my emphasis). I truly felt that it was. I had paid a considerable sum for some music I already owned. But finally 'it' - a living testimonial to the MC5 and my commitment to them *then* - was in my hands *now*. I felt good about the world, my collection, my self. It raised many auto-ethnographic questions, questions of connoisseurship, taste, nostalgia, collecting, collections and the collected and the role of the object in these questions. This moment was not then rupture, not in the sense of radical change, it had after all taken years to come to this point - although I did, within a few months of this event, sell several thousand CDs I had accumulated (but not collected) over the previous three decades. Rather it was a departure, a departure in the Derridean sense 'necessary as part of the deconstructive act' (Stronach and Maclure 1997 p. 3).

On reflection I could have picked any number of vinyl-driven moments that lead me to begin this act of deconstruction. That point in February of 1974, for instance, when my parents relented and bought a shiny black seven inch disc containing Suzi Quatro's 'Devil Gate Drive' (Chinn and Chapman 1974); a record that I played repeatedly until The Goodies' 'Funky Gibbon' (Oddie 1975) stole my attention. Or possibly, the moment in the summer of the Silver Jubilee year when I took my pocket money and my bus fare and walked in to the town centre and made my first independent vinyl purchase - 'All Around The World' by The Jam (Weller 1977). I walked the three miles home and hid the single up my jumper as I went into the house. I was eight years old. It was the first, but by no means the last, time that I would secretly buy records. Audiosonic, the shop I purchased this single from offered me a Saturday job in April of 1984 and the next four years of weekends and holidays was spent earning one pound per hour working in a vinyl record shop. Each Saturday I exchanged my wages, my labour, not for economic capital, but subcultural capital, that is I exchanged my £8.50 wages for records and for being known at school as the kid who worked in the record shop. I repeated this pattern throughout my undergraduate studies - working three days a week in a record shop to fund my

record shopping under the pretence that I was funding my degree. That I can recount these stories with chronological accuracy relies on the history of popular music, or at least a history of the British pop charts. As such it is the cultural history of popular music, of vinyl production, chronicled and documented that allows me to tell the story of my own life.

There is another exchange of capitals, or at least an attempt, an exchange in process here. That kinetic energy, the physical capital that I exchanged at a rate of one pound per hour, or more often than not, exchanged for records, produced in turn subcultural capital. I became knowledgeable about records, record labels, record production and value under the guise of knowing about music itself. In the times I worked in records shops, this knowledge was gathered through reading catalogues, the music press, memorising catalogue numbers, knowing which distributor handled which record labels and which labels handled which bands. Now I attempt to turn that economic and subcultural capital into more traditional forms of capital – cultural capital - through the academic work that this study is situated within. There is possibility that this cultural capital may in turn become economic capital. The cycle of economic capital there, to economic capital here, would be complete. 'Being There is a postcard experience. It is Being Here, a scholar among scholars that gets your anthropology read . . . published, reviewed, cited, taught' (Geertz in Spry 2001 p. 709).

This particular narrative however relies as much on rejection as it does on inclusion. My rejection of CDs and, alongside it, the rejection of much of new music in general and instead the decision to wallow self-consciously in a nostalgia for vinyl – a rejection of the present and an acceptance and celebration of the past, is a journey from techno-euphoria to techno-phobia. It was not a moment of epiphany but a gradual accumulation and a search for meaningfulness in the objects of music. I tell it as a point of methodological interest. I have been fascinated by music my whole life and the point at which popular music history ended (for me at least) and allowed me to collapse into focused nostalgia created this study. Along with the rejection of CDs I also rejected the majority of popular music and embraced music from around the time of my birth – psychedelic rock, heavy psych and the emergence of heavy metal - a period 'ossified by nostalgists' (Walker 2006 p. 119). Whilst rejecting a narrowly focused continued interest in the present production of the music of the UK and USA, I

embraced the world of the past and the progressive rock of Italy (bands such as The New Trolls, Osanna, Procession and Il Balletto Di Bronzo), the psychedelic rock of South America (Los Dug Dugs, Os Mutantes and Aguaturbia) the proto metal of France (Les Variations, Zoo, Rotomagus and Docdail). Depth was replaced by breadth which lead to more depth.

Theoretically the work comes from rejection and inclusion also. Shortly after the moment of self-definition I searched, for the first time, for material that might explain collecting. I had read, some years earlier, Nick Hornby's 'High Fidelity' (1995) but had not in my academic career had reason to explore collecting. I first turned to Susan Pearce's (1998) book 'Collecting in Contemporary Practice' to see if it could illuminate my own collecting practice. Thirty-two pages in I read the following passage.

Records, tapes, CDs and videos were put in a group together, and books and photographs were added to the same group. This kind of material presents an obvious difficulty in a study of collecting. If material of this kind is gathered principally to play or read, in other words the material is valued as *media*, then it represents at least a particular aspect of collecting and may, indeed, not fall into any useful collecting remit at all ( p. 32).

This collecting remit, extends beyond Pearce's own work and is broadly adopted throughout collecting theory and writing. (Belk 2001) and (Baudrillard 1994), among others, similarly exclude record collecting by way of the utilitarian nature of vinyl records. Durost's early writing on collecting seems to be one of the signposts to this limitation of collecting discourse.

If the predominant value of an object or idea for the person possessing it is intrinsic. i.e., if it is valued primarily for use, or purpose, or aesthetically pleasing quality, or other value inherent in the object or accruing to it by whatever circumstances of custom, training, or habit, *it is not a collection* ( in Pearce 1998 p. 2 my emphasis).

This element of the definition of collecting, as practice, is discussed at length in chapter three after the introduction of the physicality of listening objects and consideration of the commodification and re-commodification of them in chapters one and two respectively. Beyond the utilitarian, record collectors were marginalised in their inclusion with collectors of CDs and other media forms and perhaps didn't count at all. Although Pearce included this entire group 'recorded material' in the study as they were the third largest group of collectors - behind those that collect ornaments and then household goods - they, or we, were absent in our own peculiar practices. I began to notice that, although they had been included, they were in fact absent in discussion and in many of the tables and graphic illustration of axes. There

was a gap, an exclusion of record collectors, partially because of their inclusion with other groups. This was the moment that I began to formulate the proposal for the following work. The following chapters address collectors of vinyl specifically and, through this focus, their practices, passion for, engagement with, and *collecting* of vinyl are used to position vinyl *within* the frameworks of collecting theory and also to directly challenge the notion of the un-collectibility of the utilitarian object. Vinyl's shifting place within popular music consumption has shifted and this too, repositions vinyl's place within collecting discourse through its new status as niche collectible.

Over the five years that I have been engaged in this research there has arguably been a 'vinyl revival'. In 2012 vinyl accounted for 2.4% of the total of American music sales. This is a small proportion, particularly in comparison with the mid nineteen seventies where vinyl sales made up approximately 60% of music sales. However, at the start of this project in 2008 vinyl made up only 0.6% of music sales measured by Nielsen Soundscan through both traditional and digital retail routes. Those sales have grown steadily - 0.8% in 2009, 1.3% in 2010, 1.8% in 2011 - to the present day (Anonymous 2013). What these RIAA statistics do not show is the sales of second hand records during this period. Because of the unregulated, untaxed and arguably unmeasurable routes and trajectories that second hand records take it is hard to estimate their trajectories or economics. At the time of writing there are almost two and a half million second-hand records listed for sale on electronic auction site eBay. To contextualise - the 2.4% of sales in 2012 represents 3.2 million sales over the last twelve months and whilst not all of the 2.3 million records on eBay will sell, the second hand market - which, of course, is not limited to eBay is vast and, as yet, under-researched. This revival has emerged both in the continued growth in sales of vinyl records and the growth of writing about records academically (Shuker 2010) and (Osborne 2012) and a wealth of journalist comment. The music industry too has embraced the revival and now for the fourth year, on the third Saturday of April, Record Store Day sees a rush of vinyl only releases that are available only through independent record stores. Vinyl, it would seem, has become a celebrated niche market as opposed to a format relegated to an historical footnote.

I lecture university students on popular music and cultural theory by day. At the weekends and in the holidays I play in a band, a practice that allows me to indulge in

further research. I collect records, read record collecting magazines and drink my tea from a Record Collector's Guild mug. Conceptually the work here is auto-ethnographically driven; methodologically, it is driven, in part, by grounded theory. My engagement with collecting, collectors, collections and the collected since 1977 means that at the conceptual level this work is, to a degree, autoethnographic; that is I have 'use[d] [my] own experiences in a culture reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions' (Holt 2003 p. 2). And whilst this autoethnographic approach does not situate me explicitly within the text, within the findings, it is *my* narrative, but I am caught between the "Autobiographic impulse" and the "ethnographic moment" represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse' (Spry 2001 p. 706). In a sense I wanted to find my narrative in the narratives of others – through their similar practices, behaviours, ideologies and discourses. I wondered if they too were nostalgic for music and the times and contexts from whence they came, if they wondered about the past whilst listening. I pondered if others experienced a visceral thrill from the physical objects, if they also spent much of their social lives engaged with vinyl products. I wondered if they found status in their collections and the sharing of them.

What follows in the next section of this chapter is a description and analysis of the practicalities of the project. How my thoughts about my own, and others' collections and collecting became a structured narrative around these themes. It explains the research design, the data collection and data analysis techniques as well as offering a brief introduction to the collectors who offered data for the research.

## **The Structure**

Record collections are carriers of the information whose arrangement and interpretation is part of the broader discourse about popular music (Straw 1997 p. 5).

The narrative is structured through the conceptual framework that came from the moments after my becoming a self-confessed collector - confirmed and adjusted by the respondents - and includes the voices of those like me who define themselves as collectors of vinyl.

Chapter one explores the historical trajectory of vinyl and in a broader sense the idea of capturing sound and holding it prisoner in tangible objects. That within

the expansive history of music, music itself has only been an object for a fleeting moment, needs consideration in historical, philosophical and industrial terms. How did our relationship with music change at this moment of thing-ness? How did it develop over the course of the twentieth century and how have theorists considered the idea of music as mass production alongside these developments and changes? What do these objects mean to people now in a world where arguably music is once again, for good or bad, losing its physicality? Beyond this a number of eras of music, of disc production and of collecting are posited and the different types of thing-ness of vinyl are suggested. It draws upon the work of a number of theorists and historians - Evan Eisenberg, (1987) Walter Benjamin, (1978) Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) Chris Cutler, (1993) Simon Frith, (1996) Michel Chanan, (1994) Richard Osborne (2012) Greg Milner, (2009) Travis Elborough, (2008) and Timothy Day (2000) among others.

In chapter two, with the materiality of music established within a framework of musical and collecting eras; I explore, via a model adapted from Arjun Appadurai, the idea that records have social lives. Beyond the material, Appadurai's model allows for the discussion of the shifting values and stories of material objects in a social sphere. I place the stories of the respondents into this framework alongside the work of Kopytoff (1986) who, like Appadurai, considers the cultural biographies of objects, as well as Leonard's (2007) framework of the types of object produced by the music industry. Through this theoretical combination I posit the idea that records have a number of trajectories and journeys; from pressing plant to distributor, from distributor to shop, from shop to home to collection, from collection back to shop and on to further collections (sometimes from collector to collector). Beyond this, the social life of these records positions them in differing states as objects depending on where they are - the collection, the shop, the charity shop, thrift store or attic, as having what Giorgio Agamben (1998) calls 'potentiality' to be either worthless or valuable depending on how the collector interprets them.

In chapter three I debate and challenge the problems of discussing record collecting and record collections within the established frameworks of collecting theory. It is not only the work of Pearce, mentioned earlier, that situates 'used' or utilitarian objects, such as vinyl (as media), on the periphery of collecting culture; as well as those whose work similarly focusses exclusively on non utilitarian objects - Belk (1988, 1989, 1990, 2001) Dittmar (1992), Pearce (1994, 1994, 1994, 1995, 1998) Elsner and Cardinal (1994) and Stewart (1984) similarly adopt this position.

Jean Baudrillard's ideas (1994) on collecting are challenged in relation to the practices of the collectors surveyed. From here I adapt Baudrillard's idea of 'objet' through Julia Kristeva's (1982) ideas of abjection to position records as 'abjet' - both worthless and priceless, unsettling through their inbetween state. Beyond this it also brings in ideas that touch upon collecting and/or objects from Benjamin (1978) and Freud (1985, 1994, 1999) to build a framework that adequately addresses collecting practices in the terms of the collectors questioned. This framework also addresses and builds upon the work of chapter two - in particular how collectors imagine the varying states of records, how they embody passion and/or disgust.

In chapter four I introduce the notion of the past as a relatively new idea and how vinyl production is situated there. Framing the discussion largely around the work of Lowenthal (1985) and his elaborate and useful dissection of the past into different imagined eras, or what the past might offer as a philosophical idea. Beyond this fundamental work, the chapter also draws upon authors including Turner (1987) and Goulding (2001) regarding the past as an idea. From here cultural approaches to the past from Hebdige (1979) Bennet and Hodkinson (2012) and Reynolds (2004, 2011) are discussed; both in terms of engagement with second hand records and new vinyl production - reissues and new music - as something that is a practice based in ideas and actualities of the past.

In chapter five the ways in which collectors access this past is addressed. The premise being that if vinyl is connected to the past then nostalgia, as a way of imagining the past, is how collectors get there/then. A range of approaches to thinking about nostalgia and the past are explored. Using Svetlana Boym's (2005) ideas of restorative and reflective nostalgia alongside Fred Davis's (1979) sociological exploration of nostalgia. Davis's idea that we cannot be nostalgic for things we have not experienced is questioned through the ideas of Appadurai (1996) and Reynolds (2011). Further models of nostalgia from Wilson (2005), Yochim and Biddinger (2008) and Goulding (2001) are discussed and applied to the collecting practices of respondents and their practices, based on their age and lifespan, the length of time immersed in collecting culture, and their personal histories with vinyl.

Chapter six explores ideas of taste and how record collectors find and situate their taste in the realm of vinyl records and collecting itself. It also explores the sensory experience of engagement with vinyl. This chapter explores Bourdieu's (1979) ideas of taste and distinction and focuses the notion of capital through Sarah Thornton's (1995) ideas of subcultural capital and 'hipness'; how both people and

objects can be considered 'cool'. From here Gronow's (1997) work on the sociological aspect of taste is further explored in a narrowed field of distinction - that is distinction in relation to the world of popular music consumption. The work of Corbett (1990) and Vaher (2008) is similarly brought in to help address how taste is constructed and articulated in the specifics of record collecting.

Chapter seven then takes these ideas and looks at how this notion of taste operates socially, how it is shared and articulated with other collectors and those that work or occupy the spaces where records 'persist and circulate' (Straw in Reynolds 2004 p. 305). It draws upon the framework constructed in the previous chapter but also brings in Dittmar (1992), Greif (2010), Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003) and explores the social aspects of subcultural capital - that is the social aspects of buying records and sharing collections. It also explores the articulation of vinyl in a social context and problematises the projection of values onto both records themselves and collecting vinyl in a positive and negative light.

The final chapter, chapter eight, explores the cumulation of the previous chapters' findings in relation to the respondents' own descriptions of collecting culture and how they defined it themselves in the initial survey to generate a picture of the cultures and practices of contemporary record collectors.



# Methodology

What are your motives?

I got to know

I'm doing research

I got to know

(Pope and Staples 1982).

In order to understand other persons' constructions of reality, we would do well to ask them ... And ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings (Jones 1985 p. 46).

## **Research Design: Theory, Frameworks & Writing**

This section details the ways in which the research was both designed and then executed. The previous section explored the ways in which the conceptual framework emerged from my own experiences of collecting culture and my place in the research, as both researcher and collector, and this will be methodologically contextualised here. Ultimately the aim is to generate a theory, or framework of theories, that address the practices and cultures of record collectors. That is 'it starts with an open mind, aiming to end up with a theory' (Punch 2005 p. 157). The research that follows on from here is both simple and complex. It is simple in the sense that it is, like many research projects partially at least, a study of a sample of a population through a standardised survey. It is also simple in the fact that this data is written up within the academic frameworks for PhD submission. It is complex, however, in that it takes neither a traditional approach to this data collection nor a traditional approach to the structure of the study. This section explores those non traditional choices and explains how they appear as 'organized common sense' (Punch 2005 p. 7) whilst situating them within the world of research methods and methodologies.

## **Design**

This research design is multidisciplinary in its construction. It draws on specific theories to address the loosely pre-designed, auto-ethnographically driven, conceptual framework from a wide range of disciplines. That is a variety of theories have been assembled to address the specificity of the research questions. It sits within

the field of material culture but draws on collecting theory, art history, historiography and cultural theory to enable this situating. It is also, broadly speaking, multidisciplinary in its approach to research design. It is, as a research project, designed to both verify and generate theory and then create, from these multidisciplinary approaches, a theoretical perspective. That is, it has taken, or abstracted, theories from these disparate fields, sometimes to test established and appropriate ideas and theories - about collecting for instance in chapter three. Here there is arguably an appropriate theory that has previously been presented, and yet for reasons of definition those theories have not been applied to record collectors and their practices. At other times the abstraction is one that pairs theories from within this broad framework to explore the phenomena observed - Baudrillard's notion of 'objet' and Kristeva's notions of the 'abject' (also in chapter three) are brought together to look at the various states records can exist in - desirable rarity or worthless trash.

The primary data collection within this study, sits in the field of qualitative research - 'a site of multiple methodologies and research practices' (Punch 2005 p. 134). To do this, the research design is, in part, influenced by grounded research as 'we have no satisfactory [overall] theory on the topic, and that we do not know enough about it to begin theorizing' (Ibid p. 159). As such, it is 'a collaborative venture between researchers and practitioners to test and adapt theory in practice settings' (Oktay 2012 p. 5). Whilst established grounded research methods initially gather data and then the conceptual framework is designed and the theoretical framework created from this, here my place in this culture (as discussed in the previous section of this chapter) generated an initial framework, initial data from the inside. I am, essentially a practitioner and a researcher; an insider. And as Hanson suggests 'it is 'insider' status which marks autoethnography' (2004 p. 186).

In such cases, there is often some benefit in delaying for a while the use of the literature, during the question development stage. There is benefit, in other words, to doing a certain amount of work on the developing the questions (and perhaps the conceptual framework) before consulting the literature (Punch 2005 p. 42).

Boyd's (2009) six point model was employed. She suggests firstly reading ethnographies before secondly focusing on a culture. After these first two stages she suggests the researcher 'Get into the field, hang out, observe, document, question, analyze' (2009 p. 29). This stage of 'deep hanging out' (Ibid) began before the primary

data gathering, after the moment of self definition mentioned earlier, through the beginnings of this as a thesis and during. I'm quite sure there will be continued 'deep hanging out' in record collector culture on completion. Ideas were tested out at a number of conferences - IASPM Canada conference 2008, and IASPM Biennial Conference 2009 (these papers are included in the appendices), as well as conferences at the University of California San Diego & Cologne University. Beyond this, time was spent hanging out in record shops around some of the countries that make up the range of respondents (see Figs 1 - 8). As a musician and academic, touring and conference attendance give opportunity to frequent record shops in places that one might not normally travel to at least not in record shopping terms. The internet was also a place of 'hanging out' in different mediated and unmediated contexts, allowing a view of practices from 'different angles' (Ibid). I also became a member of the record collecting online forum 'Very Good Plus' in 2010. However I never got 'too comfortable' (Ibid), which is the fourth stage where one is 'reflexive of your own biases' and 'question your own questioning' (Ibid). For Boyd the next step, five, is where the researcher places 'observations and interpretations into an "intelligible frame"' (Ibid p. 30) which will allow for the final stage "To make meaning of culture. Interpretations should be situated and they must be questioned' (Ibid).

This study then, as it emerged from these processes, is not about extreme cases; it is also not about those that buy, or accumulate vinyl, it is about those that engage in *collecting* at a level that is, at its most simple level, self-aware. That is they refer to themselves and their practices as collector/collecting. Respondents were invited to self define as expert and engage with the research with the question 'Collect vinyl?' (see appendix one); to define record collectors as well as reflect on their own place within the discourses and hierarchies of collecting. Within this approach the self-definition of the status of collector was the only entry requirement. Self-definition was important in the sense that I reflected on my own experience; I knew when I had stopped accumulating and became a collector. Within qualitative research 'the issue of sampling has little significance as the main aim of most qualitative inquiries is either to explore or describe the diversity in in a situation, phenomenon or issue' (Punch 2005, p. 165), although sampling was considered and is discussed in the next section. This method also dictates the design and writing of the work in that the literature and the data are not separate in distinct and discrete sections - literature review and

then results - but woven together in a series of conceptually driven chapters where theory and data can be reviewed and analysed alongside each other.



Fig 1. Author at the now defunct Minus Zero/Stand Out! London, England, 2009



Fig 2. Author and store owner at Sound Station Records Copenhagen, Denmark 2010



Fig 3. Author at New Records in Bari, Italy, 2009



Fig 4. Author at Lost in Music, Camborne, England, 2011



Fig 5. Author at Second Hand Records, Stuttgart, Germany, 2012



Fig 6. Author at Raves From the Grave, Frome, England, 2010



Fig 7. Author at Carmel Records, Southend-On-Sea, England, 2010



Fig 8. Author with store owner (Andy) at In the Groove Records, Henley on Thames, England, 2013

'The appreciation of a wider range of choices has meant also the freeing up of some of the restrictions about writing, and is encouraging experimentation with newer forms of writing' (Ibid p. 261). The idea here is to situate collectors amongst a narrative of theory and theory amongst collectors' cultures and practices.

The net effect of recent developments is that we cannot approach the task of 'writing up' our research as a straightforward (if demanding) task. We have to approach it as an analytical task, in which the form of our reports and representations is as powerful and significant as their content (Coffey and Atkinson 1996 p. 109).

That is the 'conception of reality' (Jones 1985 p. 46) - the data, the words and narratives of the respondents is not treated as separate from the words and narratives of writers and theorists. There is both analysis of data through theory and the analysis of theory through the data. The writing here is a 'way of learning, a way of knowing, a form of analysis and inquiry' (Punch 2005 p. 275). This also means that, unlike some qualitative projects, the work here is not entirely reliant on the respondents. The project uses their voices, their data as a way of understanding theory, generating theory and framing theory. This approach is also drawn from grounded theory where the 'Theory is not to provide full conceptual description of all of the data, rather, it is the discovery and development of theory about what is central in the data - theory which is condensed, abstract and selective' (Ibid p. 215).

### **Sampling**

Whilst Punch (2005) suggests that sampling does not have the same importance in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research, sampling was considered. The sample range is both purposive *and* convenience based and draws on the Delphi-method notion of the 'expert'. That is, the collectors here do not 'represent the general population' but were chosen, or self selected, for 'their expert ability to answer the research questions' (Fink & Kosecoff in Krahn. 2007 p. 2). That said the sample was purposefully chosen so as not to include 'extreme-case sampling, [...] negative manifestations of the problem' (Punch 2005 p. 187) in an attempt to maintain an internal consistency, coherency and logic to the study, and to stay away from the freak-show-journalistic manifestation of the dysfunctional collector. These depictions include, amongst other places, the movie 'Vinyl' (2000) where 'Alan Zweig investigates

the wacky world of record collecting' (Anonymous 2011) through a series of interviews with collectors who are, for instance, 'trying to collect every song in the world'. Or in Brett Milano's book (2003) 'Vinyl Junkies' where in an early chapter he describes collecting as 'a fairly benign disorder' (2003 p. 29), but a disorder nonetheless. One that he suggests is an addiction of creative types with serotonin deficiencies. Here musician collectors such as Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore or Original Cramps drummer Miriam Linna are interviewed. These people have had extraordinary experiences with music, the music industry, with vinyl both in terms of production and consumption. Whilst their stories are interesting they represent extreme-case sampling. They are essentially, to some degree, famous, they work with music, for record companies, producing records. In this world the amount of records encountered is vast, whether through record shopping on tour, being sent records by other bands or by their own or other record companies. Vast collections are assembled in extraordinary circumstances that do not reflect the experience of music fans who collect vinyl as a preference. These collectors also occupy public discourses of record collecting through, among other things, the 'Collector of the Month' column in Record Collector magazine and the Amoeba records video series 'What's in My Bag' where they are given space to discuss their collections and recent purchases. Similarly whilst Evan Eisenberg's (1987) respondents are not 'famous', they are extreme. 'Clarence opens the kitchen door and you enter, but just barely. Every surface - the counters and cabinets, the shelves of the oven and refrigerator, and almost all the linoleum floor - is covered in records' (1987 p. 1) What the above examples share is a journalistic approach to the topic outside of theory and their extreme-case sampling their selling point. They are, arguably, famous enough, or odd enough, to warrant journalistic attention, column inches and documentary coverage. Whilst they are the public, or published, face of record collecting, they mask the activities of collectors who are, I would suggest, not famous and not odd in the pathological ways that Zweig and Eisenberg's collectors are portrayed. And whilst Robert Crumb suggests that 'Record collectors put each other down for their various fixations. Everybody is convinced that his way of collecting is superior' (in Milano 2003 p. 70) this research is concerned with those 'practitioners [who] make use of spaces that cannot be seen' (De Certeau 1984 p. 104). The notion of types of collector will be discussed in chapter three.

At a point near the beginning of this research, the question of sampling and of the sample's relationship to the population was raised. Through my work, my social

life and my musicianship I have encountered many people who on reflection, would be extreme cases. I know many collectors, record label owners, musicians, journalists, DJs and those who have, or do, work within the music industry in some way or other who would sit within this extreme case sampling. They did form part of Boyd's 'deep hanging out' and contributed to discussion of the beginnings of the conceptual framing. They were not excluded from the survey but they did not form the population from which the sample was drawn. Similarly, whilst the extreme cases discussed by Milano and Eisenberg were not sought out, the frameworks (particularly that of Eisenberg) that were used to question and frame their work, do form elements of the discussion throughout the chapters.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected via an online twenty question survey. Respondents were directed to the survey (as noted above) via Twitter, an online social media platform<sup>2</sup>, where collectors, among others, tell stories about their finds, their records, their practices. These 'recent technological technologies like blogs and social network sites [are] where individuals construct their social world through links and attention. Rather than relying on interests or structure-based boundaries, current social groups are defined through relationships' (Boyd 2009 p. 27) and the relationships between collectors in current practice is discussed in chapter seven. Twitter was chosen from the range of available social media for its ability to allow direct communication outside of immediate social networks, meaning that it allows for a wider reach outside of the user's immediate friends or followers to a large amount of individuals with common interests. The use of twitter means that the research is limited to a sample consisting of record collectors who also have twitter accounts; a problem that would similarly emerge with any use of social networking sites. However, it did mean that the potential reach and scope of the research was much larger than other offline methods giving a broader range of answers and practices from the collectors surveyed. A tweet was generated and sent to the accounts of Record Store Day, Record Collector Magazine and Dust and Grooves: an international organisation to celebrate record shops, the UK's record collecting magazine and a photographic book project about record collectors and their collections, respectively. There were twenty re-tweets of the initial tweet as well as a number of users who favourited the tweet. Data

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing Twitter had 637,391,500 users Anonymous (2013). "Twitter account just registered:." Retrieved April 12th 2013, 2013, from <http://twopcharts.com/twitter500million.php>.



were gathered in a relatively short time. The approximate number of people who could have seen the tweet in their twitter feeds (The number of followers of those initial accounts, plus the number of followers of those that retweeted) was 77,240. From this potential group approximately four hundred responses were noted within four days of the initial tweet before responses slowed to one or two a day and the survey was closed after a week. And whilst 'the suitability of the Internet for conducting research remains relatively unexplored' (Mann and Stewart 2009 p. 4) 'Media are integral to the full range of human social practices. They are appropriated for the everyday conduct of social, occupational and civic life in ways that bring these fields into new forms of convergence across space and time' (Markham and Baym 2009 p. x). As record collecting as an observable (via websites, magazines and newspaper articles) phenomena is a worldwide set of cultures and practices, respondents were not told where the study was based, or where I am based. As such, collectors responded from countries where English is a first, or common second language (a full break down of the collectors follows later in this chapter).

Whilst the trajectory *to* the questions sits within new ideas about qualitative data collection, as described by (Markham and Baym 2009) (Mann and Stewart 2009), the questioning itself was more traditional, even if it was online. Though online identities can allow respondents to 'type themselves into being' (Sunden in Boyd 2009 p. 32) like writing a blog post or tweet. Here the questionnaire was away from these social network sites and those that responded could not see the responses of others.

The questions - beyond the initial demographic questions including age, gender and location - consisted of a 'standardized open-ended interview' where 'all respondents receive[d] the same questions in the same order, delivered in a standard manner' (Punch 2005 pp. 169-170). The twenty questions were subdivided into four sections, each section containing five questions the first detailed the respondents collection and their journeys into collecting and the remaining sections' questions were generated through the initial conceptual framework (see appendices 2 - 14 for a selection of full transcripts and appendix 17 for full data). Like the 1998 survey of British collecting undertaken by Susan Pearce et al at the University of Leicester, here the questions ask about the history of people's collections and how they feel about them as well as how they came to collecting. Where it differs from the Pearce study is in the qualitative design and the framing of the questions within the context of vinyl production and consumption as well as music fandom.

## **Data Analysis**

The data was analysed through a number of coding levels from the concrete or specific to the abstract or general – this in turn can be mapped against Geertz’s idea of thin and thick description (Punch 2005). Initially the interview data was first order coded against the emergent conceptual frame to see if they and the broad themes within them were appropriate – nostalgia, the past, collecting etc. This ‘open coding’ allowed for exploration of the theoretical possibilities of the data. At the same time as this open coding, memo-ing – ‘the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst whilst coding’ (Miles & Huberman in Punch 2005 p. 201) - was utilized to reach the next level of coding, to add theoretical remarks into the data which lead to the next level of analysis. Beyond this, higher level coding was employed to both analyse and reduce the data. At this point the nuances of the conceptual framework were brought in – typologies of collecting or nostalgia for instance – and used to further analyse the data as well as bringing in new elements of theory - notions of patina for instance in chapter six. This, as Glaser suggests can be called ‘One upping’ (in Punch 2005 p. 204). There were, of course multiple empirical indicators in the data that could be related to individual concepts (codes) and each indicator (property) was consistently compared with all other indicators connected to each concept (category).

This open coding allowed for the construction of chapters and subsections and the framing of analysis through the emerging nuances of the data.

[O]pen coding is the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data ... During open coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data. While various questions are asked, the key question is the one above – ‘What is this piece of data an example of’ (Strauss & Corbin in Punch 2005 p. 207).

Axial or theoretical coding is the process by which the data is re-constructed after the ‘opening’ of the data in the first level of coding. This was used to clearly abstract the indicators within the data from the everyday to the conceptual. After theoretical coding was undertaken, the dominant themes allowed for selective coding to take place, to ‘integrate and pull together the developing analysis. The theory to be developed must have a central focus’ (Ibid p. 211). Whilst this method of analysis can lead to fragmentation of the data into segments so small that the narrative elements

of the data are lost and bring in to question the choice of research methodology in the first place, care was taken to make sure that the holistic sense of culture and narrative was not broken. Here, as mentioned earlier, literature ‘as further data [was] fed into the analysis’ (Punch, 2005 p. 159).

### The Collectors

This work is qualitative and the respondents were given anonymity as well as the option to omit questions as they saw fit (most filled in each section). Whilst the objective here is not to produce a picture of an ‘average’ collector but to explore the various and varying practices of collectors, it may be useful to have an overall picture of who the collectors are as a group, as groups within group, by age, by gender, by collection.

In total - when blank forms (where potential respondents opened but did not complete any section of the survey) were removed - there were 344 responses. The respondents varied in age between 16 and 59. 45 between 16 and 20, 133 between 21 and 30, 99 between 31 and 40, 44 between 41 and 50, 3 between 51 and 60 as can be seen in fig 9.

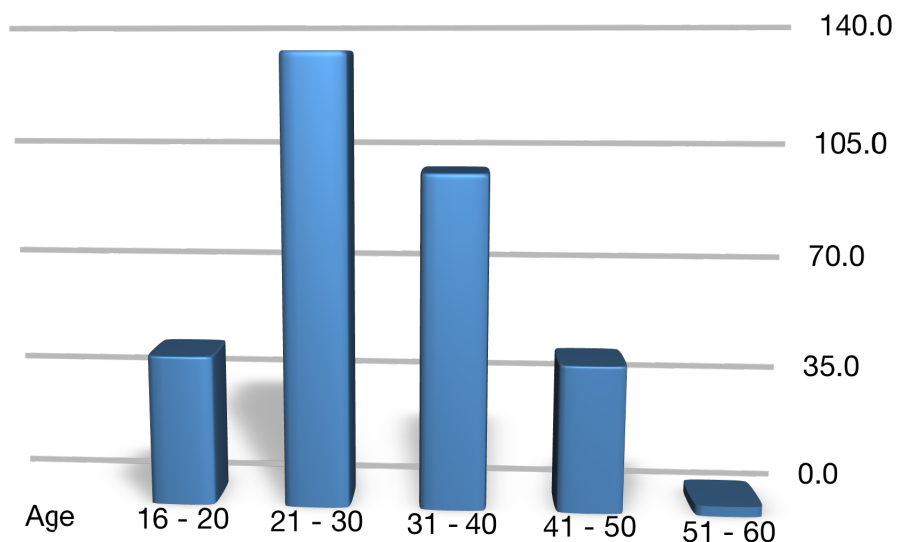


Fig 9. Respondents by age

Of those that completed the survey, 63 (approximately 18%) were female with the remaining 82% (281) being male. This contrasts with Susan Pearce’s (1998) study of British collecting where 58% of all collectors were female. Within each age category (shown in fig 10) women made up 31.1% of the 16-21 year olds, 17.29% of the 21-30

year olds, 12.12% of the 31-40 year olds, 15.9% of the 41-50 year olds and (fittingly) 33.3 % of the 51-60 year old.

There is, arguably, much to say about gender and record collecting, far more than can be discussed within the parameters of the conceptual framework here. Sarah Thornton made more than an allusion to it in her study of club cultures: ‘the size of a man’s record collection has long been a measure of his subcultural capital’ (Thornton 1995 p. 118) and Will Straw has written about the ‘masculinist character of record collecting’ (Straw 1997 p. 4) both as public display of power and private refuge from the social (sexual) world. Whilst I acknowledge this importance it is a project as big, if not bigger than the work undertaken here. Collectors themselves had a variety of views on this topic and whilst most respondents filled in this part of the survey with M, F, male or female and so on, one collector<sup>3</sup>declared his gender but pointed out that the question was ‘irrelevant’. Some of the female collectors explained their collecting (and the problems of) in terms of gender

I think it demonstrates my varied taste, and that it's possible to like many disparate things. As a woman, record collecting is often seen as a "man's" hobby because our world likes to divide things by sex and gender. I think my collection demonstrates that appreciation of music has little to nothing to do with what's between your legs<sup>4</sup>.

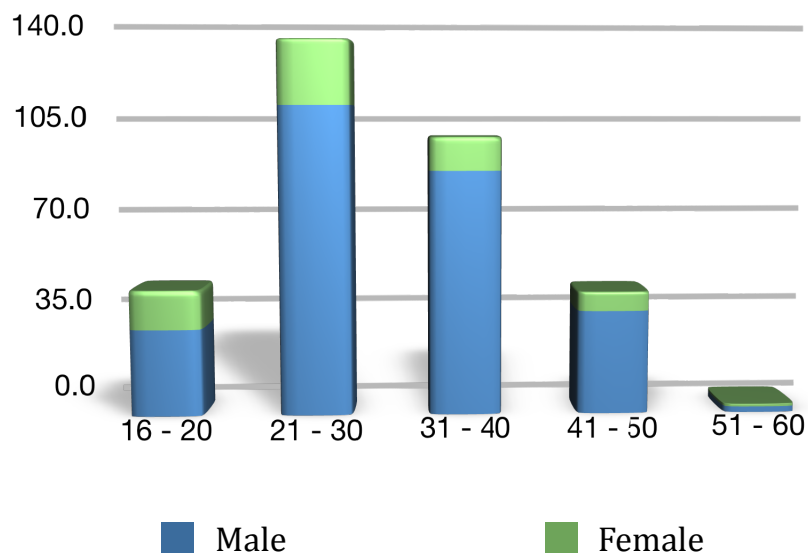


Fig 10. Respondents by gender and age.

The positioning of self inside this ‘male culture’ in terms of musical knowledge

<sup>3</sup> Respondent 283 a 55 year old from London

<sup>4</sup> Respondent 82 a 23 year old female from Wisconsin

was also discussed ‘Somewhat knowledgeable about certain genres. I think it's extremely important especially b[e]ing female because it gives you credibility in a male dominated culture.’<sup>5</sup> and went on to explain ‘I've even had to [e]nd relationships with boyfriends that didn't understand.’ Record collecting formed part of respondents’ identity in terms of sexuality as well as gender (amongst other traits). A 28 year old male claimed that his collection demonstrated ‘That I'm a feminist bad ass queer nerd’<sup>6</sup>.

The number of records that made up the respondents’ collections varied between the five records - owned by a 28 year old female from Reno<sup>7</sup> who had ‘just started’ to collect, to over 20,000 records owned by a 41 year old male from DC<sup>8</sup> who used them in his DJ career. Some collectors knew exactly how many records they had, by format ‘400 (250 x 7", 15 x 10", 135 x 12")’<sup>9</sup>

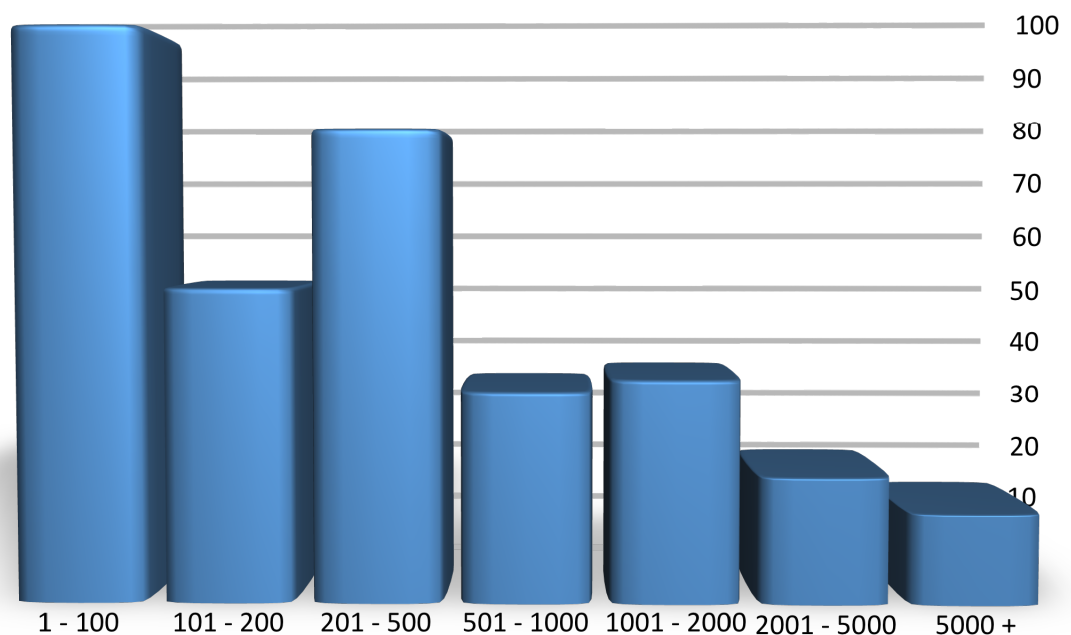


Fig 11. Number of records in the collection

whilst others gave approximations such as, ‘Conservative estimate: Over 5,000. I

<sup>5</sup> Respondent 162 a 31 year old female from Lincoln Park, MI

<sup>6</sup> Respondent 100 from Rancho Cucamonga, CA

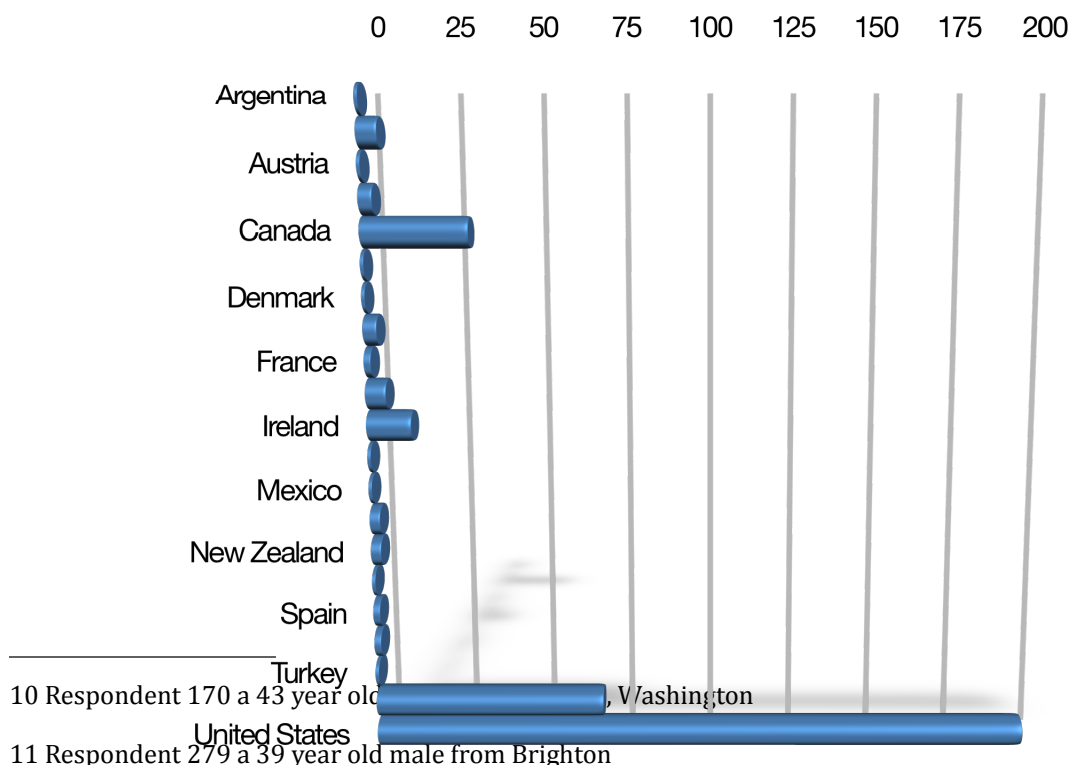
<sup>7</sup> Respondent 88

<sup>8</sup> Respondent 125

<sup>9</sup> Respondent 131 a 25 year old male from Corby, UK

haven't counted them in years'<sup>10</sup>. In total there were approximately 380,000 records in the respondent's collective collection. If redistributed equally amongst them this would equate to a mean of 1,116 records each. A median average, however situates the average lower at 300 records and a mode at 100 records. The amount of time the respondents had been collecting for also varied. From one month which had heroically resulted in 20 records<sup>11</sup> to '40+' years which had resulted in a collection consisting of '25000 x 7" 1500 x 12" singles 7000 x LPs'<sup>12</sup>. Some collectors had been collecting sporadically over the course of their lifetime with definite periods of 'collecting'. Or some respondents had, like me, moments of self definition where they said they had been collecting 'Actively the past 5 years; owned, listened and appreciated 20+'<sup>13</sup>, or others who admitted that 'Although I've owned vinyl records for over 25 years, it's only in the last ten years that I've collected'<sup>14</sup>. Whilst the amount of records owned as a definition of collecting had never been something I had considered, nor had it been mentioned by those that contributed to the discussions at the beginning of the work during 'deep hanging out', it was a question I had been asked by other (non collector) music fans. As such it was included to see if it was an important marker of the discourse of collecting to those who collected.

Fig 12. Respondents by country



10 Respondent 170 a 43 year old male from Washington

11 Respondent 279 a 39 year old male from Brighton

12 Respondent 293 a 52 year old male from Glasgow

13 Respondent 101 a 25 year old female from Texas

14 Respondent 61 a 40 year old male from Dublin

Respondents came from twenty one countries. Austria, Argentina, Columbia, Denmark, Italy, Mexico, Poland and Turkey had one response each and the countries of North America dominated with two hundred and twenty five of the responses. The United Kingdom and Ireland contributed eighty one responses (UK 68), Germany and Australia - six, Belgium and Finland - four, New Zealand and The Netherlands - three, and Sweden, Spain and France - two each. Whilst each country may have its own cultural variations on collecting, the current global market in vinyl records is reaching into a number of geographical locations - South America, Africa, Pakistan, Iran and so on - although predominantly through the musics of those countries' pasts.

These opening two sections have framed the personal impetus for this project and the theoretical and conceptual journey and structuring of the work that follows in the subsequent sections. It has also explored the methodological and narrative considerations undertaken to construct the actualities of the writing and how these two ideas, the conceptual/theoretical and the methodological, frame both each individual chapter and the collective chapters as a cohesive piece. This consideration, like much else in my life can be compared to listening to music.

I think it shows that I care about the artist and the music I listen to. I consider an album a book, and each song an individual chapter. Meaning that I like to listen to a complete album not just one song<sup>15</sup>.

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15 Respondent 20 a 25 year old male from California

# Chapter One:

## Music Becomes a Thing

Be not afraid, my lord, we are on the confines of the Frozen Sea  
(Rabelais 1864 p. 364).

For the listening public at large, in every century but this one,  
there was no such thing as collecting music  
(Eisenberg 1987 p. 11).

### **A Fleeting Thing.**

This chapter deals with what will become known as, if Bill Drummond (2008) is to be believed, the fleeting physicality of music in the twentieth century; a brief moment in the history of music, and our engagement with it as a series of physical objects. A moment when music became, through a variety of cultural and industrial practices, a 'thing'; something tangible, repeatable, own-able and subsequently and importantly collectable. This physicality, this thing-ness, Drummond argues, is a result of the recording process, the capturing of sound, and this he argues, will be left only to those who make advertising jingles, produce film soundtracks or manufacture ringtones (2008). Whilst Drummond's comments question the necessity of recorded music at all, other commentators such as John Corbett (1990) and Maria Styven (2007) have similarly explored the notion of the lack of physicality, or 'the intangibility of music in the internet age' (p. 53). None of these authors suggest that music itself will disappear, but all of them discuss the notion that music will become, or return to something invisible, ephemeral and akin to a 'service as opposed to a sale of physical goods' (Ibid). And whilst the authors discuss the decline of physicality from different perspectives (celebratory and problematically), the end of the thing-ness of music as the dominant engagement with listening is the basis of their discussions. The thing/not thing dichotomy of music is not straightforward. The recording of music and its subsequent rendering as products was not a static process, unchanging over the last one hundred and twenty years. Music did not enter into the twentieth century encased in a singular, static, physical and stable format and remain there until the close of the century when the tyranny of the physical was quashed by the 'digital revolution'. The changes in the technology of music, its cultures and its



industry, at various points from its inception in the late eighteenth century and continuing to the present day, meant that there were only ever short, relatively stable, periods of music production and consumption before, sometimes subtle and sometimes paradigm, shifts moved ideas, actualities, products and the means of consuming them into new eras. 'Each new technological change in mass music-making' Simon Frith argues 'is a further 'threat' to 'authentic' popular music' (1998 p. 16) or rather what is perceived as 'authentic' popular music. As will be discussed below, there exist extensive histories (of which this is just one possible narrative) of thought and discursive development in the cultures of music production and music listening; the becoming and un-becoming of the musical listening object (Barfe 2004), (Chanan 1995), (Corbett 1990), (Eisenberg 1987), (Frith 1998) and (Laing 1992) among others. This opening chapter deals with some of the fundamental (to this argument at least) philosophical, theoretical and historical issues surrounding the capturing - a word I use deliberately and will expand upon later along with other 'heroic' words associated with record collecting - of art and particularly music; leading up to what Simon Frith calls the 'industrialisation of music'. It then further charts the captured physicality of this 'industrialised' music and its accompanying rituals, through its conceptual and actual stages from the accidental amusement of initial recordings through the heyday of vinyl and to the present day's discussion where commentators like Drummond suggest that the end of the recorded music industry is nigh, and where vinyl is left only 'to the very poor, the very rich and the very odd' (Eisenberg 1987 p. 211).

That this industrialised music can be discussed in terms of its effects, its formats and the engagement with them, or what one respondent calls 'spinning vinyl [as] ceremony, a ritual'<sup>16</sup>, relies on an argument much older than the recurring arguments and various and nefarious format wars of the twentieth century. That man has a 'need to make beauty and pleasure permanent' (Eisenberg 1987 p. 14 discussed in detail in chapter three) is a notion that occurs in academic and fictional writing over a far longer period, but is one that is fundamental to recording and to the record. That the act of *making* beauty and then making *made* beauty *permanent* is something left to man, leads into discussions of taste (discussed in chapters six and seven), occasionally into vulgarity and into who it is that can create, copy or capture things of beauty and the morality of doing so (Batchelor 1994). For the ancient Greeks the poet

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16 Respondent 137 a 37 year old male from Northern Maine

held this privileged place in society. He could capture and simultaneously set free, with words, the beauty of nature, of the Gods, of 'beautiful women and boys' (Eisenberg 1987 p. 9). That this beauty can be made permanent is left to the somewhat less romantic act of writing. But writing – or recording – whilst giving permanence to poetry, also ties it to the page, to a physical form – it paradoxically captures what poetry sets free; it makes beauty a thing, 'Consequently, words sit where they are, never going anywhere or doing anything' (Hutchinson 1992 pp. 8-9). As Evan Eisenberg argues, beauty and poetry are often depicted or imagined with wings, with the ability to soar and transcend the earth. The Greeks depicted their gods as airborne, and one of the enduring images of Christianity is the angel, winged and paradise bound. Conversely the most 'durable things [...] are precisely the most earthbound and inert, the most thingly' (Eisenberg 1987 p. 10). This dichotomy - between the heavenly and the earthly, the beautiful and the utilitarian, the priceless and the worthless - forms at least in part, the tension of vinyl's current position in the world of the cultural industries and will be returned to at various points throughout this narrative.

The words, or rather the page upon which the words of poetry are scribed, are the obstinately robust necessity of the process of capture. The page is not the intellect or imagination of the poet, nor is it the sound signifiers of the poem itself accompanied by the intonation and inflection, the implications and stresses of the voice. The link between writing as record making and the industrial practice of recording music as record making (in all senses) has become further evidenced in more recent times. In March 2008 scientists at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, California used optical imaging to transcribe the markings left by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville's phonograph – a device that recorded the human voice in visual and essentially written form rather than an audio recording. On April 9<sup>th</sup> 1860 Martinville achieved what had been discussed by philosophers and scientists for some time; he captured 'a ghostly tune, drifting out of the sonic murk' (Rosen 2008). This picture had remained static, frozen for a century and a half before the thawing qualities of technology allowed the visual representation 'inscribed on soot-blackened paper' (Ibid) to be set free. The page sang.

This is an important point; Edison's invention has been largely credited as the first voice recorder until the discovery – or 'playing' – of Martinville's recordings, captured and subsequently released the voice. This prompted one French

photographer to declare it the reality of Rabelais's story of the sea of frozen words<sup>17</sup>. A place so cold that any act that created sound resulted in the physical creation of an object containing the noises, words and music and where the human voice and clash of swords could be heard only when the sea melted and released the words within. Martinville's device held the unknown recitation of 'Au Claire de Lune' 'frozen' for one hundred and forty eight years. The recording has been a thing, tangible, physical, an object for over a century before being released into the ether. The idea of vinyl records as freezing device was similarly described by one collector

I just like media. People expressing ideas in an artistic form and recording it in some way. Freezing it in time. Vinyl is almost literally frozen. It is a physical representation of sound that has to heat up (from friction of the stylus) to play, and it can simply melt away<sup>18</sup>.

This capturing and what it might mean to art, knowledge or poetry is not particular to the industrial and post-industrial age. The Greeks too, were concerned with the tangibility of words and their collection. Timon of Phlius called Alexander the Great's library 'The birdcage of the muses' (Eisenberg 1996 p. 10) although there was no mention of the whereabouts of the sirens. The differing states of the tangible sound object as the carrier of sound as utilitarian device will be discussed in chapter three.

### **Folk/Art/Pop**

The melting of the sea of frozen words has taken hundreds of years over what has been broadly discussed (Cutler 1993), (Frith 1996), in terms of three stages, or what Cutler calls 'modes' of music: The Folk Stage, The Art Stage and the Pop Stage. The folk stage is the historical era of music where there is no system for storing music other than through the act of remembrance. Here songs are stored in the human memory and can only be retrieved through the performance of it – by recollection and singing and/or playing. This, on a small scale, poses little problem for singers of song. On a larger scale, this oral tradition lead to great feats of memory and collective memorisation, evidenced in such wonders as the aboriginal song-lines or, in the later

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<sup>17</sup> In a paradigmatic episode of Rabelais's Fourth Book (IV.55-56), Pantagruel and his companions hear strange, disembodied sounds erupting out of nowhere in the open sea – chaotic sounds of men, women, children, horses, trumpets and cannons. The ship's captain explains that there at the edge of the glacial sea a battle took place between two (imaginary) peoples at the beginning of the winter. The shouts, cries and other sounds of din froze in the air, but now with the warm season coming on they've begun to melt explosively back into sound. Pantagruel scoops up whole handfuls of words (paroles, motz) resembling crystallized sweets of different colors; some of them are witty words, others sharp and bloody. Like snow they melt in the hand giving off sound in "barbarous" languages as well as non verbal battle noise. Hutchinson, S. (1992). *Cervantine Journeys*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press.

18 respondent 262, a 28 year old male from Fort Worth Texas

stages of the 'stage', the estimated ten years it took for a young chorister to learn the chants necessary for service in Abbeys and Cathedrals (Goodall 2001). Performance required investment and learning, intense and repeated listening. What this folk stage means in terms of engagement and listening is that music was during this time 'perforce a social event' (Eisenberg 1987 p. 24) aside from the musician playing for him or herself, music was a shared cultural experience and one that was ephemeral. This began to change in the sixth century with the beginnings of a unified system of notation and the beginnings of what has been described as the Art stage. Whilst the Greeks, among others, had a notation system for song, with named notes and markings over notes (or words in the case of the poetry of Euripides) there was no transferable standardisation to this chironomic system. The earliest surviving example of this 'captured' song dates from the third century and consists of a piece of papyrus found in Egypt – arguably the first record. This was further developed under the patronage of St. Gregory the Great (Pope between 590 and 604 AD). Beginning with simple neumes (notes to indicate the direction pitch should take) placed over the words of song indicating the cadence or curve but without any reference or way of signifying the pitch. This system was developed later by Guido d'Arezzo who anchored the beginning notes of neumes and gave further points at which to measure the note of the curve. This effectively gave consistency of what was essentially a shape to give structure to the 'tune' and made it sing-able by more than one person at a time. D'Arezzo also developed the four line stave giving smaller intervals and definition to musical structure and a series of measures to indicate tempo and rhythm. In music, as in language, 'intonation is everything' (Chanan 1994 p. 2). Previously Bakhtin suggested:

[T]he living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of dialogical threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of the utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue (1981 p. 276).

With developments of the score, such as the anchoring of neumes to standardised notes and the increasing centralisation of song – both lyrically and musically, there is a coded restriction of the Bakhtinian dialogic threads of song as utterance, as story, history and worship. This impacts on the role of the singer as well as listener. This system became, over the course of its development, the modern notation system. Whilst the series of developments were 'the intellectual property of the church' (Chanan 1994 p. 54), popular or folk musics remained somewhat of an oral

tradition maintaining the active sociality of the utterance and remaining (outside of the remnants of songs written by Trouvers, Troubadours and their ilk). The evolution of folk music was, and is, aligned with the technological musical and instrument(al) developments; instruments that were not allowed within the hallowed walls of the church thrived in the unofficial world of folk. Whilst music remained predominantly a social event, official or otherwise, where 'the musician sang for his supper, he did his work in the presence of his patrons - noblemen, clerics, festive clumps of peasantry - and as he satisfied, had his own needs met in return' (Eisenberg 1987 p. 20), there was a shift in the way in which music was stored. Essentially musical memory was no longer the safe-keeper of music and music started to become tangible and measurable against the imagined perfection of the score. Music (official or religious music at least) was no longer stored solely within the body even if it could only be retrieved through the physical performance. The body as the retrieval device for music finally gives way to the recording in the Pop Stage although this took several hundred years to become more than a philosophical idea. Music becomes a thing or what Cutler terms 'The POP level of discourse [...] pop in its mass consumed, pure-commodity form' (1993 p. 13) with the technological developments of the late nineteenth century. In terms of the impact on the audience, they shift from active music makers - singers and players of song - to passive music listeners. 'The only instruments people like me can play today' Simon Frith argues 'are their record players' (1998 p. 11).

But this posed as many philosophical debates as it did commercial concerns. The broader arguments about the industrialisation of culture (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997) and the mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 1978) of art have been discussed at length elsewhere (and will be drawn upon here); the debates around music take a more specific, but no less, political form. Whilst this narrative is not concerned with 'good' taste, it is concerned with the mobilisation 'of tastes' (discussed in chapters six and seven). This discussion is one where the absence of performance became the focus of the debate.

[T]he history of music [was thought to be] 'unintelligible' unless it took as its starting point actual performances of the music. [A]n example in notation is 'not an actual specimen of art ... but the mere means out of which a trained intellect and vivid imagination may construct such a specimen (Chanan 1994 p. 11).

It had taken a little over three hundred years to realise the capture of sound as beauty. Before acoustics had become a branch of science (and hence less interested in art as beauty but in mechanics), attempts and suggestions were made as to how we

might capture or record the human voice.

[I]n 1589 the Italian scientist Giovanni Batista della Porta [...] imagined that he had 'devised a way to preserve words, that have been pronounced, inside lead pipes, in such a manner that they burst forth from them when one removes the cover (Chanan 1994 p. 1).

With Martinville's phonautograph in the middle of the nineteenth century an important change occurred and one that lasted until the middle of the twentieth century. 'Certainly the technological limitations of early recordings - up to the end of the shellac era, up to the nineteen fifties - prevented them being given serious consideration by many musicians and cultural commentators' (Day 2000 p. 231). The device was designed not to replicate music from a score the way in which a player piano might, but it was designed to capture a human performance. '[S]ound, so to speak liberates the ideal content from its immersion in matter' (Hegel 1997 p. 125).

This too echoes the origins of the thingness of popular music, of the Pop stage. It was only with Edison's later invention that things began to change, but even here 'in its original form the invention that promised repeatable recording but not its replication was able to *capture* the imagination of a potential market but not satisfy it' (Chanan 1994 p. 5 my emphasis).

Technological and philosophical changes moved music over the course of centuries through modes, or stages, of folk and art and eventually positioned it in the popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, captured, frozen, as thing. Storage of music moved from paper to a variety of formats, predominantly the disc and so it was/is not dissimilar to the art stage. The big shift in the pop stage is the retrieval of music; music is retrieved mechanically. Memory and performance become redundant, leaving us with our record players, our CD players and our MP3 playlists. Suggestions like that of Bill Drummond, that open this chapter, hint at Jacques Attali's (2009) idea of a fourth stage, a 'new political and cultural order' ( p. 19) which 'would emerge in the future where music would begin to be again made for pleasure, and is taken gradually away from commerce' (Till 2010 p. 179). Attali's prophetic analysis arguably, and initially, situates vinyl as a product, a thing, a format to be purchased through traditional and non traditional routes - but always through the 'traditional' transactions of cash for product. An archaic reminder of capitalism's grip on the physicality of poetry, anchoring beauty to the physical and the commercial whilst through the electronic ether, digital beauty is free to soar. After all, as Richard Osborne

suggests:

[T]o a certain extent digital technologies are not formats at all. Digital information is freely exchangeable across various media, consequently any idea that this information is being determined by its format is diminished. In contrast, the analogue record places many aural and physical parameters around its recorded material (2012 p. 183).

Why would we wish to keep beauty caged? Why would we imprison it? Or as one respondent suggested 'I dislike the fact everything is transitioning to digital. If I can't hold it, it's not worth it'<sup>19</sup>. This argument could leave vinyl, or the preference for it, as a conservative practice; a hankering for capitalist production and, of course, consumption whilst bohemian and radical folk practices of making and listening to music would take place online outside of the established routes and modes of twentieth century cultural production. Travis Elborough suggests that 'In the face of these advances, to purposely listen to LPs on vinyl could seem dangerously close to an act of deliberate historical re-enactment, like putting on a stovepipe hat and pretending to be a Parliamentarian pike carrier at weekends' (2008 p. 6).

Before exploring vinyl consumption and collector's practices through this framework (outlined in the previous chapter), consideration needs to be given to the cultural/historical developments of vinyl production. Beginning with its impact culturally and commercially at the end of the nineteenth century and ending with this philosophical point where vinyl consumption arguably sits between conservatism and bohemianism.

### **The Pop Stage and the Place of Vinyl Records.**

This argument is concerned primarily with vinyl records. The two words - Vinyl and records - will be used interchangeably by both myself and the respondents (as well as slang terms such as wax) alongside the word disc throughout. There is, of course, a politics of language here. As Richard Osborne points out 'Although 'vinyl' is the favoured name at present, 'disc' and 'record' have also been used [...] the first describes a material, the next a shape and the last is the result of an action that has taken place' (2012 p. 3). Vinyl was preceded by a number of formats and materials used to capture and freeze performances. From cylinder to shellac disc, the industrial experimentation of sound recording and its accompanying patents of 'disks or cylinders are impressed by a stylus under which they pass' (1905 French Court Ruling

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19 Respondent 149 a 33 year old female from LI, NY

in Osborne 2012 p. 13), during the tumultuous events of the first half of the twentieth century saw little stability in production or market. If the freezing of music captured the performance in recording and held it in shellac and then on vinyl, the views of the ways in which these recordings existed in the world of the listener were not so static. There was in fact a diametrically opposed set of philosophies within this new sphere of mechanically reproduced music.

Recorded music has offered the chance to almost everyone of experiencing musical sounds in ways only dreamt of by music-lovers in the past, and experienced by only a tiny handful of privileged men and women who could listen to music (Vaughan Williams in Chanan 1995 p. 228).

Vaughan Williams' euphoric democratic cry at bringing an end to the privileged concert world of live classical music that had prevailed since the sixteenth seventies, represents one side of this argument. Not that all responses were as techno-euphoric regarding recorded music; others were critical of the position that the record player was a playable instrument (Frith 1998): an early music executive proclaiming

I believe the listener should leave his phonograph alone; if he [sic] wants to get into the picture, let him play the piano. I would like to see a standard set with phonographs where even the volume could not be changed. Then you would finally have what the artist wanted (Liebsen in Frith 1996 p. 231).

However over the course of the first half of the twentieth century a paradigm shift occurred where the object of the recording process (once that recording process had become sophisticated enough) became an end in itself. It moved beyond the idea of 'capturing' the live performance of the musicians involved and took the dominant role in the relationship. Recording's dominance reached the point where the live performance of the work was then expected to match the quality of the recording; from recording the performance to the performance of recordings.

One result of this has been that a listener's expectations in the concert hall, in live performances, are based on the standards achieved or seemingly achieved in performances on discs, the kind of performances that most music lovers listen to most frequently (Day 2000 p. 156).

Once the scientific endeavours of the nineteenth century had developed the freezing and thawing devices necessary to capture and set free recorded sound (and once the industrial application had finally been expanded from dictation device) the changes in the thing-ness of music came quickly and often. As well as the developments of formats these changes were also in how disc listening was positioned culturally. 'The gramophone began as not quite respectable (because of its public novelty value), and so an emphasis on its use for playing classical music was necessary to sell it to



middle-class families' (Frith 1998 p. 16).

The first cylinder recordings went on sale in America in 1890 and were superseded four years later by the first gramophone sales. The cultural impact of the capture and release of sound was demonstrated in elaborate ways. A series of Tone Tests were performed between 1914 and 1925. Initially in East Orange, then New York, America and then the world. Opera singers such as Anna Case and Christine Miller would amaze and shock audiences during their performances by simply stopping singing whilst the song continued by way of a recording. A local Pennsylvania paper claimed it as being 'perfect, it being almost an impossibility to decide the difference without watching the lips of the singer' (in Milner 2009 p. 44). Changes in industry, whether in the production of hardware or software, came with urgency and a fierce and competitive rapidity. Within a quarter of a century there were forty-six record companies established in the U.S, but records themselves, remained expensive. A Beethoven set over eight discs cost around £2, an average weekly salary by comparison was a little over half of that amount - (Day 2000 p. 7) Prices continued to drop and the subsequent expansion of both technological aspects of capture and the number of recordings meant that by 1927

The playing time of both single-sided discs and cylinders in the early 1900s was about two minutes. From the late 1920s a disc side could last up to about four and a half minutes, a ten-inch disc up to two and three quarter minutes. Very occasionally twelve inch discs were issued with sides lasting more than five minutes (Day, 2000 p. 7).

Vinyl emerged within this fast evolving industry in the early nineteen thirties when it was used to house transcription recordings of radio shows so that they could be further broadcast; a role that magnetic tape would take over after the Second World War (Osborne 2012). At this point, although more durable, harder and finer than shellac, it was considerably more expensive to produce and so it was reserved for such commercially profitable enterprises such as repeating radio broadcasts. 'Shellac, the principal component used in making discs between about 1896 and 1948, is a resinous compound secreted by tree insects native to India; supplies dried up during the Second World War' (Day 2000 p. 19) . With shellac in short supply PVC was used in the production of V-Discs as part of the American military programme, whilst in the world of popular music, shellac was recycled to make new discs. The first commercially available vinyl record appeared after the war and was released in October 1946; a red vinyl pressing of 'Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks' (Elborough

2008). As a product it was more expensive than shellac and at this point it was the same size and speed as its shellac equivalent and vinyl did not capture the minds or money of the audience. It was another two years before vinyl was released again, this time during the speed wars between RCA and Columbia records. Independently RCA had worked on a microgroove technology and was planning a new seven inch record that played at forty-five revolutions per minute. Vinyl was, unlike shellac, able to accommodate these finer grooves meaning a smaller record could be manufactured. Columbia, meanwhile, was working on a twelve inch record that played at thirty three and a third rpm. Both were trying to improve upon and replace the ten inch disc that played at seventy-eight rpm (Milner 2009). Much of this developmental activity was based upon recordings of classical music but the results would have a considerable impact on the upcoming boom in rock and roll.

Classical music had been heavily edited in shellac production 'Sir Henry Wood's 1922 recording of Beethoven's 'Eroica' symphony, the first of this work, omits almost half the music' (Day 2000 p. 7). Classical works had to be edited as in this example or be housed on multiple discs. 'Verdi's Ernani was recorded in 1903 by the Italian branch of the Gramophone company HMV, but even in an abbreviated form it took up forty single-sided discs' (Ibid). RCA's development, the seven inch disc, held the same amount of music as a shellac disc and required a special player to hold up to eight discs that would then play one after the other. Columbia's disc would hold up to twenty-two and a half minutes of music on each side of a single disc offering longer passages without interruption. The speed war echoes some of the contemporary arguments about music consumption and production. The forty-five rpm disc has a more robust structure, but the twelve inch disc is more convenient for listening to collections of songs without changing discs. The public chose convenience.

The first Columbia LPs were launched at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York on 20 June 1948 [Edward Wallerstein, Columbia's president] took the podium next to a stack of 78s that were 8 feet in height. Next to them were the same recordings on LP, a pile just 15 inches high (Barfe 2004 p. 154).

Over the next decade the seven inch would become the home of the pop single and the twelve inch record the LP, the long player or the album. 'the LP and the 45 were marvellous achievements' Barfe claims (Ibid p. 156), even if all of the components had been around for some time<sup>20</sup>.

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20 The stylus was in commercial use at the start of the century, vinyl for at least two decades, twelve inch discs had been used before and so had the 33 1/3 speed. Sleeves had, in a number of cases, been used to house discs.

Whilst the vinyl disc emerges in all its sizes and speeds<sup>21</sup> in late 1948 and the spring of 1949 as a mode of producing individual tracks and collections or albums, there are a number of other developments that take place over vinyl's period as the dominant format. Firstly the sleeve. As soon as shellac discs were produced they were, if not always, packaged in a paper sleeve and some of these contained lyric sheets or had lyrics printed on them. The sleeve, much like the label in the middle of shellac and subsequently vinyl discs initially favoured the record label over the artist in terms of design and display. The introduction of the picture sleeve and the unfolding (literally in some cases) story of the sleeve is credited (Osborne 2012) (Elborough 2008), to Alex Steinweiss, the lone employee of Columbia's art department who was responsible for advertising material. He persuaded Wallerstein to let him design sleeves for some of Columbia's new twelve inch long playing output in 1948.

Experimenting with cardboard and paper, he hit upon a dapper square outer jacket. His 'sleeve' protected the vinyl record from everyday wear and was capable of carrying eye-catching 'front' image, while informative details about the artists or the recording could be printed on the back. His cover was practical, functional design at its best (Elborough 2008 p. 32).

These sleeves had a staggering success commercially and also had implications for the industry. Record labels now had to print these increasingly elaborate designs and retail outlets then moved the records from behind the counter on shelves to in front of the counter facing forwards in specifically designed racks. The sleeves, as shall be discussed in further chapters, are something that collectors have come to cherish, sometimes more than the music itself. At times this cardboard packaging is described as the most important aspect of the vinyl record - 'the cover art must be as close to mint as possible. On the off chance I'm buying it to listen to it'<sup>22</sup>.

The language of the time was to refer to speed - forty-fives as opposed to seventy-eights. Over time and with the advent of variety of formats in single releases, particularly the development of the twelve inch single in 1975 (Shapiro 2005) the parlance included descriptions such as sevens and twelves. 'it was only with the introduction of further formats - namely the tape cassette and the CD - that LPs and 45s were commonly referred to as 'vinyl' albums and singles, instead of being introduced by their disc speeds' (Osborne 2012 p. 69). This, I would argue, creates

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<sup>21</sup> Whilst the 12" single and the E.P come later they both use combinations of sizes and speeds that were in existence at this point.

<sup>22</sup> Respondent 202 a 35 year old male from Spring Hill, TN

four distinct disc eras to place the arc of vinyl production into. Starting with shellac discs 1896 - 1948, then moving on to the second era and the dominance of vinyl production 1948 - 1981, the arrival of, and subsequent third era, the compact disc 1981 - 2001 and then the arrival of a variety of hard discs (whether portable or computer) 2001 - present<sup>23</sup>. Whilst this distinction is easily applicable in hindsight, at the time that vinyl was introduced, Joe Caida writing for *Billboard* magazine bluntly described the situation (and echoes the descriptive linguistics of the time).

So it boils down to this. No matter what anybody says or writes, the record business as of early spring 1949 will have three types of records available to consumers: 78, 33 1/3 and 45. The 15-17 million people who now have 78rpm players will be able to buy records for their machines. Those who buy 33 1/3 players will be able to get records for their machines, those who decide they want 45rpm records will be able to buy such disks and players for them (in Elborough 2008 p. 35).

And buy they did. 'By 1953, high fidelity was everywhere. Annual hi-fi sales topped \$70 million, as dealers reported figures that they hadn't thought possible a year earlier' (Milner 2009 p. 138).

### **The Vinyl Aura/A Different Kind of Thing.**

The multiple trajectories of popular culture and popular music tend to run in narrative parallels that occasionally meet at contextual crossroads - focusing either on the production of music (Milner 2009), the production of objects and commodities (Osborne 2012), (Elborough 2008) or the multiple histories of popular music itself - Jazz, blues, soul, pop, rock, punk and so on - as well as the impact of this popular culture, if not always the artefacts. That these cultural and industrial changes and practices run side by side is touched upon briefly or left for the reader to navigate - although 'the factory production of shellac and vinyl records directly influenced the artistry of recordings' (Osborne 2012 p. 72). In terms of vinyl production (as opposed to musical production) little changed between 1948 and 1981 in vinyl itself with regards to sizes and speeds. As a designed object it remained relatively stable. Our relationship with it as an audience underwent some changes further democratising our engagement with the mechanically captured, reproduced and released music. This democratising of the act of listening, once reserved for those of wealth and status had

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<sup>23</sup> This is based on the first production of said discs and not when they became dominant. There is, of course, overlap. Shellac was produced into the nineteen fifties, 78s ceased production in the UK in 1961, and vinyl is still in production now. The hard disc date is set at the release of the iPod in 2001 as the player that was commercially and culturally successful (although other players had been available since 1998).

political and philosophical implications.

The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind (Benjamin 1978 p. 215).

By the nineteen sixties other traditions were 'shattering'. The average working week in Britain had decreased from fifty four hours before the First World War to forty hours (Day 2000 p. 102). Similarly between 1945 and 1974 the university population grew fivefold and the number of universities, polytechnics and colleges doubled. The prices of equipment and the price of recordings had also dropped - although this had been engineered at times by the industry to an audience who were initially reticent having been used to constant change even though Wallerstein had suggested at the 1948 launch

LP microgroove records do not make obsolete the millions of dollars' worth of records and equipment the public already owns. The new records allow for a gradual transition at little or no expense. Either tape or wire recording would have tended to make existing equipment obsolete (in Osborne 2012 p. 68).

Timothy Day points out that an equivalent recording of the Glyndebourne *Le nozze di Figaro* 'which in 1935 on seventeen discs had cost altogether 99s (£4.95), was reissued on two classics for pleasure LPs and cost 35s. 6d (£1.77 1/2)' (2000 p. 107). The cost of records had fluctuated from the time of their introduction 'prices ranging from 22s. to 39s. At this time [1952] the average weekly wage for men over 21 was £8.30 per week' (Osborne 2010 p. 69). In 1963 the tax payable on records was reduced from 45 to 25 percent making them 'increasingly affordable to British consumers' (Elborough 2008 p. 168). Music, and recordings, had taken a new place in this world of more education and leisure. 'The new middle class in the affluent society reads little, but listens to music with knowing delight. Where the library shelves once stood, there are proud, esoteric rows of record albums and high fidelity components' (Steiner in Day 2000 p. 107). This is also the era when 'Many collectors, especially in north America, were brought up in the abundance of the later 1950s and 1960s. Their mass accumulations as children of hoards of toys created the sense of possession as reassurance' (Pearce 1998 p. 15). It has been argued that these consumer practices that emerge, as vinyl does, at the end of the second world war, complicated Benjamin's notion of the aura of the work of art through 'first, the desire

of the public to negate the effects of mass production. Second, their ability to restore aura to multiplied artworks' (Osborne 2012 p. 76). The professional production of music, and the industrial production of music on record, meant that there was an elevation of the artist that gave vinyl a non-amateur status that Osborne suggests gives them status, specialness. This gatekeeping quality of the music industry - along with critics and journalists - is dissipating with the expansion of computer hardware and web based services such as Soundcloud, YouTube and so on; a lack of approval as well as a lack of the tangible. In the 'golden era' of vinyl, records were something only produced by 'artists' and, as such, these magical objects were, I would argue - not as Milner (2009) suggests taken for music itself - they *were the aura* of popular music, a physical black circular aura guaranteeing authenticity. For most people the music within them was not accessible in any other way. The seven inch single and the twelve inch disc had found their niches immediately 'the moment that America's latest product was coming off the production line' (Savage 2007 referring to the teenager p. 145). With the emergence of the post war rock and roll market, followed by the pop and subsequent rock markets in the nineteen sixties, along with the globalisation and Americanisation of youth culture, owning a record by Elvis, for instance, would be the most authentic engagement one could have given his remoteness in time and space. The authenticity, the aura, *was the disc*.

There were a number of developments and reemergences in the presentation of records during this period that increased the thingness, the physical aura of music, increasing its status as something as opposed to nothing. Although sleeves with lyrics and notes had featured early in the production of shellac, sleeves became elaborate in the later sixties

But now with the LP they got to know the music by playing the disc and they got the habit of reading about music by scanning the commentary on the back of the jacket ... [which] innocent practice established without argument that one's experience of music could be enhanced, organized, solidified by the use of words - preferably wise, accurate and enlivening words (Day 2000 p.107).

The sleeve contributed to the aura of the disc, contextualising and describing it and over time to be part of a singular thing. But by 1970 the picture disc re-emerged, re directing attention to the physicality of vinyl. Previously picture discs had been made of a number of materials: paper, aluminium, glass, plastic. Initially they were picture post cards with a film of transparent plastic pasted on top. Picture discs

emerged intermittently in various sizes and various countries made with a variety of production methods until the nineteen seventies where their novelty (and the cost of production) was such that production of limited edition discs became common. Curved Air's 'Air Conditioning' (1970) and Saturnalia's 'Magical Love' were the first vinyl and 3D vinyl picture discs respectively in this new era of production. Coloured vinyl also made a comeback in the nineteen seventies. Although 'the first colored records were 78rpm shellac records produced as early as 1904' (Benedetti in Mustienes and Rando 2009 p. 18), and colour had been used as a marker of genre by a variety of companies through the first half of the twentieth century from the nineteen thirties. This practice was revived by record labels in the nineteen seventies.

### **The Eras of Collecting.**

By the nineteen seventies Thurston Moore suggests 'people had enough 'historical resonance' with records that they self-consciously created collectibles' (in Milano 2003 p. 121). This, I would argue, is the moment that vinyl becomes a different kind of 'thing', a celebratedly self-conscious thing, an object of desire in its own right, a celebration of the thing itself regardless of the music held within it. Importantly, for the first time, a nostalgic thing. As a nostalgic thing, nostalgia was needed to engage with it, understand it and collect it. It was now packaged and presented in such a way that 'When music came clad in a cherishable husk of packaging and the recording medium itself had a material heft, it asserted itself as a tangible presence in your life. It was easier to form an attachment to' (Reynolds 2011 p. 126). Up until this point records, particularly in the shellac era, represented the clumsy capture of poetry, a black plastic bird cage for the muses. A crackly lo fidelity reminder that you were engaging in the attempt to listen to music in spite of its carrier, an attempt to get to that which was ephemeral and fleeting. Vinyl as a secondary object to the music within. As early as 1954 the critic Roland Gelatt wondered why

[N]o-one had yet 'seen fit to gather the [the phonograph's] legacy together under one roof and make it available to the serious student (or even the curious layman)'. Until that happened – and he was sure that one day it would, 'given the will and the money' – 'the phonograph would remain an invention with a history but without a heritage' (Day 2000 p.232).

The industrial developments of recording, production and playback meant that by the late nineteen sixties the fidelity of stereo recordings and the price and quality of playback equipment was such that the record began to become invisible, despite its mass production. 'However, in our smaller and more impatient world' Douglas Gillies

claimed in his sixties guide to collecting

[S]o much is written - and rejected after one hearing - and so much more of the past rediscovered that not even in chamber music can we keep up with what is now offered. Therefore, as well as being curtailed by economy, personal taste must also be limited by selectiveness (1966 p. 7).

The (over) production of vinyl, the hit or miss culture that it inhabited and enabled was such that it was even commented upon in the liner notes of albums. On the rear sleeve of Rust's 1969 album 'Come With Me' they ponder 'RUST is now waiting whether this sound will become a world-famous hit or go to the dogs [...] silently watching what happens.' The 'lack' of the visible or performance put forward by John Corbett (1990) that vinyl represents is discussed in further chapters, but his notion addresses the lack of the visual performance. This second generation of disc listeners at the end of the nineteen sixties had enough historical legacy and, arguably, the beginnings of nostalgia for previous artists of the rock and roll, blues and jazz eras that records began to be considered as precious commodities in themselves, as opposed to the music contained within them - nostalgic rather than novelty. Visible, precious objects because they allowed nostalgic access to music that would otherwise be lost to the fast turnover of popular culture. 'From the day that the first record got deleted, people felt proud about owning them' (Paul Jones in Gilbert, Doggett et al. 1995 p. 13). Simon Reynolds (2011) argues that one of the defining moments of this pop nostalgia is the release of The Beatles self titled album (The White Album) in 1968. On it the modernist, progressive psychedelia of Sgt Pepper's is replaced with an album that looks distinctly backwards to a stripped down rock and roll. The Beatles were not the only nor were they the first band to look back in this way. In 1968 The Deviants released their '20<sup>th</sup> century bohemia [...] neo-rock'n'roll' (Miles in Deviants 1968 my emphasis) album 'Ptooff!', the liner notes claimed this neo-bohemianism 'A world of matrix numbers and 'rare black wax', Cobra 78s and deleted Sun recordings of priceless worth, Rock'n'roll is OF THE ESSENCE. The philosopher's stone' (Ibid). Concurrently, record collecting was changing and becoming nostalgic too. Paul Sanford, a record collector of some renown, suggested that 'The market really began to boom in 1968' (Gilbert, Doggett et al. 1995 p. 21), not through new records but through the old.

London was entering its 'swinging' phase, and many fans of original rock'n'roll were getting dewy-eyed about the halcyon days of Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis and ripping up the seats in their local Odeon. This nostalgic yearning reawakened interest in vintage rock'n'roll records, many of which were already recognised as classics. It was at this point that collecting really took off, with enthusiasts



buying vintage singles and LPs at well above the usual retail price (Gilbert, Doggett et al. 1995 p. 16).

Whilst collecting culture was established before this where collectors attempted to

Distinguish [...] themselves from mere consumers by their rejection of mindless, market driven buying. Instead they employed powers of discrimination honed by years of studious listening, immersing themselves in disused recordings that provided a rich sense of the musical past (Hamilton 2007 p. 174).

I would argue that this sixties nostalgia - noted by musicians, collectors and commentators - marks a shift in collecting from a discourse of taste to a discourse of nostalgia, for historical objects. Along with the four stages of music and the four disc eras, I propose a second era of collecting can be added at this point with an additional third to come with a further cultural shift.

It is the establishment of rarity by the audience as a desirable quality, or at least the rare was desired (discussed in chapter two and beyond) in the market which then subsequently becomes manufactured in by the industry with the rise of picture discs, coloured vinyl and limited editions. This is not lost on contemporary collectors themselves. 'Honestly it probably says I'm a slave to marketing because I have A LOT of rare special edition numbered releases. Musically it probably says "hey look here's another hipster who listens to vinyl"?'<sup>24</sup>.

It was both the performers and the audience that created the heritage of vinyl (if not popular music) that Roland Gelatt urged for in an attempt to stop records, as objects, disappearing into history. This can also be seen with the 1972 Elektra compilation 'Nuggets: Original Artyfacts From the First Psychedelic Era 1965-1968'. A compilation put together jointly between Lenny Kaye and Jac Holzman where Kaye's now legendary liner notes<sup>25</sup> look fondly back on records that were commercially unsuccessful only four years earlier and, as such were becoming rare collectible objects. Whilst the idea of compilations was not new and the idea of the curator of song was similarly established (see chapter three). This was a moment where records in and of themselves surfaced as the object of desire. 'The lightning strikes of brilliance that move a record past genre into the realm of classic. I just played disc jockey, telling my ear-witness tale of inspiration derived, of desire and belief. Or daring to believe.' Claims Kaye, explicitly referring to records twice (2012).

This further complicates Benjamin's claims on the aura of the mechanically

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24 Respondent 115 a 23 year old male from Kansas City MO

25 One of the first uses of the term punk rock

reproduced work of art or, as Sarah Thornton suggests, it relocates it. 'Degrees of aura came to be attributed to *new, exclusive* and *rare* records. In becoming the source of sounds, records underwent the mystification usually reserved for unique art objects' (Thornton 1995 pp. 27 - 8). Again, I would argue that the record itself *became* that aura. Certain music - up until the third and fourth disc ages - were only available in vinyl form. Once they had ceased pressing the records, that music was unavailable *unless* you could find that black, vinyl, treasure.

The record industry grew steadily from the nineteen sixties onwards and arguably peaked in the UK with the opening of the first Virgin Megastore on 7 July 1979, two years after the centenary of Edison's Gramophone. Vinyl production and consumption was hampered by the launch of the Sony Walkman in the same year and the ongoing effects of the global oil crisis in the nineteen seventies as well as the launch of the CD in 1981. Whilst the oil crisis had its affect on the quality of vinyl production and was a factor in the development of the CD, it was the Walkman and then the CD that had an impact on the culture of consumption. The culture of listening was changed dramatically by the private mobile listening experience that was the walkman and the CD trumped vinyl at its own game 'like vinyl before it, its chief selling point was its sound quality and its possibilities in terms of length.' (Elborough 2008 p. 377). And whilst the debate about the sound quality of vinyl is discussed in chapter six, the length of a CD at 74 minutes meant that it offered another thirty minutes onto the time available on a single disc (and of course it was considerably smaller) it signalled the beginning of the third disc age. Sales of vinyl dwindled throughout the eighties and nineties but did not cease production. At this point I would argue a new, third collecting era began. Whilst the first collecting era was about amassing a collection of music of good taste and predates the vinyl record, the second era starts in 1968 twenty years after vinyl production started. This saw a generation who grew up alongside vinyl (as well as their parents) look back to the rock and roll era and begin to treasure the associated artefacts. With the beginning of the third disc era, a third collecting era emerges; one where

Some enthusiasts worried that the death of vinyl was imminent, and that CDs wouldn't excite the same interest among collectors as 7"s and LPs. As a result there was concern that collecting would become an increasingly retrospective activity, with the market centring around the records issued between the mid - 1950s and the

mid-1980s (Gilbert, Doggett et al. 1995 p. 23).

In a world where vinyl production seemed finite, and fewer and fewer records were being released, nostalgic collecting was the default position. Vinyl was, if not over, then in its death throes. Even as late as 1995 record collecting publications were suggesting 'just how long vinyl can hang on is open to debate, but it's safe to say that we'll probably be able to buy 7"s, 12"s and LPs up until the year 2000' (Ibid p. 23).

Vinyl production took on a different position with the dawning of the fourth disc age in 2001 with the launch of Apple's iPod. Although a number of portable MP3 players had been produced over the previous three years it was the iPod that had the same commercial and cultural impact as the Walkman had in 1979. Whilst newspaper reports and commentary had, since the nineteen eighties, reported the death of vinyl, the MP3 phenomena created a curious shift in some commentators view of vinyl. In 2007 an article in Wired claimed that 'Vinyl May be Final Nail in CDs Coffin'. CDs were no longer valued for their portability, their convenience, their size or digitalness. For those who wanted a physical product, some people were choosing vinyl 'even though its bulky, analog nature is anathema to everything music is supposed to be these days' (Buskirk 2007). By 2013 vinyl had re-emerged in its own distinct cultural and economic world - the vinylsphere represents a separate arena of music consumption.

What we call the music business has successfully split into two economic camps: the digital marketplace, in which participants pay for a licence to access content – with no opportunity for exchange; and the vinyl marketplace, in which participants purchase goods that retain some inherent exchange value (Sevier and Shipley 2013).

This chapter has framed the production of vinyl in historical, linguistic and philosophical terms and explored the notion of music as a series of thing(s). Vinyl has been situated in an historical framework of four stages (Folk, Art, Pop and a proposed fourth), of four eras of disc production (shellac, vinyl, cd and hard disc) and in three collecting eras (music collecting, nostalgic collecting and post-vinyl collecting) . In collecting terms the idea of collecting music has been explored and the shifts in the place of vinyl in that music collecting discussed. Firstly the collecting of a tasteful library of (largely classical) music in the years up until the economic shifts of the nineteen sixties as a way of 'deepening our awareness of music offered on records, it

must also present a realistic selection from the music of every period'(Gillies 1966 p. 7). Secondly the collecting of records brought about by the shifts in nostalgia indicated by the shifts in music production by the likes of The Deviants, as well as Lenny Kaye's 'Nuggets' collection and the production of 'rarities' such as picture discs and coloured vinyl by the music industry itself. And finally collecting vinyl records in the post-vinyl economy when the CD has removed the need for records at all. What it is about vinyl that has meant that it has endured and survived these and shifts and changes in the dominant formats of music production, is what is discussed in the following chapters. The idea of collecting, things themselves, taste, nostalgia and the world of the collector, is the focus.

A collector can go into a record shop and be there for hours, just looking, feeling, smelling, touching the records. A collector appreciates the vinyl and everything about it<sup>26</sup>.

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26 Respondent 57 a 29 year old male from Belgium

## Chapter Two: The Social Life of Records

I got a stack-a-records here, a stack-a-records there  
I got records scattered all over everywhere  
But I'm looking for one that I can't find  
[...] Oh tell me, what am I gonna do? (Tall 1957).

I don't always play them ... I just like to have them<sup>27</sup>.

Whilst the previous chapter explored music's journey from ephemeral experience and social performance to tangible and hence collectible object, its capture and rendering as thing, this chapter deals with what happens to music once it has become object, when it becomes objectified. Perhaps more importantly, it explores what happens when that rendered object, that 'thing' becomes commodified, sold, resold and collected and potentially sold again. It also explores what those trajectories might mean in the culture of collecting. 'I always think of where the record came from, who owned it before and what connection the previous owner had with the record'<sup>28</sup>. The chapter expands upon the work of Arjun Appadurai – in particular 'The Social Life of Things' (1986) - drawing on the conceptual map that is presented as an overview of the commodity itself in its travels through everyday life. Here the conceptual map is used as a basis to explore the social life of vinyl records. The records discussed here are both those that are newly produced - exchanged between industry and consumer - and those that are second hand - exchanged between consumer and consumer, and industry and consumer. This distinction, between new and second-hand records, becomes more apparent - beyond the logic of all records starting their social lives as new - through the journey of Appadurai's theoretical framework where a complex typology of commodities emerges. 'To become a commodity a product must be transferred to another whom it will serve as *use-value*, by means of an exchange' (Marx in Appadurai 1986 p. 8, my emphasis). And whilst on a broad level this typological survey is applicable, there are many complications brought in by the practices and cultures of record collectors themselves that develop Appadurai's framework. These complications include practices where collectors organise their

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27 Respondent 169 a 16 year old male from UK

28 Respondent 64 a 23 year old male from New Jersey

unwanted records and set up and participate 'in a record swap club'<sup>29</sup> as well as the practices of the music industry in the drive to sell vinyl records (discussed in the previous chapter). It is also complicated by the notion of 'use-value', noted above, and what a record can be used for beyond listening to music. The very tangibility of music-as-objects and the manufacturing process that renders them in their particular form – wax cylinder, shellac disc, vinyl, CD etc. - places them, that is the sound carrier format and the music held within, in both a conceptual discourse and a physical trajectory of capitalism. Indeed this argument accepts and builds upon a broadly Marxian notion where 'commodities [in this instance vinyl records] are generally seen as typical material representations of the capitalist mode of production, even if they are classified as petty and their capitalist context as incipient' (Appadurai 1986 p. 7). Once music has physicality it, as indistinguishable from the format that encapsulates it, essentially takes on a generic commodity form and from this position it potentially undertakes any number of journeys and occupies any number of positions (ideologically and actually) as commodity, circulating and re-circulating in a world of exchange, with economic and cultural value being prescribed by the industrial process that produces and distributes it. Value is also ascribed, by those that wish to purchase, own or collect it, at various points along its journey, particularly when the grasp of commercial competition is replaced by the collector's competition in the form of collector-to-collector transactions. Essentially, records, through the potentiality of their travels, 'have social lives' (Appadurai 1986 p. 3). Their status, value, desirability, collectibility and fame may fluctuate greatly, even whilst the music within them remains static... silent. Sometimes these journeys have physical impact on those records.

One time I got a copy of Exile on Main Street that had various bible verses stamped on the inner sleeves. Apparently there was a guy who owned a record store in Toronto who, ironically, thought rock music was satanic. He stamped records in this way so, at some point, that copy of Exile passed through his store<sup>30</sup>.

That music recordings have economic or even religious value is a topic that has entered a number of discursive arguments and practices: the discourses of both music fans, as ascribers of cultural or subcultural value, and the music industry, as prescribers of economic value. This, at an historical point in technological

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29 Respondent 340 a 34 year old male from Seattle WA

30 Respondent 213 a 28 year old male from Hamilton

development, means that music has ceased to be tied to physical carriers even if it still has a reliance on physical players. The very un-thing-ness of music has created as many arguments and ideological positions regarding the practices, habits and engagement of listeners, artists and industry, as the thing-ness - the capturing of music and production of music objects - did in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The debate has created renewed interest in the value of music as an experience, as objects – the physical carriers of music – ‘value is never an inherent property of objects but is a judgment made about them by subjects’ (Ibid). This theory, put forward by George Simmel in 1907 goes some way to explain the buying of records as traditional ‘commodities’; that is, items that are purchased and end their journey at the point of entering the domestic sphere. The idea that the trajectory of a record (as commodity) is uni-dimensional, is one that deals only with the journey of records that is perhaps concerned with commerciality and ‘the statistical, tabulatory, scientific irrefutability of the ‘top 40’’(Corbett 1990 p. 80), and is most eloquently described by Evan Eisenberg who confesses that

[W]hen I buy a record, the musician is eclipsed by the disc. And I am eclipsed by my money - not only from the musicians view but my own. When a ten-dollar bill leaves my right hand and a bagged record enters my left, it is the climax. The shudder and ring of the register is the true music; later I will play the record but that will be redundant. My money has already heard it (1987 p. 20).

Of course, in the current market the record can be re-eclipsed by money. The record that Eisenberg metaphorically exchanged for \$10, could now be worth hundreds if not thousands of metaphorical dollars. As one reflective respondent explained ‘Sex Pistols - God Save The Queen on A&M. I could have bought it when I was twenty for £18 but I thought that was too expensive. It now fetches up to £6,000’<sup>31</sup>. This was a point that many collectors pondered - why previous owners might have put certain records back in to circulation. ‘I’m also interested in the records I find in “used” bins that I think are treasures — like, \*gasp\* How could you possibly let this one go!’<sup>32</sup>

### **Multiples and Variants**

Contemporary record collecting differs philosophically and practically from the philosophy of commodities where ‘they are product[s] intended principally for exchange, and that such products emerge by definition in the institutionalised,

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31 Respondent 336 a 49 year old male from Bristol

32 Respondent 65 a 21 year old female from Carrboro, NC

psychological and economic conditions of capitalism' (Appadurai 1986 p. 6). In this instance, where the value of identical mechanically, and mass reproduced objects is set by manufacturing and retail outlets regardless of the content of the carrier. Whether it is critically acclaimed music or not, the object, the vinyl record itself, appears to be the rationale for the pricing, taking into account the cost of manufacture, marketing, distribution and production. In contemporary record collecting practices, both new and second hand, a varying number of ideological as well as manufacturing traits impact on the pricing as well as the trajectories of the records themselves from shop to owner, owner to owner, town to town and country to country. 'Sometimes I think about the journey of records from brand new shop bought to being passed around over the years, till they end up in my collection!'<sup>33</sup>. To understand this journey 'we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories' (Appadurai 1986 p. 5). Manufacturing itself can be of major concern to the contemporary collector. In the case of the Vertigo record label - a subsidiary of Phonogram started in 1969 - some contemporary collectors favour those items produced and manufactured in the UK followed by Germany and Holland as being of a superior manufacturing quality, particularly in terms of the vinyl production. This preference, when Vertigo records were released in many countries in the initial years of production, can of course lead to multiple objects with varying quality of manufacture, even if it contains the same music. Music from multiple shops, destinations and countries, with multiple languages, sleeves and qualities.

So you might see someone who will have multiple copies of the same album, but one will be the US pressing, one will be the EU/UK pressing, one will be the Australian pressing and one will be the Japanese pressing....each with unique features<sup>34</sup>.

Initially these label, sleeve and artwork variations were for specific markets with specific tastes. However in the contemporary collecting world the journeys that records can potentially take are much longer and fans and collectors can collect multiple copies of the same music (if not the same record)

I have a weakness for cover variations, e.g. foreign issues with different cover designs. I try to limit the number of these I buy, as you

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33 Respondent 320 a 39 year old male from Sheffield

34 Respondent 11 a 38 year old male from Sweden



are essentially buying the same record again, just in a diff cover, but I do succumb rather a bit<sup>35</sup>.

And, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the music industry, attempts to manufacture this rarity, difference, collectibility. Rather than independent offices in many countries licensing or releasing the same product with local artwork and

manufactured in local factories, labels can now pre-manufacture these 'variants' with different issues, coloured vinyl and artwork.

[I] want to [have] a complete collection of all records & variants of a band called the saddest landscape<sup>36</sup> so that is my main goal atm. i want both the record & the packaging to be as mint as possible but if it's a really rare record that i want i will buy it even if it's not in that good condition. it should not look too abused though ;)<sup>37</sup>.

Before being collected together in a meaningful grouping of national and cultural variation (See Fig 13), these multiple pressings may well have been seen as detritus. That is records that have made their initial steps, their primary journey as chart eligible 'units' then, actually or potentially, continue onwards through any number of routes where records 'persist and circulate' (Straw in Reynolds 2004 p. 305). They can be seen to move in and out of the state of commodity, and differing kinds of commodity, throughout their lives and these can be 'slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or deviant' (Appadurai 1986 p. 13). They can also fit into the same category of 'collectibles' that Appadurai notes as distinct from such everyday and mundane items such as steel or consumables. Where records are situated on a broader scale of commodities is questionable with seemingly arbitrary categories and typologies created along financial and therefore arguably class lines. This complexity has been acknowledged (Appadurai 1986) as not entirely useful and further typological distinctions are made. Luxury goods cannot simply be contrasted with necessities but exist in a more multifaceted opposition than a simple binary will allow.

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35 Respondent 292 a 48 year old male from The Netherlands

36 At the time of writing The Saddest Landscape's album 'The Sound of The Spectacle had 10 different releases.

37 Respondent 112 a 22 year old male from Stuttgart, Germany

Fig 13. Some now highly collectible cover variants for Black Sabbath's single 'Paranoid' released on the Vertigo label across a variety of territories in 1970.



Collectors themselves often situate vinyl as a luxury, but not unproblematically. For some there is clearly a need expressed: 'im a Hendrix completeist, and i have to have original presses, but also any press i find that is slightly different i *have to have*'<sup>38</sup>(my emphasis). Some, almost begrudgingly, note the contemporary place of vinyl as a luxury: 'Yes. I am getting charged a premium to have better quality. It's almost in some ways discouraged and being branded as a luxury instead of a proffered channel to get music. I wish they would bring vinyl full on back to mainstream'<sup>39</sup>. Others embrace the luxury within the world of vinyl production and the built in rarity in some contemporary production. 'I am more likely to buy an album if it is limited edition and more of a collectors item. Also if it had any distinguishing features e.g Coloured vinyl'<sup>40</sup>. Whilst definitions of luxury and commodity cannot be divorced from more everyday production processes, vinyl is, ultimately, a sound carrier, a way of accessing the beauty, art, poetry or music itself, or as Sombart (1967) points out 'Iron foundries provide the pipes critical for the fountains of Versailles' (in Appadurai 1986 p. 39). The idea that luxury goods can be contrasted against those that are mass produced is problematic and the mass produced item can become a luxury item in differing social and/or historical contexts as well as contexts of production. This is particularly astute in the case of records where production of individual recordings can range from the small runs of independent labels, to the hundreds of thousands of top selling artists and groups. As such, demand at the time of production needs to be carefully measured against demand in the intervening years as well as the contemporary sphere. This production of new records in limited 'die hard' editions of different coloured vinyl, with elaborate gatefold or box packaging, free posters, badges, magazines or patches can be the entry into vinyl collecting in the first instance. One collector described her journey in to record collecting through this trajectory: 'I was Christmas shopping in 2006, I saw The Killers - Bones vinyl single. I saw it was limited, so I bought it and a turntable'<sup>41</sup>. Luxury goods can be seen as those which are social and which have a rhetorical use and are arguably 'incarnated signs' (Appadurai 1986 p. 38) which, I would argue, add to the social aspects of record collecting which will be discussed in chapter seven.

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38 Respondent 322 a 34 year old male from Vancouver, Canada

39 Respondent 256 a 38 year old male from Lincoln, CA

40 Respondent 72 a 22 year old male from London

41 Respondent 25 a 25 year old male from Tyne and Wear

## The Markers of Luxury

Luxury goods are those that have been argued by Appadurai to fulfill five category markers. Firstly luxury goods can be seen as those that are restricted to elite groups. In the case of records this is perhaps more complex. Records can be exceptionally cheap, a matter of pence - 'I'm very proud to be the owner of a first pressing of Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band! And it was only £4. Bargain of the century!'<sup>42</sup> - or incredibly expensive; for example respondent eight, a thirty eight year old male from Washington DC paid '\$800 [for] Smashing Pumpkins Tristessa 7" on Sub Pop on Red Vinyl (exclusive color and only 5 copies made)'<sup>43</sup>. Rather than suggesting that records fit the category of luxury because they are restricted to elite groups, I would suggest that collectors have *constructed* elite groups through the creation of luxury items. That is, there are a number of practices, discourses and knowledges related to objects, the past and each other (discussed in chapters four to seven) and as such these records are restricted to *specific* groups - albeit with open access - to Evan Eisenberg's previously referenced 'very poor, the very rich and the very odd' (1996 p. 211). This elitism then is one that is built around the knowledge of vinyl production that comes from the immersion in vinyl culture and collecting culture. This is articulated through what it will allow the collector to know about, search for and buy, through what Tony Bennet calls 'discourses of value' (1990 p. 34) where 'numerous and heterogeneous array of discourses which regulate the social practice of valuing within different valuing communities'. These practices of valuing in turn create a valued subject 'that is, a subject marked out from other subjects by his/her ability to recognize the value which such objects and practices are said to embody' (Ibid). In record collecting it is not the record that produces luxury-ness and hence elite groups, but rather the elite groups and their associated value discourses that mark records as luxury (regardless of price) and hence an accessibility to the group not based on economic power, but the power of knowledge. Of course the individual's music preferences, among other things, impact on both the sub groups of elitism and what is and is not a luxury object.

The second of Appadurai's markers is one that suggests that acquiring the goods itself can be complex. Again this is not simple in the case of records. In their initial stage of commodity state, new records are, or at least they have been, relatively

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42 Respondent 57 a 29 year old male from Belgium

43 Respondent 8 a 38 year old male from Washington DC

straight-forward to acquire. This has been complicated in the post-vinyl economy; broadly linked to the last two disc eras (CD and hard drive) - that is the years after vinyl's dominance as the premier format in 1988 when CD sales overtook records (Shepherd 2003 p. 505). In this post-vinyl economy, records have become both harder and easier to acquire. On the one hand the continuing demise of the record shop as a local emporium of new music acquisition makes traditional shopping harder. Graham Jones notes that between 2003 and 2007 record shops closed in the UK at a rate of 2.7 a day (Jones 2009 p. xi). On the other hand the world-wide web has meant that ordering records from online shops, bands, labels and other collectors has become a global and comparatively easy affair<sup>44</sup>; this shift has been commented upon by collectors themselves where they discuss the routes and journeys both they and their records have taken. Where it 'Used to be specific shops in the pre-internet days. Then specific mail order dealers. Now it's a blend of the remaining few physical record stores and online vendors'<sup>45</sup>. However the collecting of second-hand records can be an exceptionally complicated, lengthy process driven by patience and arduous research as well as the necessary funds to acquire rarities. This transcultural travel of records means that knowledge of the initial production, rarity and availability is fundamental in the discourses of records. This knowledge can be what turns the commodity and its potentiality as static object in transit into a valuable or collectible piece depending on the lens of knowledge and capital through which it is viewed. This links directly to the third marker, where the capacity of goods/records to semiotically signal complex social messages is required to fulfil the luxury criteria. The very record-ness of records generates complex social messages, and these messages seem to become more and more complex the less need there is for vinyl. Vinyl is, I would argue, a signifier of meta-authenticity in the contemporary music market as a way of 'validating 'synthetic' texts' (Moore 2002 p. 215) . It directs, through its 'thing-ness', its very 'vinyl-ness', the audience to the 'golden age of recorded music: a time when artists released albums containing important statements, unfettered by the interference of record labels' (Hayes 2006 pp. 51-52). As such, labels now generate

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44 In 1988 I made a mail order purchase of some records by Jody Foster's Army from Phoenix based record label - Placebo. The research involved in finding the prices and other fundamental information such as the label's address took time and the reading of a number of fanzines that were, in themselves, hard to track down. After an initial letter to the label in Phoenix and receiving a catalogue, a trip to the post office was required to exchange the required amount of pounds sterling to dollars before posting to Arizona. The whole process took around six months. These same records can now be found on a number of websites and paid for using electronic payment methods and shipped in a matter of days.

45 Respondent 153 a 42 year old male from Torrance, CA

vinyl products as a signifying practice, suggesting artistic integrity and multiple intertextual references to past artists, movements and genres. As one collector claimed 'The older stuff gives me a look at the past and the newer stuff is more authentic'<sup>46</sup>. In more specialised worlds of collecting, the messages can be more and more complex; the understanding of the differing sleeves for instance, beyond the differences shown in the Black Sabbath singles shown earlier. Subtleties in pressings can be markers of semiotics and knowledge. For instance May Blitz's first album has a laminated sleeve for the German pressing only, not the UK pressing although the UK pressing is more valuable and/therefore, to collectors of Vertigo records, more desirable.

The fourth distinction is the specialised knowledge required to 'appropriately' consume them (again this is a complex social set of rituals and will be discussed in later chapters) and can include the quality of the second hand vinyl and whether a copy is for playing or for 'keeping'; that is 'if you keep them wrapped in the wrapping as a prize more than a piece of music'<sup>47</sup> for djing or for home use. This is then further complicated by the equipment used to play the records on and the further social semiotics of the hi-fi. And finally, the fifth category, a 'high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality' (ibid). Records are arguably the most physical, bodily, of all the music carriers produced over the course of the thing-ness of music 'I fetishize the physical objects around music to some degree'<sup>48</sup>. That records and the music within them link to the personality of collectors or owners can be discussed through discourses of psychology as well as homologous belonging to subcultures or listening groups, which in themselves may well be more about the music contained within the record rather than the records themselves. Whilst, on the whole, record collecting exists in a normative framework of rules of exchange, one of the ideals of record collecting is the heroic bargain where the seller unwittingly parts with a valuable item for a paltry sum where the 'value and price have come almost completely unyoked' (Appadurai 1986 p. 14). Although this is arguably part of the mythology of collectors 'You always hear about people finding rare record in thrift shops and sidewalk sales. I'm still hoping I can find at least one original Robert Johnson 78 while crate digging one of these days'<sup>49</sup>. This links back to the first

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46 Respondent 111 an 18 year old male from Pennsylvania

47 Respondent 131 a 25 year old male from Corby, UK

48 Respondent 29 a 34 year old male from Pennsylvania, USA

49 Respondent 23 a 31 year old male from Dallas, TX

category where elitism of knowledge and tenacity in searching can lead the collector to a luxury item - a record that may be worth hundreds, if not thousands of pounds.

### **Types of Commodity and Exchange**

Whilst bartering is a way in which records exchange hands in the contemporary collecting sphere it does so in a way that differs from the model put forward by Appadurai where it is stated that objects are exchanged 'without reference to money' (Appadurai 1986 p.6). In contemporary collecting, the collectors who engage in bartering are aware of the monetary value of both the record they offer up for this sort of exchange and conversely the monetary value of the record offered up in return and the accompanying practices of selling at auction or to shops or private collectors. This distinction can be observed in practice via the 'threads' on Very Good Plus<sup>50</sup>, where people can list records that they have for trade as well as some indication of what they would like to trade for - 'One's desire for an object is fulfilled by the sacrifice of some other object, which is the focus of the desire of another' (Appadurai 1986 p. 3). There is also, however, a thread where initially one collector decided to give a record away to the first person that wanted it. This person was required as part of the deal to then give away one of his or her records and so the trail goes on. There are, at the time of writing, seven hundred replies to this thread. This system of bartering also enters into the retail world where second-hand record shops, such as London's Music and Video Exchange, offer direct swaps and even a voucher system (worth double the cash equivalent). This is one of multiple 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 1986 p. 15) to be discussed in further chapters where records enter into differing contexts where their status as commodity is introduced and re-introduced and the ways in which they enter the collection rely on differing techniques and practices of the record collector.

This commodification and re-commodification (as well as further re-commodification) means that records themselves do not simply exist in one state of commodity but transcend and change depending on their context and setting. Whilst Jacques Maquet (in Appadurai 1986 p. 16) suggests four 'types' of commodity - commodities by destination, commodities by metamorphosis, commodities by

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50 [www.verygoodplus.co.uk](http://www.verygoodplus.co.uk)

diversion of metamorphosis and ex-commodities, I would argue that records have the potential to shift and change between the notion of types of commodity or of course to not change state. 'What is potential can both be and not be. For the same is potential as much with respect to being as to not being' (Aristotle in Agamben 1998 p. 45). The record will always retain the music, always retain its record-ness but the context and projection of value by the collector determines the trajectory from potentiality to actuality. Maquet suggests that there are a number of routes from potentiality to actuality. There are those commodities that are commodities by destination; that is, in its most simple form, objects that are produced to enter the world of exchange. Almost all records start in this phase; they are produced by the recording industry, manufactured and distributed through shops and other retail outlets with each party in this journey adding their share of the profit and taxes to the eventual price of the record. In the contemporary world with the decline of the record shop, this practice still goes on, even if in smaller quantities. There is a growing practice of smaller labels and bands selling vinyl from their own websites at shows and at festivals. There are, of course, exceptions to this model – one collectible record produced in an edition of fifty-four in 1970, Fresh Blueberry Pancake's 'Heavy', was produced as a vinyl LP demo in an attempt to secure a record contract with a major label. This has been noted with a 'pie in the sky' (Anonymous 2010) price tag of forty thousand dollars. This is an example of Maquet's second type – commodities by metamorphosis – those items designed for a particular use which then become commodities through their placing in the context of commodity exchange. Of course these objects were designed as carriers of music, to allow the end user to listen to the music rendered as thing and trapped within the micro-grooves. However there is a debate here as to what the primary and secondary purpose of the record is and this will be described differently depending on the discourse it is described in – artist, record company, fan etc. Here the signed record, or mispressing, can become a much sought after commodity.

Maquet's third type is a subdivision of the second variety – those objects that enter metamorphosis by diversion. That is, objects that were initially protected from entering the commodity state. This is one of the areas of record collecting that gains both most attention and economic value. Records such as the reported twelve copies of the Sex Pistols' 1977 single 'God Save the Queen' on A&M records (mentioned by a regretful collector earlier) that survived the 'recycling' process that twenty four thousand nine hundred eighty-eight did not, become prized because they were not



intended (or at least only briefly intended) to become commodities. Test pressings, those initial copies of records that are sent out to labels and artists to check the mastering quality and so on, can also be included in this category. 'I also have every 7" release by Milhouse including test presses'<sup>51</sup>, claimed one collector. The final type of commodity state is ex-commodity, that is objects that are removed or retrieved from the commodity state and placed 'in some other state' (Appadurai 1986 p. 16). I would argue that all records remain in a state of potentiality regarding commodity state resting only when on the shelf of a particular collector, in a potential fifth category of stasis, where for the briefest time the record would not be sold, traded or bartered - they are desired and used.

Whilst further divisions and categorisations of commodity exist, there are always those records that 'I just absolutely have to have'<sup>52</sup>. Marion Leonard has discussed the specifics of categories of musical ephemera and has constructed 'a typology of popular music materials' (2007 p. 151); this typology too remains largely and necessarily static and also contains other collectible ephemera such as posters, t-shirts, calendars and other material. All categorisation requires the object to exist in a particular state, in a snap shot, as it rests - if briefly - on its journey. The first of these categories seemingly covering most vinyl records 'manufactured for general commercial sale' (ibid). The second category consists of material that is only available to those inside specific commercially defined discourses of circulation such as promotional 'white label' releases (initially available only to those that work in record shops or the labels or distribution company charged with the initial circulation) or that material that is only available to members of specific artist or musician fan clubs. There is also material circulated to radio stations for pre-release play and to journalists for review purposes. Leonard's third category does not generally include what I would call 'music as object' that is, music rendered as physical through its capturing on specific sound carriers such as vinyl. This third category includes material that is not made for commercial use but can be made by fans or artists (such as set lists, lyric sheets or demos). The further divisions include fourth - promotional material such as posters and concert tickets; fifth - clothing worn by musicians, particularly stage costumes; and the final category covers those

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51 Respondent 189 a 27 year old male from Melbourne

52 Respondent 115 a 23 year old male from Kansas City, MO

'collectibles' that have no musical function in themselves but become collectible through their association with musicians - John Lennon's glasses for instance or Jim Morrison's death certificate. In this typology vinyl appears in only two categories and these can be correlated with the categories defined in broader collecting literature so that Leonard and Maquet's primary categories are broadly compatible, that is 'commodities by destination' are broadly in line with records that are manufactured for general commercial sale. Similarly, Leonard's second type - the promotional record - can be compared with Maquet's third category 'commodity by diversion' where the shift from primary purpose produces a different kind of commodity whilst always, of course, maintaining its recordness.

That records themselves exist as a type of commodity has been brought into question by the typological or categorical distinctions made by academics; collections broadly or music ephemera in more specific terms. For the purpose of this argument records will be discussed both as one specific type of commodity object but with potentialities to transcend the commodity state or to enter into any number of commodity states at a variety of points. Of course there have been many other attempts to define and create typologies of commodities that are not appropriate to records - Bohannon's (1959) discussion of rites for instance. To treat records as one particular type of commodity situates them at the beginning of the journey - in a warehouse, shop or store - before their collectibility impacts on their commodity state. This also allows the delineation between cultural biography and social history (Appadurai 1986 p. 34). Records themselves as a category of commodity that has been sold (as opposed to being collected), or at least had the potential to be sold can be discussed broadly in terms of social history. Records (regardless of the music held within them) have a social context and shifting status over the course of the recording industry's relationship with physical sound carriers. Technological shifts (the format wars leading to the single and album discussed in the previous chapter) bring shifting views on the record as type, as do economic realities - the burning of records to keep warm during the depression years for instance (Marcus 2010). Individual records within this category however, have what Kopytoff (1986) calls cultural biographies. That is the individual stories of individual commodity objects as they travel in and out of particular realms of ownership and contexts regardless of, or perhaps in relation to, the social history of the object. An individual record's journey back into the realm of commodity with the technological and commercial domination of the CD that saw

many swap their vinyl collections for the, then new, CD format for instance. The social richness of the mass produced object described by a sixteen year old collector from Tennessee.

My copy of "Tommy" has the previous owner's name written on it twenty-seven times. Since I bought it, I've stared at it, trying to figure out what would compel Bret to write his name twenty-seven times on it. Were people that ready to steal it from him? And the records my Dad gave me, they all come with a story. He used to sit in his room, like me, and just take in the sounds. "I was listening to this record when I found out that Lennon had died. I was at a party . . ." I love that. I'm just another chapter in the stories of these records<sup>53</sup>.

Knowledge of commodities as well as ignorance of commodities (or indeed whether they are commodities at all) is complex in the discourses of record collecting. This knowledge relates directly to the states of potentiality and actuality the various categories of commodities records sit within. And whilst knowledge of commodities will be discussed in a social sense in subsequent chapters and how it articulates taste, knowledge here can be broadly split into two areas. Firstly the technical, social and aesthetic knowledge and judgements from record company employees through producers, marketers and retailers, and secondly the knowledge of the consumer about these issues as well as the specifics of vinyl and vinyl condition. These knowledges and their accompanying discourses are quite different and different records will be read differently in different contexts - 'knowledge at both poles has technical, mythological, and evaluative components, and the two poles are susceptible to mutual and dialectical interaction' (Appadurai 1986 p. 41). In the case of second-hand record collecting, an example shows how these knowledges can overlap. Records produced, as initial commodities-by-destination, that is produced by the recording industry for commercial exploitation and potential profit, sometimes failed in their, or perhaps more precisely the record company's, primary capitalistic aims. Conversely, some of these records become rare and expensive rather than tied to their initial democratic pricing. An act such as Edinburgh's Writing on the Wall produced an album 'The Power of the Picts' on Middle Earth records (MDLS 303) in November 1969 but sadly 'sales were poor' (Jack 2010 p. 42) at the time of release. However, at the time of writing (some forty-four years later) the book price<sup>54</sup> for this record is

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53 Respondent 250 a 16 year old female from Tennessee

54 Book price refers to the Record Collector Rare Records Price Guide list price for British releases. If older editions of the book are used or reference is made to American releases or the Goldmine pricing for American Issues this will be noted in the text.

£200. In 2003 copies were selling on internet auction site Ebay for between €113 and €156, and Italian label Akarma reissued the album on vinyl for the first time since the record was deleted from the Middle Earth label when the label stopped producing material in the early nineteen seventies<sup>55</sup>. Akarma reissues have become collectible themselves as they are usually reissued in small runs and this built-in-collectibility is a combination of the knowledges of producers and consumers. In the contemporary world, and the collecting and record collecting spheres in particular, knowledges of commodities have in themselves become commodified with myriad books on specific genres, bands artists – popular or obscure – price guides and histories being produced.

I would argue that records are problematic to academics and theorists, who centre their work on collecting for a number of reasons. Although I have argued that records can, or have the potential to, become luxury items, not *all* records become luxury items; many remain disposable once their initial trajectory comes to a halt. This is, in part, reliant on Bennet's notion of value discourses and the subsequent valued subject. These terminal journeys render a large proportion of records as bulky, clumsy relics of a bygone age. This leads on to the second reason why records are difficult to theorise within collecting discourses and discourses of luxury commodities. The knowledge (or discourse of knowledge) that is used in their production, is standardised in much the same way that product knowledge that is used in the industrial production of such everyday 'primary' commodities as metal, grain, fuel or oils, is standardised. These are factory made, mass produced items and the knowledge, equipment and raw materials remain the same, or similar, for all records regardless of the content therein or their production runs. The knowledge has shifted with the revival of vinyl production in the post-vinyl economy, in that some records are released with built-in-collectibility. This can be used to command a higher price for the item and/or a higher demand for the item by making the record according to the relative value discourse of the elite groups mentioned earlier. An example of this can be seen in the new RC Rare Vinyl series of releases come 'complete with numbered certificate of authenticity signed by Ian Shirley, Editor of the Rare Record Price Guide' (Shirley 2010 p. 31). This signed quality, among others, situates the vinyl record closer to artisan practices. The limited productions mean

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55 The album has been reissued on CD in 1992, 2000, 2003 and 2007 on Repertoire, Repertoire, Akarma and Ork records respectively

that they are only partially 'mass produced' by comparison to their former quantities, in fewer and smaller factories staffed by specialists, enthusiasts and certainly in comparison with the unlimited endless capacity of a track to be downloaded. The idea of authenticity as related to vinyl production earlier has replaced, in some senses, the concept of exclusivity, or rather exclusivity is guaranteed through the kind of authenticity generated through this kind of (re)production. Copies of Red Bird are still in circulation although 'legend – or rumour - has it sold something like 100 copies' (Ibid p. 30) and the current book price is £650. Collectors can now buy one of the 500 copies being reissued for £19.99 with an accompanying certificate of authenticity. Whilst this adds to the knowledges and music histories of collecting, it has been argued that 'perfectly ordinary goods are placed in a sort of pseudoenclaved zone, as if they were not available to anyone who can pay the price' (Appadurai 1986 p. 55) and attitudes to reissues vary from collector to collector. There are a subset of the respondents that would prefer an original pressing of a record but have placed a price limit rule on their spending. This is a way to bring records like the Red Bird album into the collection because it is on the outside of this rule.

I don't like buying new reissues IF I could snag an OG<sup>56</sup> with sufficient effort but I have no problem if it's something unobtainable. Price limit is about £50 infrequently but I won't think twice about spending a fiver. I have a pretty faint rule that I think it's more interesting to buy things that people I know IRL<sup>57</sup> don't have. More interesting to acquire my own "discoveries"<sup>58</sup>.

Whilst this collector discusses the complexities of substituting the expensive and rare with the exclusive as a way to develop social status, this sociality will be discussed in chapter seven. Other collectors have different strategies for bringing rare vinyl into their collections using other strategies of compromise.

Avoid recent reissues as far as it's economically possible. First pressings aren't a factor - old pressings are. I like the feeling of old. Which is good because then I can pick up some really rare records cheaper because I choose "the German 1971 pressing in EX condition" over the "original UK 1970 pressing in M- condition"<sup>59</sup>.

But price was the most common response in relation to the inclusion or exclusion of reissued or repressed records.

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56 Shorthand for Original

57 In Real Life

58 Respondent 4 a 40 year old male from London

59 Respondent 11 a 38 year old male from Sweden

I generally won't buy represses/reissues if first pressings are easy enough to come by at a reasonable price. I don't like to (but for the right piece, I will) spend more than \$50 on a rare single, \$75-100 on a rare LP, maybe \$150-175 for a rare double or triple LP (and this is if they're in pristine or mint condition)<sup>60</sup>.

For other collectors it is the sound quality that makes a distinction in the rules between original and reissue. 'I prefer to get first pressings, but I watch for reissues that sound superior to the originals'<sup>61</sup>. The general preference for originals appears to be established. Even those collectors who do not go out of their way to find these original artifacts refer to the practice. 'I'm not a purist. I'll almost always take a \$15 reissue over an expensive first pressing'<sup>62</sup>. This production/reproduction issue problematises notions of the authentic object put forward by Benjamin (1978). For with records it is the music held by the record that is arguably the authentic art and not the vinyl 'sound carrier' as object which, I have argued, acts as, or is, the aura of this authentic art. The politics of contemporary record collecting are both discursive and individual and no two collectors approach exchange with the same criteria (or indeed bank balance) and yet there is a level of agreement on what that collecting practice is, or should be, should we have enough money.

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the social life of records. To discuss the different ways that such similar objects travel through initially similar routes with some of them gaining value economically and culturally through value discourses. The position of records as luxury items in themselves - in terms of the specific practices of the respondent collectors - will be discussed in chapter six. Here, however, the notion of luxury is used in the sense that only *certain* records become luxury items at certain times, that is that whilst certain records become either temporarily or permanently worthless - at least economically - others become both economically and culturally valuable. Whilst the routes of new records used to be relatively local, with labels having offices and production plants in different countries, even if the music on them was foreign, exotic or chronologically distant, the contemporary world of e-commerce means that record collectors can buy their vinyl from bands, labels, shops and collectors online, although many (discussed in chapter seven) choose not to when

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60 Respondent 40 a 27 year old male from Woonsocket, RI

61 Respondent 47 a 35 year old male from Portland, OR

62 Respondent 67 a 29 year old male from Birmingham, AL

there are 'Not enough brick and mortar stores to buy from'<sup>63</sup>. Whilst this diminishes the number of variants in collecting terms, it broadens the trajectories of both music and records themselves. The routes into second hand markets have similarly been problematised; not in the sense that people no longer sell or give away records that they do not need or want, but in the sense that the growth or position of collecting itself and the growth of sites such as Discogs and eBay mean that similarly the expansive routes and trajectories of second hand records now reach around the globe. It is perhaps the static record, philosophically at least, that demonstrate the problem of value. The value of records, pressings and releases can change or have the potential to change through a number of states - purposefully and accidentally - or by destination or metamorphosis (Maquet in Appadurai 1986 p. 16).

This notion relies on the concept of the value of records outside of the established music industry and in an informal second hand industry where issues such as supply and demand impact on identically produced records and impact on the book price of already produced and consumed records. Essentially it relies on the idea of collecting and the culture of collecting. The following chapter builds upon the notion of the social (cultural and economic) lives and trajectories of things and the value discourses of the collectors who search them out and mark them as luxury - as desirable. It explores these vinyl objects in terms of their desirability a value ascribed by the fans that search them out. It moves on from the idea of desirability to the concept of collectibility. It explores what can be desired and when it can be desired and adds to the ideas presented here of the changing ways that records can be viewed as commodities, as collectibles and the changing states they can exist in, or in between.

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63 Respondent 254 a 38 year old male from USA

## **Chapter Three:**

### **The Problem with (talking about) Collecting Records.**

The gold which the devil gives his paramours turns into excrement after his departure (Freud in Petocz 1999 p. 73).

Out of shit a treasure arose (Laporte 2000 p. 16).

The previous chapter explored the social lives, trajectories and journeys of commodities – in this particular instance vinyl records – and how records (as the physical manifestation of music) came to be commodities. The exploration also discussed the varying and fluctuating commodity states vinyl records can, potentially or actually, occupy through a number of scenarios, contexts, descriptions and journeys. Whether those objects were commodity by design or metamorphosed into the category, the journeys of records in and out and back into commodity states is complex. Knowledge of these commodities and their varying states, as well as the potentiality of records to enter into discourses of collectibility through the semantics and actualities of rarity, demand and authenticity was highlighted as an important factor in the allocation of economic and cultural value and meaning. That meaning which is ascribed, as well as prescribed, situates records as potentially in any number of object categories, depending on who is reading and interpreting them. The superstitions, stories and beliefs around the polarity of value - between shit and gold - are explored by Petocz, who suggests that

[W]e know that the gold which the devil gives his paramours turns into excrement after his departure and the devil is certainly nothing else than the personification of the repressed unconscious instinctual life. We also know about the superstition which connects the finding of treasure with defaecation, and everyone is familiar with the figure of the 'shitter of ducats [dukatenscheisser]' [...] it is possible that the contrast between the most precious substance known to men and the most worthless, which they reject as waste matter ('refuse'), has led to this specific identification of gold with faeces (1999 p. 112).

This chapter explores the problematic nature of record collecting itself through the frameworks identified by a number of theorists and explores the marginality and liminality, the ambiguity of both records as objects, and record collecting, as practice, through a number of models that discuss what is collected and importantly what can be talked about being collected (notably Pearce 1994, 1995,



1998 & Baudrillard 1994 – but also – Clifford 1988 Belk, 1988, 1989, 2001 and Eisenberg 1987). It builds upon the complexities of recorded music and the vinyl object. After all, as discussed in chapter one, music both *is* and *is not* a thing, it is both there and not there. It is the non object of everyday consumption in the living memories of many collectors and non collectors and yet it is also the conspicuous consumption of the tangible in the age of the intangible; it is in/visible, un/listenable . Every record has the potential to be played ‘whether playing or not, the potentiality to play remains’ (Durantaye 2009 p. 55). Despite their liminality and fragility of categorisation, records do exist and their physicality and reproducibility, resulted in industrially produced, mass-marketed objects. Whilst collectors can explain and did explain what they collect whether ‘Mostly new San Fran garage rock (Ty Segall and those guys), but also new and old punk. Also a lot of 60s psychedelic stuff’<sup>64</sup>, or a ‘near-complete Sonny & Cher catalog, and I collect a lot of Springsteen, Phil Spector pop, '60s pop in general, and Motown (I'm originally from Detroit). I also have a small collection of Laurel Canyon and Psychedelic music’<sup>65</sup>, their rationales for their collecting were not as forthcoming.

Collectors themselves – dedicated, serious, infatuated, beset – cannot explain or understand this all-consuming drive ... is it an obsession? An addiction? Is it a passion or urge, or perhaps a need to hold, or possess, to accumulate? (Muesterberger 1994 p. 3).

The above quotation by Psychoanalyst Werner Muesterberger is oft quoted in collecting literature, and whilst this study is not a psychoanalytical investigation into the unconscious, subconscious or even conscious drives and decisions made by collectors, some psychoanalytic terms and concepts will be utilised in a discourse more underpinned by cultural theory than by psychoanalysis itself. This will build upon the sociality of the thing, the object, the record, by exploring how collecting and of course collectors themselves contribute to, place, displace, discover and uncover these objects and place selectively vinyl discs into the social and cultural trajectories discussed earlier.

That only some of the ‘mass produced’ objects come to be desired at any given moment in time when much about them is similar, common and un-extraordinary can be at least partially linked to the music held within the micro-grooves. If it was ‘purely

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64 Respondent 55 a 21 year old male from Trondheim, Norway

65 Respondent 142 a 20 year old female from Illinois

about the music'<sup>66</sup> or the 'sound quality'<sup>67</sup> – as many collectors claim it to be, a default position, excuse, explanation or defence (to be discussed in chapter six) – then there would arguably be no record collectors, only *music* collectors with CDs and predominantly, in the current technological milieu, MP3s (which at the moment are the cheapest way, legally or otherwise, to amass a 'music collection'). As Simon Reynolds contentiously suggests 'file sharing culture is basically an infinitely vast communal record collection' (2004 p. 306). The collectibility of formats, if not artists themselves, has been in some way dictated collectively by labels both major and indie '[T]he recording industry has played a central role in the introduction and construction of the relative popularity of formats. Other industry strategies and products are aimed primarily at collectors' (Shuker 2010 p. 57). The most recent of these developments is Record Store Day, conceived in 2007 and beginning in 2008. In 2012 over 400 record store releases were made available on the third Saturday of April, exclusive releases in limited numbers. These particular records can arguably be described - using the combined categorisation of the previous chapter via Appadurai and Maquet - as luxury objects by destination. These industrial objects are designed to become collectible, desired above all others – 'Stand outside Third Man on RSD<sup>68</sup> and you will see what I mean'<sup>69</sup> suggested one collector. However not all collectors considered these objects worthy of collecting, even though they may well recognise them as specifically designed luxury objects.

I'm just proud of myself for not falling into the obsessive collector stereotype when it comes to vinyl-only labels like Third Man. Third Man releases a super limited edition of everything they put out, which people spend days camping out for at their store in Nashville. Just to buy a record they'll never listen to. I don't begrudge the entrepreneurial spirit of Third Man for juicing the speculative market, but I'm glad to not be that kind of collector<sup>70</sup>.

The difference between collectors' interpretations of objects is mirrored semiotically in the differing meaning attributed to the idea of objects.

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66 Respondent 1 a 43 year old male from London

67 Respondent 233 a 29 year old male from Los Angeles

68 Record Store Day

69 Respondent 166 a 44 year old male from Southeastern US

70 Respondent 42 a 25 year old male from Nashville, TN

## Object or Objet?

As Baudrillard points out in French *objet* is defined as 'anything which is the cause or subject of a passion' (1994 p. 7). Of course, it could be argued that all records are (or at least once were) the subject of someone's passion, but this would be too simplistic. It is the music, ephemeral, disembodied, released from the object that is, or rather was, the cause, the subject, the passion rather than the object itself. Collectors spoke in terms of the music rather than the object with comments such as 'I'm passionate about music'<sup>71</sup>, 'my passion and interest in music'<sup>72</sup>, or 'I'm consistent and passionate about music'<sup>73</sup>. Occasionally respondents would discuss their passion in relation to records 'I have quite a passion for music and, more importantly at the moment, physical releases where most people are happy to buy an album from iTunes'<sup>74</sup> - The music predominantly came first in such discussions.

Baudrillard's work highlights the problematic relationship between collecting and records, between record collecting and collecting theory and discourses within the academy. Baudrillard suggests that objects, in his example a refrigerator, that offer a 'practical transaction' that have purely mechanistic properties can *not* be 'objet' and therefore cannot cause or be subject to passion. Records occupy a liminal space when discussed, as they do in so much collecting literature, within the tight parameters of this discourse. In these terms they are mechanistic in that they offer the means to access music itself through mechanical means (although the magical qualities of this sound reproduction should not be underestimated) and as such they are utilitarian objects comparable to Baudrillard's 'refrigerator' - common place factory produced objects of mass consumption. And yet they *are* collected. Whilst Baudrillard acknowledges the functional qualities of the commodity as use value and the fetishised quality of commodities as their exchange value, the record as object should be discussed first. Their very object-ness becomes, for many, a point of collecting - 'I prefer vinyl as a collecting medium because it is large, it is an 'object' with some intrinsic value or presence in its own right, even when just held and looked at'<sup>75</sup>. However, to collectors of different genres, labels, eras and/or artists, the same record can be passed over as a mere mass-produced annoyance in the quest to reach

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71 Respondent 153 a 42 year old male from Torrance, CA

72 Respondent 78 an 18 year old male from Lancashire

73 Respondent 254 a 38 year old male from USA

74 Respondent 131 a 25 year old male from Corby, UK

75 Respondent 234 a 53 year old male from Dunedin

that desirous collectible item and therefore remains in a variety of commodity states - diverted or by destination, discussed previously - but in these terms they remain 'object'. To another collector the very same item may be the cause of passion and the result of painstaking research and searching and therefore 'objet'. This tension between object/objet, between ordinary/extraordinary, high/low, or in Freudian terms shit/gold, has prevented records from entering the academic discourse of collecting for many years. Records can be the least/most valuable things and inhabit, at least in terms of potentiality, multiple discourses until placed in an orderly, meaningful, historical, social, cultural meaning system by collector/s. This is not the only tension present and not the only tension that is highlighted by Baudrillard's refrigerator. Later in his article he returns to the refrigerator and its functionality. I will recount Baudrillard's point using records as the example rather than the original fridge.

[T]he fact that I make use of a [record] in order to [listen to] things, means that the [record] is defined in terms of a practical transaction: it is not an object so much as a [listening] mechanism. In this sense I cannot be said to possess it. Possession cannot apply to an implement, since the object I utilize always directs me back to the world. Rather it applies to that object once it is *divested of its function and made relative to a subject* (Baudrillard 1994 p. 7 original emphasis).

### **Collecting and the utilitarian**

The utilitarian nature of records is clearly an issue for a number of academics and not just Baudrillard, even when discussing 'products lacking any precise functional use like the record' (Buxton 1983 p. 429). Not utilitarian in an art historical sense; art for art's sake - or rather music for music's sake - this is a debate regarding the *contents* of vinyl records although packaging practices and design could fall within these parameters. Utilitarian in this case, regarding the actual black, flat vinyl record, meaning its value as a useful object, as having utility can be the quality that causes academic discomfort. At this point some definitions of collecting from the academic discourses that cover the world of the collector and the collectible, can be brought in to highlight this tension. Belk defines collecting as 'the process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring things *removed from ordinary use* and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences' (Belk 2001 p. 67 my emphasis). This begins to show the problem of records in this definition and discourse, the 'ordinary' use of records is complicated certainly if considered through the framework of

Baudrillard's mechanistic framing. This mechanism is further explored, although written seventy years earlier, by Durost:

A collection is basically determined by the nature of the *value* assigned to the objects, or ideas *possessed*. If the predominant value of an object or idea for the person possessing it is intrinsic. i.e., if it is valued primarily for use, or purpose, or aesthetically pleasing quality, or other value inherent in the object or accruing to it by whatever circumstances of custom, training, or habit, it is not a collection. If the predominant value is representative or representational, i.e., if said object or idea is valued chiefly for the relation it bears to some other object or idea, or objects, or ideas, such as being one of a series, part of a whole, a specimen of a class, then it is the subject of a collection (in Pearce 1998 p. 2).

Or as Theophile Gautier suggested half a century before the advent of recorded music 'The useless alone is truly beautiful' (in Harrison 1998 p. 99). This use value of records is an important aspect in exploring the definitions of collecting. Other definitions do not include this. Aristide's definition suggests that collecting is 'obsession organized' (cited in Pearce 1998 p. 2) which suggests the ordering process of the collector but does not address the use of the collection. Aslop also contributes a definition although too broad to be of use here 'to collect is to gather objects belonging to a particular category the collector happens to fancy ... and a collection is what has been gathered' (in Pearce 1998 p. 2). Susan Pearce has taken on board the utilitarian in her own work, where she has encountered the problem of including the record collector. This may well be because she chose to 'collect' record collectors along with CD collectors, as did Shuker (2010), but also included them in a group with video collectors and as such the nuances of vinyl collecting are simply not allowed the room to gestate and the utilitarian problem not given room to expand within the discourse. These objects are simply 'media' - practical things that give us access to music or give us access to film. There is no room for the differences between the DVD collector and the 8mm collector here, these objects are ways of accessing beauty, not beauty in themselves.

This is complicated by vinyl's place in the post-vinyl economy; it is not utilitarian in the sense that these other forms and formats are. As such, the everyday, ordinary, Guatierian 'utilitarianism' of the collected object has to be removed for it to become a Baudrillardian objet. A coin, for instance, loses its function, and its value becomes tied to some other set of markers outside of its use value when it is collected; like many other things that are collected, 'Sound recordings are largely mass-produced artefacts, and therefore hardly non-identical in that individual copies exist even if from the same master recording' (Shuker 2010 p. 6). This definition

places vinyl on the cusp, in-between, in no man's land. Whilst the utilitarian nature of vinyl has dissipated in the years since the recorded music industry introduced the CD and then MP3 as the preferred music carrier for production and distribution of music, it has left vinyl as somewhat of a novelty and therefore *not strictly* everyday. This I would argue is why records should be considered as collectible within the remit of existing collecting theory - in its own category and *not* alongside the CD. It is not utilitarian - or rather it is not *as* utilitarian as a CD and even less utilitarian than the MP3. Whilst this might situate the CD as an object closer in terms of physicality to the record than the MP3, the CD is closer to the MP3 in convenience. It is the dominant sales format - a supermarket 'loss-leader'. It is still easily accessible, it is easy to purchase and most releases are still produced in this format. It is NOT vinyl. The difference between vinyl and CD creates an appreciation of the vinyl object: 'I found the reduction in size a major problem. Up to then I had no concept of my appreciation of the vinyl album as artefact, as a tangible object of beauty, like a well turned out book.'<sup>76</sup> This allows it, partially at least, into the discourse of collecting; it is only the production of vinyl as part of a niche (or luxury) market (as opposed to a mass market) that has changed. As Pritchard suggests: 'Vinyl. First it was dead, then it wasn't, having risen from the grave like Jesus or some other kind of zombie' (2008 p. 64). This tension explored by one respondent who suggested 'Maybe some technological advancement will completely make records obsolete, but for now clicking "Purchase" on iTunes doesn't quite cut it'<sup>77</sup>.

That vinyl can be considered an art object or objet is similarly problematic. Whilst I and other collectors consider particular releases to be beautiful, to be works of art, it is not necessarily the sound quality of vinyl that makes it so, not the music within it, but the physicality of the object itself. 'I know that a lot of that music is from a digital source and so will not sound different or better on vinyl, but I buy them anyway because I'm a collector and I'm interested in the art object of the record'<sup>78</sup>. That records can be experienced aesthetically, where 'the aesthetic point of view that creates the aesthetic object [...] in terms of form rather than function' (Bourdieu 1979 p. 29), places the meaning in the imagination of the collector and the subsequent discourse of collecting. Panofsky suggests that the work of art has to have artistic

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<sup>76</sup> Respondent 292 a 48 year old male from the Netherlands

<sup>77</sup> Respondent 327 a 20 year old male from London

<sup>78</sup> Respondent 89 a 33 year old male from Oklahoma

intention to prevent all objects becoming aesthetically artistic or beautiful. However 'Objects previously treated as collectors' curios or historical and ethnographic documents have achieved the status of works of art' (Ibid p. 30). Or as one collector asks 'Am I the same as someone who searches for rare butterflies or who buys works of art by Picasso? Passion and a slightly crazed OCD are probably two of the necessary components'<sup>79</sup>.

Vinyl still escapes Belk's definition in terms of consumption because it is, in those strict terms at least, still not removed 'from ordinary use' - that is records are still played and therefore their use is still in the utilitarian, if not cultural sense, 'ordinary'. It is the popular appropriation, not the use value that has changed. Vinyl appears to be eccentric, archaic, fragile, bulky and impractical. The impractical elements drawing attention to the objectness, a quality remarked upon by respondents: 'i think about how amazing it is to hold something so fragile and old in my hand and to have to still play just as beautifully as it did the day it was purchased. i pay my respects to those who owned and took care of them so religiously that i may enjoy them now'<sup>80</sup>. In a world where MP3 formats and players can effectively house a lifetime's worth of collected records in the palm of the hand the impractical becomes decidedly *unutilitarian*. Size and convenience then, the removal as far as possible of the thing-ness of music, its materiality, its tangibility, has become the increasing objective in industry terms and is, as discussed in chapter one, what lead to the vinyl 33 1/3 in the first place - with the 45 having superior sound but considerably less storage/convenience. The first step was perhaps the CD, co-developed by Philips and introduced to the mass market by the Sony corporation in 1983 and by 1992 only 130 million vinyl LPs were sold as opposed to the 1.15 billion CDs or the 1.55 billion cassettes where 'forces [...] combined to squeeze records from the mainstream to the fringe or the underground' (Plaskettes in Shuker 2010 p. 61). Vinyl, it would appear, is now an extraordinary object used for ordinary purposes.

### **Object or Abjet**

This might then suggest that vinyl records are neither object nor abjet but through the meanings mapped onto them by collectors exist in an unsettling and in between space. It could be argued that they exist in a Kristevan (1982) potentiality of

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<sup>79</sup> Respondent 3 a 42 year old male from London

<sup>80</sup> Respondent 324 a 38 year old female from Pensacola, FL

abjectness, a place where each vinyl record is both shit and gold - 'the most precious substance known to men and the most worthless, which they reject' (Freud in Petocz 1999 p. 73). This study does not seek to find the psychoanalytic root of collecting and specifically record collecting in Freudian, Lacanian or Kristevan terms. However, one cannot discuss at length the in-between, the liminal, notions of loss where 'every as-yet-unsatisfied desire reawakens the original sense of loss' (Lechte 1990 p. 159) or being and not being (or at least Fort/Da) the discomfort of the shit/gold dichotomy without mention of Kristeva's abject. The abject complicates collecting. It is 'the ambiguous, the in-between, what defies boundaries, a composite resistant to unity' (Ibid 1990 p. 160) and yet in the collection the boundary is clear 'between including and excluding there can be no half measures' (Elsner and Cardinal 1994 p. 1). Whilst for Kristeva abject is between, or neither, object or subject, here to extend the metaphor, the record, as abject, is between, or neither object or objet. 'It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva 1982 p. 14). Whilst cleanliness is an aspect of records that collectors have differing attitudes toward (to be discussed in chapter six) it is the unsettling in between-ness of records as cultural object I am discussing in this particular chapter. To combine Kristeva's idea of abjection - that which unsettles with its in between-ness - with Baudrillard's ideas of objet - as that which has transcended the ordinary - I would like to suggest here that records, in this sense, are *abjet*. That is, they are in between, or neither the desired nor the undesirable, they have the potential to be objet. They are desired and yet their perceived utilitarian ordinariness means they are impossible to desire. This state, or place of *abjection* is dependent on the collector; as any collector who has hovered over a box of records at a boot sale or thrift store watching as another collector flicks through the vinyl will attest. The mentally inhaled sharp breath, the attempts at nonchalant stoicism. Watching whilst the collector flicks past one of those sought-after records, hoping that it remains 'shit' for a few moments more, remaining abjet, to be released as objet only when physically held by the victor. This is not specific to record collecting necessarily and Walter Benjamin regales the reader with his stories of book collecting and the way in which he shows cunning when another collector uses Benjamin's specialist collector's knowledge to bid (i.e. he only bids on that which Benjamin himself does)

[I]t was simple enough: since my bid was bound to give the item to the other man, I must not bid at all. I controlled myself and remained silent. What I had hoped for came about: no interest, no bid, and the book was put aside. I deemed



it wise to let several days go by, and when I appeared on the premise after a week, I found the book in the secondhand department and benefited by the lack of interest when I acquired it (Benjamin 1978 pp. 65-6).

However much individual records exist in one potential particular state, and at whichever point on their social journey, it is this sense of in-between-ness, that is abjection. The becoming or not becoming of the collectible relies on the metaphorical alchemy of the collector's practices of turning shit into gold.

If that which is expelled inevitably returns, we must trace its circuitous path: shit comes back and takes the place of that which is engendered by its return, but in a transfigured, incorruptible form. Once eliminated, waste is reinscribed in the cycle of production as gold (Laporte 2000 pp. 16-17).

### **Types of Collector**

I have discussed up until now the psychoanalytic 'state' of the record itself, or what it inspires in the collector. The psychology or psychoanalysis of the collector has been discussed and constructed previously. 'In the West, collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture and authenticity' (Pearce 1998 p. 1). Dittmar (1992) suggests that there are three ways in which objects and ownership are and have been studied: in terms of biological instincts to acquire, in terms of the functions that possessions fulfil for the individual and in terms of the social aspect of possessions as material symbols of identity. The construction of a typology of collectors has been discussed by Pearce where three basic 'types' of collector are constructed (although these types can of course co-exist within one collector). Firstly the souvenir collector, secondly the fetishistic collector and finally the systematic collector. The souvenir collector in this model is one that autobiographically collects and constructs a 'personal memorial' (in Shuker 2010 p.6) through their collection. This places the collector her/himself as dominant in the relation to the record's place as abjet/objet.

This kind of collector is exemplified in Nick Hornby's novel 'High Fidelity' where the protagonist rearranges his collection in the order in which he bought them 'that way I hope to write my own autobiography [...] when I've finished I'm flushed with a sense of self [...] I've made myself more complicated than I really am' (Hornby 1995 p. 52); or as John Windsor suggests 'the souvenir is prized for its power to carry the past into the future' (1994 p. 50). As one collector explained 'Well I think it says a

lot about me. I don't sell many records so it is like a biography of my life'<sup>81</sup>. Only those records released from this respondent's collection return to a space of abjection, the rest remain objet, inspiring passion in a stable category of commodity. Another collector confirming 'I think Nick Hornby pretty much nailed it in High Fidelity when he referred to the autobiographical aspects of one's record collection. Some records refer to certain places and people. It's like my journal in a way'<sup>82</sup>.

Where this relationship is switched, that is the object is dominant and plays its part in the creation of the subjectivity of the collector – the collector's self, the typology suggests the 'fetishistic collector', the obsessive who removes 'the object from its historical and cultural context' (Windsor 1994 p. 50) and 'this context destroys the context of origin' (Stewart 1984 p. 165), the collector redefining the object in the terms of a broader collector discourse of their own construction. 'I collect all genres and eras. I have no particular favourite really. What appeals is the flowing narrative between all eras and how music changes gradually over the years with the introduction of new technology and new cultural context'<sup>83</sup>. When collectors acknowledged this fetishism of the vinyl object, it was often qualified through the music held within the records. 'I fetishize the physical objects around music to some degree, but that enjoying the music itself and the experience of listening to it are paramount'<sup>84</sup>. or else it was justified against other formats

Vinyl is just the only real format to me, the best combination of fidelity, presentation, and it's a format I don't need to worry about disappearing. I try not to fetishize them. I just never liked cds, and tapes are fine but inferior to vinyl for a number of reasons<sup>85</sup>.

Where the collection is governed by a rationale on the part of the collector, again placing the collector – intellectually if not financially – in control to complete the collection, Pearce suggests 'systematic' collecting to the typology, although, as one collector suggested, 'I don't have enough money for rules'<sup>86</sup>. In this instance, the drive is the construction of a collection to represent an ideology or 'authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience' (Schor 1994). Vinyl is not alone in this aspect of

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81 Respondent 77 a 33 year old male from Austin, TX

82 Respondent 308 a 33 year old male from Finland

83 Respondent 296 a 41 year old male from Ireland

84 Respondent 29 a 34 year old male from Pennsylvania

85 Respondent 322 a 34 year old male from Vancouver, Canada

86 Respondent 208 a 32 year old male from United States

collecting. One respondent suggesting that 'Vintage clothing is similar to a record in that it had a past and you are using it to create a present or future. There is memory and history involved'<sup>87</sup>. Roy Shuker aligns these types with music collectors although, like Pearce, he is careful to suggest that they are not exclusive categories. He suggests that – here in contradiction to Pearce – completists, based on label or artist for instance – are fetishistic collectors. This can be on the basis that objects and not the music held within them becomes a dominant driver.

I can get to be quite a completist - at the moment I'm trying to get all the records that Shake Kean played on while he was in Germany - don't ask! I've also spent a lot of time tracking down records that have tracks from the Animated Egg LP. I have no idea why I should spend money on a Spanish press of a record when I have every song multiple times on other records!<sup>88</sup>

Similarly, this fetishism can be in the form of fandom of particular artist. 'I am set on having full discographies of my favorite bands; everything that they have released on vinyl. I am a completist when it comes to certain bands'<sup>89</sup>, or specifically 'Im currently collecting The Smiths LP's - first pressings only'<sup>90</sup>; a collector who 'suffers the pathology of completeness at all costs [...] classification precedes collection [...] the urge to erect a permanent and complete system against the destructiveness of time' (Elsner & Cardinal 1994 p. 1). The collector's relationship with time is discussed in the following two chapters.

Shuker goes on to align the systematic with connoisseurship and a discriminatory ear (or eye) and hence control over the collection. He then suggests that the souvenir collector is the autobiographical collector whose collection is a life map or life history or what I, in the introduction, called 'historiophonography': the act of selectively, through inclusion and exclusion, physically writing music history through the act of collecting records. These definitions do not bring into account the levels of collecting (beyond Durost's musing on the difference between the accumulator and the collector noted earlier). John Elsner and Roger Cardinal define both the first collector and the most extreme collector through a discussion of Noah. 'Noah was the first collector [and] represents the extreme case of the collector: he is one who places his vocation in the service of a higher cause, and who suffers the pathology of completeness at all costs' (1994 p. 1).

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87 Respondent 188 a 27 year old female from Champaign

88 Respondent 3 a 42 year old male from London

89 Respondent 244 a 27 year old male from Tampa Bay, FLA

90 Respondent 9 a 22 year old female from Kent

## **The Need To Collect.**

Evan Eisenberg takes a more pragmatic approach to the notion of collecting. For him there are five possible 'needs' that the collection and the act of collecting can satisfy. The first two are centered on the desire of the collector in relation to the object itself or the music within it. The third and fifth categories are more socially constructed whilst the fourth appears to cross both categories where the social imagining might well be that - imaginary. Firstly there is 'the need to make beauty and pleasure permanent' (1987 p. 14). Where there is a mistrust that one might never be able to experience that beauty, poetry or music again and so the preservation of such objects, such beauty from previous disc eras becomes a primary driver. This can be a driver, particularly for those collectors who willfully collect the bizarre, the obscure, the self released, the perpetually unfashionable, the novelty or the oddity - precisely because they represent these things. 'I travel a lot and love finding weird records in other countries.'<sup>91</sup> The second need is the need to comprehend beauty

Beauty has its intellectual side, which is the more beautiful the better it's understood when the mind exercises its prehensibility, it is natural for the fingers to take part, if only to keep the object in striking distance of the mind. Certainly owning a book or record permits one to study the work repeatedly at one's convenience (Ibid pp. 14-15).

One collector compared the collecting experience to the academic spending a lifetime studying Chaucer<sup>92</sup>. The third category is the need to distinguish oneself as a consumer. Here Eisenberg discusses what he calls the 'heroes of consumption [...] who spend on a heroic scale, perhaps, or with heroic discrimination' (Ibid p. 15). Beyond this he suggests that the heroism is in fact defined by the journey, the chase, the hunt for objects and then the willingness to share the 'spoils'. The fourth category is the need to belong. Not in the sense that the third category suggests where there is combative and heroic consumption, but in the sense that there may be a time or place where one feels an affinity and 'cultural objects are a fairly dignified tonic' (Ibid). The final category is 'The need to impress others or oneself' which 'can be philistine snobbery' (Ibid 1987 p. 16). It is an important category in that it, beyond showing off, can be a love of a cultural form without actually liking it. 'That kind of love is almost as well satisfied by owning records as by listening to them' (Ibid 1987). These final two categories - the aspects of collecting that discuss taste and then belonging or the social aspects of collecting - are discussed in chapters six and seven.

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91 Respondent 77 a 33 year old male from Austin TX

92 Respondent 52 a 25 year old male from New Have

There exists then, a complex typology of collectors, or types of collecting. When Pearce and Shuker's typologies are combined they are then further complicated by potentially five reasons or sensibilities - needs - that each intersect and rub up against other typological collecting subjectivities. The records themselves - the object, the objet, the abject and abjet add another layer of complexity as they wait to re enter the discourses of popular music beyond their initial pressing and distribution. The collectors and their collections demonstrated an elaborate relationship with these typologies. Collections can be multidimensional, each individual record having a particular set of meanings. Even two identically produced objects can have different biographical, cultural and economic readings for the collector.

I first buy what I want. If I know I want something, it doesn't matter too much if it is a first pressing or even a novelty reissue because my collection originally started out as me building a group of my favorites to listen to casually. That said, when I am buying artists I have more knowledge in (Sonny & Cher, Phil Spector, Springsteen), I am way more careful and picky about the price, condition, and pressing. And it is with those few artists that I aim for completism, too. I have multiple copies of some albums because if I see one in better condition than the one I have, I buy it again<sup>93</sup>.

The music industry through its marketing and promotional departments has attempted at various points to create the record as *objet*; instantaneously and beyond the music held in the microgrooves. This can be seen in two distinct eras. Firstly the era when vinyl was constructed as the primary carrier of music, technologically the best deliverer of song – In disc era two; primarily from the late nineteen forties until the late nineteen eighties. And secondly in the post vinyl eras - CD and then hard disc (disc eras three and four respectively) - when vinyl becomes a marker of the authenticity that through its redundant technological place, its very awkwardness, signals Hayes' (2006) previously mentioned 'golden age' with its corresponding important statements, artists and albums. Or, as one respondent bemoaned 'I was only born 17 years ago and that is about the time they stopped making classic records!<sup>94</sup> and many of these multiple copies in the collections of respondents were reissued or anniversary editions - Miles Davis's 'Bitches Brew' 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition,<sup>95</sup> Interpol's 'Turn on the Bright Lights'<sup>96</sup> anniversary edition, and Derek and

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93 Respondent 142 a 20 year old female from Illinois

94 Respondent 76 a 17 year old female from Ontario

95 Respondent 227 a 23 year old male from Canada

96 Respondent 215 a 20 year old female from Las Vegas

The Dominos 'Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs' 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition<sup>97</sup>. One collector going so far as to preempt anniversaries:

I've been trying to get all of the really influential albums from my earlier years on vinyl and since they're all approaching 20 years old now, they're getting nice 20th anniversary treatments or at least represses. Most of these only saw limited vinyl releases outside of the States so it's the first time for release for a lot of these<sup>98</sup>.

These historicised attempts to defy or deny the mechanistic or utilitarian properties of the object and to artificially make them desirable, individualistic, to make them art, to make them distinct and give them distinction, to make them 'objet', have a long history - some of them explored in chapter one. As Roy Shuker points out 'Record industry packaging practices have created a number of collectibles, including picture discs, picture sleeves, boxed sets and 'promos' (2010 p. 57). The visible and visual identities of identical records can only be enhanced through either the expensive and elaborate picture and/or shaped disc. The dominant practice has been the picture sleeve; the packaging which for most other products is discarded once the desired object has been unleashed from its protection. Whilst initially records were packaged in the plainest of covers, the labels (and occasionally the covers) may have had designs but these were based on the branding of the labels and not the artists, musicians or composers and 'were as likely to be housed in sleeves advertising shops and wholesalers as they were record company brands' (Osborne 2012 p. 161). This, if one imagines a 'collection' of objects, emphasizes (rather than distracts from) the mass-produced qualities of the record. This was relatively unproblematic for the labels themselves until the intervention of the marketing and design departments that became more elaborate during the nineteen forties and into the nineteen fifties. This was a time when 'American youth had an estimated spending capacity of \$750 million' (Savage 2007 p. 448).

Associating records with images has been used as an effective way to market and individualise sound recordings. As discussed in chapter one (in relation to the LP sleeve in 1948), the first picture sleeves were designed by art director Alex Steinweiss at Columbia records in 1939 on a series of ten inch 78rpm records. 'Sales of a Masterwork recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, previously clothed in a plain binder, rose 894 per cent when it was reissued with one of Steinweiss's illustrated jobs' (Elborough 2008 p. 31). Before this, records came in plainer, more uniform

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97 Respondent 217 a 25 year old male from Minneapolis

98 Respondent 208 a 32 year old male from United States

cardboard covers; covers which gave away both the mechanised and utilitarian properties of the record and the sleeve itself. Whilst picture covers gave the opportunity to create visual representations of artistic intent from the artist or band/group and acted to anchor an image to advertising materials, its primary purpose was/is to protect the record. The first LP sleeves as they can be recognized now came some nine years after the first sleeve experiments. 'Later Steinweiss's design of the folded cardboard (the fold at the spine) became the standard of the industry in the USA. His basic design was soon varied upon but remained in essence the same, up to this day' (Anonymous 2010). In *Billboard* magazine, one journalist commented that the LP may 'quite conceivably change the buying attitudes of *collectors* and delegate present modes of purveying recorded classical music to limbo' (in Elborough 2008 p. 33 my emphasis). As Richard Osborne (2012) argues, there is a shift in, at least, semiotic power that begins with this act. With individually designed sleeves for individual artists, the generic record label identifiable through the cut-out hole in the plain sleeve loses its visual impact, uniformity and importance. After the introduction and acceptance of the picture sleeve and the artwork and sleeve designs of Steinweiss, the nineteen sixties and the subsequent weakening of the distinction between pop culture and high art, the sleeve itself has continued to evolve with die-cut sleeves, gatefold, triple gatefold, poster and novelty sleeves. With the establishment of the sleeve as artwork as opposed to purely utilitarian and its place 'essential and entwined part of the listening experience' (Osborne 2012 p. 176), new and imaginative ways to distinguish discs were produced. This was no more prevalent than in the late nineteen sixties where not only was there an attempt to hide the mechanistic and industrial qualities of recorded music but an attempt, ideologically, philosophically and artistically to create the rock music (as opposed to pop music) as authentic – as art – and the packaging was part of that process.

The new record albums came with increasingly elaborate covers, many double-flapped, their curiously costumed and staged photos set in swirling, throbbing graphics. The album covers were in fact designed for young people smoking marijuana or 'dropping acid' to seemingly spend hours examining (Kurlansky 2005 p. 183).

These sleeve designs, and disc designs as well as many other techniques, have been used to 'divest [the object] of its function' and to render the newly manufactured object, *objet*. This (in Baudrillard's terms) detracts the user from the utilitarian nature of the commodity to the extent that object becomes *objet* and its success can be measured by the collectability of records. And yet this is perhaps enough for the

collector if not for the academic, at least not those interested in collecting primarily; music historians however take far less umbrage with the idea. If successful in ridding itself of its functionality, to become possession, the record will

[S]ubmit to the same abstractive operation and participate in a mutual relationship in so far as they each refer back to the subject. They thereby constitute themselves as a system, on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together his [sic] world, his personal microcosm (Baudrillard 1994 p. 7).

However, a record can never be wholly 'abstracted from any practical context' nor stop being 'defined by its function' (Ibid). The collection does give safe harbour to objects, the multiplicity of objects 'collectively' highlighting ideological connections and rationale, and allows the subjective to supersede the functional. With individual collector's rationales and needs - whether systematic, fetishistic, or souvenir - creating, generating, subtracting value and the potentiality of value, the removal of abjection and ambiguity 'if the subject's identity derives from the unity of its objects, the object is the threat of unassimilable non-unity: that is ambiguity' (Lechte 1990 p. 160). It also places individual discs in a context (the collection) and objects can become objet through association, by being part of a collection. This notion of the set or context that a record sits within is of interest in some definitions of collecting and collections. Belk (1990) suggests that collecting is

[T]he selective, active and longitudinal acquisition, possession and disposition of an interrelated set of differentiated objects (material things, ideas, beings or experiences) that contribute to and derive extraordinary meaning from the entity (the collection) that this set is perceived to constitute (in Pearce 1998 p. 3).

Collecting, in psychoanalytic terms at least, is related to the retentive practices of those who have regressed to the anal stage and who manifest this 'in such behaviour patterns as accumulation, ordering, aggressive retention and so forth' (Baudrillard 1994 p. 9) and can also be used as a way in which those who collect divest the object of usefulness and create subjective passion for objet. The fact that in this particular theoretical framework collecting as an impulse generally occurs around or just before puberty which is also a time when an interest in popular music often manifests, is noteworthy; not least in the sense that it starts to tie the collection to the collector's sense of self, to the past self and to the past - 'the collector thus rediscovers his narcissism in the charm of objects, each of which reflects back a portion of his lost libidinal objects' (Forrester 1994 p. 236). However, this has been described outside of the libidinal and sexual developmental discourse as a 'collecting



instinct' in adolescents that is 'wonderfully universal' and 'wonderfully intense' (Burk in Dittmar 1992 p. 30) (the notion of youth is discussed in the next chapter).

This chapter has explored the idea of collecting as a practice, through the social and cultural functions of collecting (rather than the biological) and how records as particular kinds of commodity, specific kinds of objects problematise some of the ways in which academics describe what can and cannot be collected and desired. That records can be considered objet in the sense that Baudrillard describes, in spite of their utilitarian function, places them in between the collectible and the uncollectible, between 'trash and treasure' (Shuker 2010). For records to be abjet is to imagine records from the perspective of the non collector, for those outside of the value discourse. Records are cumbersome and redundant, time consuming and difficult to use in comparison with new and recent technological perspectives 'These resurrections mark a disillusionment with technology' (Taylor 2001 p. 96). As such, the record is at odds with contemporary 'mainstream' music consumption and therefore can, I would argue, be considered as 'divested of its function' (Baudrillard 1994 p. 7), even when its function is one of the aspects that make it desirable, that make it objet. Whilst chapter two explored the states and potentiality of states in relation to records along their journeys into, around or out of value discourses, here the collector and the collectibility are what place the records in a state of abjection from a number of positions. Whether collectors are collecting for fetishistic, completist, or souvenir reasons, to engage in self biography or historiophonography, the state of the record will change for the duration of their possession.

Many of these reasons - the past self, the back catalogue, the souvenir of experience, disillusionment with technology or heroic anti capitalist consumption rely on the concept of the past and the experience of it. Records journey through time as well as space to accumulate desirability and collectibility. This notion of the past, what and importantly when it is (or was), is explored in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four: Past/times

For anyone interested in exploring beyond the boundaries of the contemporary popular music scene, the past is a strange and wonderful place (Hayward 2000 p. 1).

All tomorrows become yesterdays (Black Sabbath, 1973).

Collecting and record collecting in particular has a complex relationship with the past and the objects that reside there/then. In previous chapters the notion of *where* a record is has been discussed, in terms of its economic and cultural value. The trajectory from the attic, the second hand shop, the record store and ultimately into the collection by way of its potentialities of value and use - its 'social life' was explored. Subsequently the collectibility of vinyl was considered both in theoretical terms - do record collections count - and in terms of the potential needs of the collector and their varying types. This chapter considers the notion of what and importantly when the past is and the place that recording, records and collecting hold within it, add to it and create an understanding of it. There are, of course, those who collect new things or objects, new releases of new music, as well as the frozen music thawing and releasing and the songs that may well be new to them. A 40 year old collector discussed the role of the used record shop and the thrift store before commenting: 'In this respect, buying and curating a vinyl collection displays a certain level of adventure in finding *new* music and a certain level of patience and dedication'<sup>99</sup>. Making a temporal world where 'the past is as uncertain as the future' (Wilson 2005 p. 26). Even the newly manufactured objects are not merely new but are created primarily to be collectible and this can include records themselves. But the new, as desirable, can become old, or not new, as undesirable, quickly.

The state, or status, of rubbish follows hard upon that of birth, or production and entry into the market, on the assumption that nobody knowingly produces things which nobody wants [...] But once the newness or fashionableness of a piece has worn off, it will be commercially worthless, another way of saying that its symbolic values have drained away. It descends into the rubbish class (Pearce, 1998 p.39).

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99 Respondent 17 a 40 year old male from Grand Ledge, Michigan

Many of the 'new' items produced to collect are not truly new, that is whilst they are newly manufactured they may well be reproductions of the past, recreations of old toys<sup>100</sup>, games, action figures and ephemera. And, as discussed previously, records are regularly released in anniversary editions, reissued and repackaged. '[T]he rift of retro' Reynolds suggests (2011 p. 185) is the moment (or moments) when the past *becomes* present, or at least an object, a reminder or marker of the past that comes into the present. This positions the past as an increasingly complex, partial aspect of the present, no longer fading into the murky depths of history, the preserve of the professional historian, but remaining or returning to the intricate nature of the present. And whilst Jenkins claimed that 'The past has occurred. It has gone and can only be brought back again by historians [...] when they go to work' (1991 p. 6), objects, in this case records, complicate the place and time of the past. Beyond this, collectors complicate Jenkins' statement; there is an implication of professionalism through the word 'work'. But the collector, I would argue, is an historian, albeit an amateur or unknowing one. The discourse of pastness and specifically how the past and present became part of the same moment is described by different authors from different positions. Foster (2010) claims that 'The past continues to reverse into the future' suggesting that somehow the past, and indeed the future, are metaphorically motorised, autonomous, dangerous and career headlong toward each other, at the expense of the present situated motionless between them. Lowenthal, however describes the relationship with a different set of power relationships where the wilful eras have been tamed, where 'we have partly domesticated the past and brought it into the present as a marketable commodity' (1985 p. xxv). Whichever direction they come from, whatever the power relationship between them, the violent, motorised and physical metaphors meet where 'Vinyl represents a link to the past that is 'immediate and visceral''(Shuker, 2010 p.67). Of course vinyl is not the only cultural product or practice that contributes to this complex relationship to the past - 'The now much more visible 'long tail' of the past is increasingly networked through a convergence of communication and the archive' (Hoskins 2011 p. 26) - and collectors use a variety of contemporary technological means to access the past. It is, perhaps, worth noting at this point that the theoretical ideas and conceptual devices within this, and other, chapters are also from the past as well as the comments about collectors' own pasts. Books and ideas are similarly used to access the past, and their

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100 At the time of writing Eaglemoss collections were issuing a fortnightly magazine and 'die-cast official collector's models of the most iconic vehicles ever to have been driven by Batman'

very pastness complicates any discussion of it. And whilst some of these books and ideas, such as Lowenthal's work from the mid nineteen eighties still seem to resonate as a series of ideas questioning the past and our relationship to it, others (such as the Jenkins quote above, written six years after Lowenthal) can be brought in to question, at least in terms of the framework here.

### **New Music/Old Music**

Whilst vinyl itself is immediate in its physical reproduction of sound, that is the mechanism of the turntable and the stylus within the microgroove, the power of the amplifier, the vibration and rumble of the speakers produce a 'sound [that] will travel through our ears and brains, and then it will filter through our recording consciousness' (Milner 2009 p. 20). The sound it reproduces is from a past historical event, or series of events. After all, music is firstly written (or jammed, or improvised, but essentially created), music is rehearsed, show-cased and/or demoed; if writers and musicians are good enough (or, some would argue, lucky enough) to be signed by a record label (or via a publishing company or management contract), there is then the industrialised development of their original artistry: more rehearsal, the recording sessions, production, mixing, mastering, pressing, marketing and distribution (physical and virtual) of said music before it eventually meets the ears and sometimes hands of its audience. As such, all music that reaches out beyond the stage of physical production into consumption, is a reproduction of a performance (discussed in chapter one) that occurred some time in the past. The gap between recording and release varies from artist to artist, label to label, but however small this gap is, it is a temporal slip resulting, still predominantly, in a physical object that holds within its grooves or data; its ones and zeros and releases from within itself music from the past. Some younger collectors spoke about the physical nature of the vinyl object as the link to the past, rather than the music itself: 'Owning a record is like owning a little piece of rock history'<sup>101</sup> or 'I like the past, and I like the remnants of it that I can collect and feel part of'<sup>102</sup>. The music may be 'new' to the listener, but it is an historical occasion that we hear. Ironically, the 'new' vinyl object – its newness signified by the first static filled pull from the inner sleeve – may take longer to become a relic than the already-past music held within it, its newness is less questionable than the past it contains. It often comes housed, sealed in

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101 Respondent 142 a 20 year old female from Illinois

102 Respondent 144 a 23 year old female from Wisconsin

shrinkwrapped plastic guaranteeing its newness. 'I don't get as excited about old used LPs. I really enjoy unwrapping a sealed new copy and smelling the freshness of it! That way I feel the record is truly my own'<sup>103</sup>. This new object/old music dichotomy is perhaps most obvious in the issuing of previously unreleased recordings by historic blues men and women (and increasingly reissues from the nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies) that achieve thing-ness almost a century after their capture - much like Rabelais' Sea of Frozen Words, only in this case with a technological (and Baudrillardian) freezing device from the future capturing and then releasing these 'vintage' songs exactly as they had been captured.

If, as Evan Eisenberg suggests, records 'shattered the public architecture of time' (1987 p. 37), the CD or MP3 is new, current, they are markers of the technological present and thus shatter the illusion of historicism. Vinyl, as discussed previously, differs in that it is a marker of the technological *recent* past, recently revived (either as metaphorical Christ or metaphorical zombie), reappraised and re-valued, like other pop cultural ephemera which also 'Before [being] properly appreciated, [...] must outlive a 'black patch of bad taste' [...] we display an uneasy ambivalence toward the recent past' (Lowenthal, 1985 p. 51). Vinyl, has made it.

It would appear that 'Even if we aim to preserve things just as they were or as we find them, protective and restorative devices mantle the past with the machinery of the present' (Lowenthal, 1985 p. xxiv). That is not to say that the time elapsed (between the metaphorical freezing and thawing) places this newly past music as 'old' or even out of date. Although it may, or may not, be 'dead', the moment of the recording is certainly long gone. This, 'death' in the current climate of 'nosomania' where 'Fashions for old films, old clothes, old music, old recipes are ubiquitous, and nostalgia markets every product' (Lowenthal, 1985 p. xvi) is arguably not a limitation on the recording process. However, in this contemporary cultural milieu 'there is now virtually nothing that is not considerably more lively after death than it was before' (Lowenthal, 1985 p. xv). The death metaphor is never far away with vinyl; from recordings origins where the 'trope of death referred to vinyl's ability to defeat death through the preservation of the human voice; later, the death metaphor referenced vinyl's expected demise in the wake of CDs' (Biddinger 2008 p. 185). Never far from death, back from the dead, revived, resuscitated, or as Simon Reynolds

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103 Respondent 335 a 28 year old female from Finland

puts it: 'reissue mania is constantly pushing back barriers, both geographically and in terms of that other 'foreign country' – the past' (2011 p.158). This music is, after all, linguistically at least, a new release and like the tunes captured in the Postillion's frozen horn, 'came out now by thawing' (Raspe, 1971 p. 36). This instant pastness of new music, and technological presentness of old music leaves the record collector as perpetually at odds with time (as well as death). Music in this way, is much like memory, it can be about anyone anywhere, but not *anywhen*. It is always a representation, a memory of someone, or something at a specific point in the past. Some collectors have rules about reissues, those records that once through their initial pressings have gone through their 'black patch' and are desirable enough once again to be repressed, reproduced; although these rules vary widely. One collector suggests that they try and avoid 'reissues except where its impossible to own an original'<sup>104</sup>, for other collectors it is important to remove the semiotics of the present. 'if I'm buying an album that came out in the 60s or 70s, I try to get one without a barcode. That way I know that it's not a more recent reissue'<sup>105</sup>. For other collectors, reissues are a welcome way to avoid the costs of owning expensive original pressings although there was an understanding of the shattering of the historical illusion 'I'm not a purist. I'll almost always take a \$15 reissue over an expensive first pressing'<sup>106</sup>; or the issue of sound quality 'I prefer to get first pressings, but I watch for reissues that sound superior to the originals'<sup>107</sup>. Attitudes to reissues vary; respondent 93, a 20 year old male from Canada had spent \$100 on a reissue of Weezer's 'Pinkerton' album, whereas respondent 42 a twenty-five year old male from Nashville, countered: 'If it costs 45 dollars for a reissued copy of Pinkerton, you're doing it wrong.' Whatever the attitude, it was centred around the issue of pastness and newness.

An art which ever increasingly contains reference to its own history demands to be perceived historically; it asks to be referred not to an external referent, the represented or designated 'reality', but to the universe of past and present works of art. Like artistic production in that it is generated in a field, aesthetic perception is necessarily historical, inasmuch as it is differential, relational, attentive to the deviations (ecarts) which make styles (Bourdieu 1979 pp. 3-4).

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104 Respondent 333 a 35 year old male from Reading

105 Respondent 61 a 41 year old male from Dublin

106 Respondent 67 a 29 year old male from Birmingham, AL

107 Respondent 47 a 35 year old male from Portland, OR

## The Lived and Unlived Past

The past's fluidity and complexity can also be explored through notions of age. Those that took part in the survey (between 16 and 59) have different experiences of the past simply by the fact of how old they are and this is reflected in the age range of the respondents quoted directly above who had an understanding of the standing of originals. I would like to introduce a marker or division of the past here. Not (in this instance) in relation to the chronological periods discussed in earlier chapters, such as the four disc eras, but in relation to individuals regardless of how old they actually are. Each individual has a marker of the past as experience, or *lived* and the marker of the past as unexperienced or *unlived*, or more simply the chronological periods before you were born and after you were born. Whilst the youngest collectors were not born during the era of vinyl as the dominant format when 'Records were the only way to buy music at the time'<sup>108</sup>, their collections are not markedly newer at least not in terms of the age of music and records within it. Of course, not all respondents collected vinyl from their unlived past one respondent explained:

My oldest record's release date is 1999, when I was 10. So haven't really branched out to far than what's been produced in my generation. I do like that with the internet the way it is now, that I have access to bands I would have never found on the radio or in any other way. I'm so caught up in what's out there now that I haven't really had the time to go back to what's already been released<sup>109</sup>.

The younger collectors in their teens similarly collected Pink Floyd, The Beatles, Scott Walker and The Beach Boys. One 16 year old respondent paying '£50 for a sealed copy of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's Unfinished Music No.2: Life With the Lions'<sup>110</sup> (1969). The older collectors, whilst similarly collecting music of this era also mentioned the fact that these records (The Beatles et al) were the first records they remember and the first records they bought as new releases. Whilst this produces commonality in collecting culture it presents each group, based on the lived/unlived dichotomy, as expressing different notions of the past, the idea that 'because it is our home – the past is where we come from' as Lowenthal (1985 p. 4) argues, I might suggest that whilst it may be our home, the past is where we *go to* if it is, or even if it is not, within our 'lived' experience. Vinyl is arguably the vehicle many collectors use to travel home to the past 'I own a first pressing of The Beatles' A Hard Day's Night.

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108 Respondent 164 a 54 year old male from Oregon

109 Respondent 321 a 23 year old male from Arizona

110 Respondent 328

Holding it in my hands, I feel like 1964 wasn't that long ago. The fact that it's tangible makes it more real' claimed a respondent born in 1993<sup>111</sup>. Or another respondent in their early twenties states that 'Records from before I was born offer a material link to the past, like holding and listening to history'<sup>112</sup>. There is, arguably, a difference here; collectors, around their late teens in the economic boom of the nineteen sixties, surrounded by the new abundance of commodities - records included - could

[E]asily become [interested] in collecting and dealing seen as rational economic activity [...] for its nostalgic character offers security as well as identity; something which, within postmodernism, can relieve the fracturing pains of the postmodern condition (Pearce, 1998 p. 15).

If the baby boomer generation in particular were nurtured in the accumulation of childhood goods and toys, then what of their children and Baudrillard's (1994) assertions (discussed in the previous chapter) regarding the childhood propensity for collecting and placing this collecting in a discourse where 'they were the living sum total of the past' (Spitz, 1979 p. 134). This can be situated in the growing field of 'youth transitions' where 'extended transitions in which firm adult commitments such as marriage, childbearing, home ownership and dedication to career are taken on more gradually or unevenly than in the past, while leisure and lifestyle habits remain 'youthful' for longer' (Hodkinson 2012 pp. 1 - 2). Whilst this extension of youth as category may be problematic in traditional approaches to subcultural involvement, for instance in heavy metal culture where Deena Weinstein refers to ageing fans of the genre as 'Wistful emigrants, no longer able to fully participate in the scene, with involvement restricted to occasionally playing their old records' (2000 p. 111), in this instance, in relation to record collecting, it is the playing of records that forms the ultimate end product of the cultural activity. However, that is not to say that record collectors are not part of other cultural taste groups.

The past however is a time that *had* become distinct, separate from both the present and the future; eras which are, arguably, similarly 'constructed'.

Only in the late eighteenth century did Europeans begin to conceive the past as a different realm, not just another country but a congeries of foreign lands endowed with unique histories and personalities. This new past gradually ceased to provide comparative lessons, but came to be cherished as a new heritage that validated and exalted the present (Lowenthal 1985 p. xvi).

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111 Respondent 172

112 Respondent 72 a 22 year old male from London



## The Past Divided

According to Lowenthal (1985), what it is that makes the past different from the future can, in order to be understood as distinct ways of thinking about time, be subdivided into four categories and these four categories in themselves require further subdivision. The initial division of the past separates into antiquity, continuity, termination and sequence, with antiquity being further divided.

'Antiquity's chief use' Lowenthal suggests, is 'to root credentials in the past' (p. 52), that is to give status to something because 'it's ... it's so *old*' (ibid). The old is a common marker in the stories and descriptions of the collectors interviewed and can be considered relative to the age of the respondents and their corresponding lived and unlived experience. One seventeen year old respondent replying to questions of how they became a collector:

I discovered a box of old 8 tracks in my father's closet, and he bought me an old 8 track player so I could listen to them. It had a record player on top, so I soon accumulated some records to play on them. I believe the first record I got was by the Beach Boys, but I don't remember what it's name is<sup>113</sup>.

She goes on to say:

I love the sound of the crackle before it begins to play, how you can hold music in your hands and how incredibly fragile it is. I like collecting old records because I like the stories behind them, knowing that they are 'previously enjoyed' and the joy you feel when you find a diamond in the ruff. The hunt for music is so thrilling and worth every second<sup>114</sup>.

The Beach Boys also make an appearance at the upper end of the age scale where a fifty-two year-old male remembers that he 'Just loved the idea of being able to listen to what I wanted to, when I wanted to. First record - Good Vibrations 7' by the Beach Boys, picked up at a school fair'<sup>115</sup>. His enjoyment seemingly archaic in an age without having to wait, save, travel or spend to listen to music when one wants to. This initial category of oldness - antiquity - can be further divided into four further categories: precedence, remoteness, primordial and primiteveness. Precedence, Lowenthal suggests 'makes things more precious: anything that was here before us gains status by virtue of its antecedence' (p. 53). This came through linguistically in some responses with one collector exclaiming: 'I like relics of the past!'<sup>116</sup>. In musical

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113 Respondent 76 a 17 year old female from Ontario

114 Respondent 263 a 20 year old female from Washington State

115 Respondent 293

116 Respondent 128 a 29 year old female from Toronto

terms the canonical narrative of influence leaves fewer avenues of creativity for the contemporary musician; the precedence of the 'greats' appearing more authentic via their relation to the past, leaving the trail of influence audible, or indeed, visible - 'tracing back to an original that validates the contemporary'(Moore, 2002 p. 215). This, in itself, can include producing vinyl records - 'otherworldly object[s]. Its power is way beyond its physical dimensions' (Marr, in Osborne, 2012 p. 117).

Remoteness, as a sub-category of antiquity, is relative depending on the depth of the past. In general terms Lowenthal gives the example of American and British heritage with, he suggests, the British past having greater status as *their* past, the historical antecedence of the nation stretches so much further into the temporal past than that of America. This is complex in record collecting terms, even though the historical trace of vinyl is shallower by comparison. Old records are not considered better or more collectible by virtue of their chronological distance from the present alone, although of course those collectors who do collect these very first recordings would argue otherwise, but their 'vinyl-ness' gives them status - 'The older stuff gives me a look at the past and the newer stuff is more authentic'<sup>117</sup>. Once the past has been turned to, each era will have its canonical artists, recordings and pressings, as well as ephemera. These eras and genres represent taste groups and preferences, it is scarcity and rarity that drive the prices of records predominantly as well as these individual taste group's discourse of its specific canon.

The time warp cultists drive to correct History. But is also related to their need to somehow expand the golden age, make it last longer. This trick is pulled off by fetishising the second – and third – division groups of the era; in a sense taking advantage of the overproduction of the music industry by retroactively overrating its unsuccessful products (Reynolds, 2011 p. 205).

The remoteness of musical history as chronology as well as the remoteness of musical history in terms of sales, obscurity and rarity, is also complicated by the relation of these two markers to the individual collector's remoteness to them through the lived/unlived relationship to the chronology. That is the oldest respondent has forty three years more lived experience - or less remoteness - than the youngest. So much of the vinyl produced over the course of the second half of the twentieth century is in circulation in the present that one does not have to look deeper to reach older records. As such the objects themselves may not be any more or less physically remote to the collectors; it is the collectors themselves (like the

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117 Respondent 111 an 18 year old male from Pennsylvania

countries in Lowenthal's examples) that have varying remoteness. In this sense it is people rather than objects that embody pastness.

The third subdivision of antiquity – primordial – is concerned with the roots of the present in the past and is 'focused on origins rather than on ancientness' (p. 55) and can be seen in the collecting of those influential rather than statistically popular acts that lead to the emergence of a genre (The Stooges, MC5, New York Dolls, Electric Eels et al in terms of punk, or Blue Cheer, Deep Purple, Vanilla Fudge and Pentagram in the case of Heavy Metal). The primordial, then 'speak[s] to a *context of origin* through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value, it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands' (Stewart cited in Schor, 1994p. 255 my emphasis). This in itself is part of the creation of the past, of antiquity and impacts on notions of taste as opposed to economics. 'Record-collector culture needs to open new frontiers, and it does this by reinventing the past: re-drawing the map of pop history and valorising the disregarded and discarded' (Reynolds 2011 p. 151).

Collecting practices undertaken today become the past of tomorrow, or at the very least secure and archive certain musics into the past. The effects of these decisions can, in turn, create the past for future collectors and scholars, and then these records can become souvenir objects, or become so through the souvenir collecting practices of some record collectors. These souvenir objects, Windsor suggests, have the power 'to carry the past into the future' (1994p. 50). Of course these collective collecting practices can have far more complex outcomes. Country blues is a case in point. As a term it can be traced to the liner notes of recordings (re)issued in the nineteen fifties of music recorded decades earlier music that 'became the emotional outlet for Negro singers in every part of the South' (Charters in Hamilton, 2007 p. 181). When the 'Blues Mafia', a highly influential group of collectors, active in the east of North America in the nineteen fifties, began to study, collect and publish their views and reviews of the music, a split occurred over the criteria for such discussions. Samuel Charters' preference was to focus on 'the musicians whose recordings black Americans of the 1930s had bought' (Ibid p. 182). James McKune however, when commenting on Charter's book 'The Country Blues' (1959) suggests as many have done since, that sales do not necessarily represent 'quality'.

This is my important point. I know twenty men who collect the Negro country blues. All of us have been interested in knowing who the great country blues singers are, not in who sold best. On his own basis, the best selling blues singers,

Charters may be all right. But I write for those who want a different basis for evaluating blues singers. This basis is their relative greatness, or competence, as country blues singers (in Hamilton, 2007 p. 183).

That one side of this argument ultimately prevailed can be seen in the way that McKune's preference for artists such as Charley Patton and Robert Johnson won out over Charter's preference for the more commercially successful Lonnie Johnson and Leroy Carr - Now Patton and Johnson are arguably more commercially successful through back catalogue than their initially more successful counterparts. This constant re-appraisal impacts not only on future tastes of those that buy and paw over the liner notes of re-issue compilations but also the fictional, partial histories of popular music that emerge from them. 'Radical movements throughout history have often envisaged their goals not as revolutionary but resurrectionary: restoring things to how they used to be, a golden age' (Reynolds, 2011 p. xxvi). In record collecting culture, the resurrectionary can create the past as it never was and promote 'new' pasts, fictional, partial and skewed histories.

Lowenthal's next subdivision; the primitive, is, arguably the most pertinent in terms of vinyl itself (as well as the romantic reminiscence of the contemporaneous ideologies), in the sense that it is the 'purity' of the past 'unspoilt by later sophistication' that persuades us (collectors) 'that modern technical skills cheapen and corrupt' (ibid). This can of course concern recording techniques and equipment within genre worlds but vinyl records become the common denominator here, although these too are subject to technological change and issues of taste. As early as 1952 the place of shellac as vinyl's antecedent was impacting on collecting culture and taste.

A major auction of choice jazz rarities held by the record trader Francis Wolfe collapsed when the recordings failed to make their minimum bids. While a few collectors held out for the original discs, most were content with the new reproductions and poured scorn on (as one collector put it) 'the jerks who pay ten bucks for an original Louis that's available on a dozen private labels at 79 cents (Hamilton, 2007 p. 175).

These objects speak of antiquity regardless of taste. This can relate to those records that are produced before the recuperation of 'deviant' or new musical tastes into what Dick Hebdige calls 'the commodity form' (1979 p. 94), when those 'symbolic challenges' become 'mass produced objects' even if 'it is difficult in this case to maintain any absolute distinction between commercial exploitation on the one hand

and creativity/originality on the other, even though these categories are emphatically opposed in the value systems of most subcultures' (Ibid p. 95).

Beyond antiquity, continuity is the second categorical marker of pastness, the unbroken stream or endless chain<sup>118</sup>. This chain may well be researchable in terms of genealogy but in musical terms the act of historiophonography allows the collector to narrate, to author his or her own diachronic musical history. A history that is selective and can remove the one-hit-wonders, the novelty hits and passing fads of history, the musical diversions made in the name of fashions (Slade's skinhead years, for example), to write out (collect out) the later work of once great artists (post Ozzy Osbourne Sabbath for instance), or even to collect in the early works of later pop performers (Billy Joel's recordings as the group Attila for instance)<sup>119</sup>. [R]ecord collectors, renegades against the irreversibility of pop-time's flow, taking a stand against the way that styles go out of fashion or run out of steam, leaving in their wake a legion of cruelly forgotten performers' (Reynolds 2011 p. 93). This gives the collector the ability and power to concentrate on canonical construction of the authorial collector's own making, in the author's own taste, in their own (historical) image, creating a 'dimension of existence as essential to us as it is imaginary' (Baudrillard, 1994 p. 16). Combined with the partial fictions of primitiveness this imaginary world really does create the past as a foreign country - unknown and unknowable.

Termination, Lowenthal's next marker of the past, I would argue, gives great peace to the collector even if it is a problematic marker. The past as an historical era, is over and 'The Collection is the unique bastion against the deluge of time' (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994 p. 1). Once a period of history (musical or otherwise) is over, it loses the ability to change (at least in terms of the sound and the look, the artefacts), it is safe, sanitised; 'nothing in the past can go wrong' (Lowenthal, 1985 p.62) has a comforting quality about it. Although to those who have not succumbed to the epidemic of nostalgia the past has simply achieved 'mnemonic sterility' (Schor, 1994 p. 255). Whilst sterile, or fixed, the collector/author has the ability to write history, the parameters are somewhat stable, the writing and collecting is palimpsestic, it can write over writing, it can write over itself, collect over collecting, partially, selectively,

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118 The name of a Texan historical newsletter. P. 57 LOWENTHAL, D. (1985) *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

119 These examples are ones that demonstrate my own taste, my own feelings about particular artists, groups and performers.

but the trace origin remains. Whilst the past is terminated, the very act of engaging with it gives it continuity.

Lowenthal's final category of pastness is 'sequence'. 'The present' he argues 'is an indivisible instant' (1985 p. 63), the past however is a length of time that can be divided, subdivided, studied section by section like the strata of rock or the rings of a tree. In record collecting terms this length can be arbitrarily decided upon by the individual, dependent on factors of taste and other limitations self imposed to aid the collecting process (for myself this is broadly, but not strictly, 1968 – 1972).

'[S]equential order gives everything that has happened a temporal place, assigns the past a shape, and sets our own lives in an historical context' (Lowenthal, 1985 p. 63). This sequentialism, like continuity, gives the collector the power of writing history, narrating in and narrating out all but the most perfect examples of the past that one yearns for 'by establishing a fixed repertory of temporal references that can be *replayed* at will, in reverse order if need be' (Baudrillard, 1994 p. 16 my emphasis). If the collector constructs the memory themselves it preserves the past in a controlled way and removes the 'lucky chance amid the processes through which the past inexorably vanishes' (Forrester, 1994 p. 245) 'a fringe of the world that [...] submit[s] to the same constraints of association that inform the way we set things out in space' (Baudrillard, 1994 p. 15). Collectors then, have a complex relationship with the past, the historical past is a fluid idea, a changing idea, a country with moving borders and shifting language, their very historiophonographic engagement with it like wind shifting sand, not allowing it to settle.

### **Other Pasts**

Historical time is not understood universally beyond notions of 'the past' and there are other markers of time that also link the present to the past - work time and leisure time - for example, leisure time being where most amateur collectors situate their collecting. Leisure, along with consumption, Appadurai states, 'is rendered residual', what is left over from time spent working and 'Leisure activities become the very definition of discretionary consumption [...] where both space and time mark distance from work' (1996 p. 79). In this leisure space and time, we exist 'In a landscape where nostalgia has become divorced from memory, involves new forms of labor: the labor of reading ever-shifting fashion

messages' (1996 p. 80). This space too is complex, where 'The valorization of ephemerality expresses itself at a variety of social and cultural levels: the short shelf life of products and lifestyles; the speed of fashion change' (Ibid). Record collecting can arguably be seen as resistant to some of these notions of shelf life and speed of change. No longer are vinyl singles or albums seen as ephemeral - that job has been taken on by the newer formats and the non physical MP3, downloadable, instant, shufflable, deletable. Records are, arguably valued not for their 'now-ness' but rather their 'then-ness'; an attempt to slow down time, change and ephemerality rather than surf the speed of their change. 'It's a different type of listening experience' one respondent suggested 'a 'slow' listening experience'<sup>120</sup>. Or, as another respondent claimed: 'I feel that it is a natural nostalgic swing against the ownership-free, physical-free download/stream/share world'<sup>121</sup>. This, of course, can be read in subcultural terms where Hebdige read the style of skinheads as being utilised 'in order to effect a 'magical' return to an imagined past' (Hebdige 1979 p. 97). Collecting accompanying consumer objects such as vintage hi-fi equipment, like the skinhead's boots and braces, cannot effect return to the lost past, to the imagined golden era (of choice), but arguably marks out lived traditions that are valued and shared. Whilst the records and accompanying ephemera and equipment create an experience of past, the memories 'rich and evocative as they are, they are, like other memories of the past, imaginary rather than 'real'' (Belk 1988 p. 550). Whilst the memories themselves may be imaginary, the act of reaching them is described by collectors in very real terms - 'Record collecting is like archaeology and history. There is nothing better than going through a load of old records as it tells more about our previous generations and cultures than any history book will ever do'<sup>122</sup>. I would argue that collectors are more than aware of the passage of time and the changes in both music consumption, in the broadest sense, and reissue culture in a more specific way; a forty year old collector from Dublin's previously quoted feelings about barcodes being a case in point. In present practice the aspects of vinyl consumption that were once seen as flaws in the format, these same aspects are now seen as part of the enjoyment (Biddinger 2008) part of the organic; the real. Or as respondent 278 put it 'It's okay to crackle

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120 Respondent 279 a 39 year old male from Brighton

121 Respondent 339 a 45 year old male from London

122 Respondent 342 a 41 year old male from the UK

sometimes - the music 'lives'<sup>123</sup>. In fact, of those respondents that mentioned the snap, crackle and pop of vinyl, all of them spoke of it in positive terms - adding to the experience, connecting to the previous plays or owners but always reminding the listener that they are listening to vinyl. 'The long-standing enemies of 'fidelity' in playback: surface noise, scratch, hum, and hiss. To render music free of noise is to grant it its proper musical status as sonically autonomous, whereas such noise foregrounds the music object as such' (Corbett 1990 p. 89). If, as I have suggested earlier, the vinyl record represents the physical manifestation of the aura of past and present popular musics then the crackle and pops are the audio manifestation of it.

Most of the collectors surveyed used digital mediums as well as listening to vinyl with one collector suggesting 'I have an iPod, some newer records come with a digital download card which i take advantage of, sometimes i even transfer music from the records onto my computer. but it's nice to have the computer and iPod switched off and listen to some good ol' analog'<sup>124</sup>. Whilst this respondent has a relaxed attitude to the different formats and their relationships to the past, others had more complex relationships with the past: 'My struggles with MP3s/iPods probably shows that I'm stuck in the past a bit too'<sup>125</sup>. Baudrillard suggests that this is not merely 'escapism' that situates the collector at odds with the present day but

[S]uch an alignment is a secondary issue, for what really matters is the systematic of the collection as it is experienced. In fact the profound power exerted by collected objects derives not from their singularity nor their distinct historicity. It is not because of these that we see the time of the collection as diverging from real time, but rather because the setting-up of a collection itself displaces real time (Ibid p. 15).

The displacing of real time in this way allows a cyclical and uninterrupted historicity constructed by the collector where they can 'symbolically transcend the realities of an existence before whose irreversibility and contingency he [sic] remains powerless' (ibid pp. 15 -16), 'for the nostalgic, the world is alien' (Turner, 1987 p. 149) or as Brett Milano puts it: 'For some collectors, it's not just about acquiring a bunch of records. It's about living in the pop culture era of your choice' (2003 p. 197). This it could be argued, away from Baudrillard's suggestions of the fear of death, is

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123 Respondent 278 a 31 year old male from Germany

124 Respondent 263 a 20 year old female from Washington

125 Respondent 332 a 35 year old male from London



one of the fears of the collector, or at least a fear projected on to the collector. One respondent echoed the final questions in the monthly 'The Collector' section in Record Collector magazine that asks the chosen collector 'How do you think that you will eventually dispose of your collection?' (Anonymous, 2010) which elicits a series of responses from the individual collectors. Respondent 293, a 52 year old male from Glasgow with amongst other things, twenty five thousand seven inch singles, pondered: "What will happen to your collection when you are no longer around?" I must admit this has crossed my mind a number of times.'

In the last quarter of the twentieth century we have the dubious privilege of seeing both the beginnings of the human romance with things in the distant past, and also its possible end, in the all too imminent future. For the first time in history there is an increasing awareness that the resources of energy that have fuelled material expansion are finite and that their desperate pursuit threatens the continuation of life on the planet (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton in Goulding 2001 p. 581).

Resource threat aside, the death of the author of the collection may also, without a new curator, cease to be. As Freud argued: 'Just one thing: a collection to which there are no new additions, is really dead' (cited in Forrester, 1994 p. 227). The collection however can die without the collector - or as a twenty seven year old collector from Birmingham Alabama puts it: 'I suppose the only real distinction I can think of is if the person still adds new records to the collection. A 50 year old guy who has 500 records that haven't been touched in two decades might not really be a collector whereas a guy with 25 records who actively purchases new additions is in my mind'<sup>126</sup>.

Vinyl records can be seen to have both a real, lived, relationship with the past as an autobiographical marker, as a story and a way of collecting life stories - 'Many of my most-prized records have a personal story with them. I can remember where and when (and why) I bought them. Like buying Can's 'Monster Movie' in their home city of Cologne when I was 16. So it is more than just the record that has value, but the memories and history that goes with it, which I suppose in collecting and antique terms is provenance'<sup>127</sup>. And then there are those songs within our lived experience that we have a relationship with, that represent 'our lost youth and seek out easy ways - like an old favourite song - to evoke old feelings of youth for a fleeting

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126 Respondent 67 a 27 year old male from Birmingham, AL

127 Respondent 234 a 53 year old male from Dunedin

second' (Strausbaugh, 2001 p. 28). Then there is the unlived experience, antiquity, the imaginary past.

[C]onsumption is increasingly driven by rummaging through imagined histories, repetition is not simply based on the functioning of simulacra in time, but also on the force of simulacra of time. That is, consumption not only creates time through its periodicities, but the workings of ersatz nostalgia create the simulacra of periods that constitute the flow of time, conceived as lost, absent or distant (Appadurai 1996 p. 78).

Whichever historical period the song belongs to 'the preference for vinyl [being] grounded in it being the original historical artefact, with an associated perceived authenticity as a sound carrier, related to its sound and packaging, and the listening process/experience' (Shuker, 2010 p. 67) and the cumulative past experience which may, of course represent multiple pasts, different eras of music, complicates the experience of the music fan.

The collector who unpacks his old books and restores his library does not simply 'own' or memorialize the past but also disrupts the present: his collecting and re-collecting make immediately visible and relevant, against his will, what was forgotten, past, or dead (Lewandowski 1999 p. 155).

Through this chapter the relationship between the collectors and their records and their wider collections has been explored through the notion of the past. What and when the past is from collector to collector is as varied as it is from collection to collection. Two identical record collections may well have a different relationship to the past. That is the age of the collector will situate some of the records held within the collection as more or less remote from the lived experience and potentially closer to the unlived experience. This can then be further complicated by the presence of new, reissued vinyl albums and singles. How these collections are then articulated, reviewed, released and received, contributes to further ideas about the histories of popular musics. Artists, upon having their music reissued can be given greater status than they ever were during their initial careers (or even lives), through this reissuing culture and then by the collecting habits of contemporary life.

Whilst the past itself may seem fixed - or offer the sanctity of termination as Lowenthal suggests or as Fleetwood Mac suggested 'Yesterday's gone, yesterday's gone' (McVie 1977) - this is not strictly true. There are unreleased resources out there that can be unleashed at any time. Even the old music is new to fresh ears and this is not reliant on the lived/unlived dichotomy. The social life of records is much like the metaphorical frozen sea; they remain static, frozen in time until the thawing act of buying, finding or digging act upon it, stylus like, and the 'new' music is released to

the collector, who then in turn places the actual stylus on the disc and releases the music through the speakers.

'Progress is not always a straight line, sometimes we must go backwards' (Fellgett in Milner 2009 p. 198).

## Chapter Five: Nostalgie de la bou

Instead of remembering here a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug into the wall; and listen to the past (Virginia Woolf 1939<sup>128</sup>).

Open your heart and sing to a song that was a hit before your mother was born (McCartney 1968).

Where the previous chapter situated vinyl and the consumption of it in terms of the multiple pasts - the various and vicarious *whens* of vinyl - this chapter explores the ways in which collectors access these pasts. How they imagine the pasts, and collect the pasts; the how of vinyl collecting, the how of nostalgic consumption. And whilst it might be suggested that 'Time, unlike space, cannot be returned to - ever; time is irreversible' (Hutcheon in Wilson 2005 p. 22), objects and memories from the past, can be returned to; they can be pondered, collected and discussed, primarily because of their very thingness. Whether those records and the memories associated with them are part of the lived experience or the unlived experience, detailed in the previous chapter, there is still the sense of returning or revisiting. To revisit them, to look back, to 'experience an exotic antiquity' (Lowenthal 1985 p. 21) is a complex journey of nostalgia; a journey where vinyl can act as a physical or semiotic marker of lived or unlived pasts. 'It symbolizes youth'<sup>129</sup> claimed one twenty five year old collector, comparatively and complexly connecting something old with the notion of youth, vitality, newness. However, the question of whose youth needs to be raised. The youth of heritage acts such as The Who or The Rolling Stones? The youth of that particular collector? Or youth culture? A culture increasingly colonised by those beyond their teenage years. Youth, then can be something in the past. 'There was a constant comparing of the past with the present in which the past took on the aura of a near-sacred time' (Goulding 2001 p. 584).

Whilst Lowenthal suggests that 'Getting into the past is a feat imaginatively achieved in myriad ways' (Ibid p. 20), we might now suggest that the past is multiple, that getting into the pasts is the feat undertaken. Even for the individual collector the past is multiple, getting to myriad pasts in myriad ways. The complexities of the pasts

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128 Cited in Lowenthal 1985 p. 13

129 Respondent 25 a 25 year old male from Tyne and Wear

of collectors narrated by one forty two year old respondent in personal and historical terms:

Its partly nostalgia. I bought records initially because that's all there was, then because at uni I fancied myself as a DJ and then afterwards because I though[t] they were cool. Over the years buying records has become something that defines me. [...] I like the history of records- finding out the connections between the artists and the genres I like the size of them - for the cover art but also because they are slightly impractical I like the search for records - you never know what you are going to find or where I like owning things that are not readily available to everyone<sup>130</sup>.

What exactly is it that the collector is nostalgic for? Once again the music contained within vinyl records must be discussed separately from the vinyl object itself. Whilst we cannot physically separate out the two, there are distinct differences. If one was purely nostalgic for music then CDs or MP3s may well be sufficient to satisfy. 'Vinyl seems more dissident, though, and more of a defiant throwback: it means that you're literally re-entering analogue time [...] The absence of digitally enabled consumer convenience means that analogue formats enforce a more sustained mode of listening, more contemplative and reverent' (Reynolds 2011 p. 125). The way that the practices of nostalgia - owning things that are not readily available to everyone - creates distinction will be discussed in chapters six and seven. But collecting and nostalgia can be linked on several different levels; one can be nostalgic for past memories where music is the trigger, or one can be nostalgic for past rituals of music listening, for people, for places and experiences. Vinyl collecting and vinyl listening can be a gateway to, or for, a number of imagined and magical pasts and also resistances, or reactions to, the present (but always from the present).

### **The Past of Nostalgia**

Nostalgia as we understand it today, at least in popular discourse is, somewhat ironically, a relatively new idea about the *pasts* that has developed and mutated at various points over the last century into new forms of use, practice and understanding. Its initial meaning declining from its shocking 'invention' or discovery, in the late seventeenth century shifting through the mid nineteenth century; its last traces in its original form removed from American military medical discourse around the time of the first LP pressings, in the late nineteen forties. Its new form emerged and overlapped with the old meaning as a palimpsest from the eighteen-fifties

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130 Respondent 3 a 42 year old male from London

onwards, into the twenty-first century where it comfortably writes over both its initial meaning as well as much of contemporary life. Janelle L. Wilson (2005) suggests that it was in the late nineteenth century that nostalgia began its 'de-medicalisation' and began to be re-imagined as something more akin to an emotion. In perhaps its most simple form it can be described as

[A] preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) towards objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth) (Holbrook in Goulding 2001 p. 566).

It was also around this time of reclassification that its meaning shifted in terms of what it was exactly that one was missing, what one was painfully or wistfully remembering. Its throw-away meaning today, its 'bad rap', as Wilson puts it, in relation to contemporary fashions and kitsch revivalism, of the good-old-days, of 'disposable memoranda from us to ourselves' (Boorstin cited in Lowenthal, 1985 p. xvii), and the relationship to history (rather than History) situates it as a 'universal catchword for looking back' (Lowenthal, 1985 p. 4). Where discussion of nostalgia in relation to popular culture inevitably leads to Jameson and the nostalgia film relying on a variety of cultural texts to 'reawaken a sense of the past' (Hayes 2006 p. 53), it deserves some exploration and debate, particularly in relation to other temporal concepts – memory, history, the past, reminiscence – as well as comparisons to its primary meaning and the practice of record collectors and their engagement with autobiography, with souvenirs (as defined with the collecting typology in the previous chapter) can be undertaken. After all, nostalgia has been similarly defined as 'passion de souvenir' (Sarobinski cited in Lowenthal, 1985 p. 10). As such, and with one of the categories of collecting being directly linked to souvenirs, it could be argued that the very process of collecting, at least in this sub-category, is nostalgic, as Baudrillard suggests 'The problematic of temporality is fundamental to the collecting process' (1994 p. 15).

The spatial aspects of nostalgia were redefined (or surgically removed) as temporal around the time of the de-medicalisation of the term in the late nineteen forties, leaving it somewhat slippery and ambiguous, and in the contemporary world arguably both meaningless and polysemic, a kind of sickly semi-feeling, a 'bittersweet recall of emotional past events. Nostalgia is a type of autobiographical memory' (Mills and Coleman in Wilson 2005 p. 23). Or as one collector-respondent put it: 'the autobiographical aspects of one's record collection. Some records refer to certain

places and people. It's like my journal in a way'<sup>131</sup>. That is not to say that there are not multiple discourses of nostalgia beyond the broadest popular usage of the word as well as these autobiographical and individual relationships with it. There has been a small, but significant, amount of writing and study of nostalgia – Boym (2005), Wilson (2005), Appadurai (1996), Turner (1987), Wernick (1997), Holbrook (2001), Goulding (2001) and Davis (1979) among others, as well as a wide and multi-disciplinary range of texts regarding memory, the past and the problems of history and historiography. There have, among the above authors, been multiple ways of exploring, explaining, bifurcating, and defining nostalgia. Wernick, for example suggests a psychoanalytic reading of the nostalgic urge, of

[T]he wounded narcissistic ego - exile and return - to that presented by irreversibility and human finitude. Going forward is towards death, going back moves you away from it. How comforting then, that going back should also be a movement towards the primal unity of the mother herself (1997 p. 220).

To apply these varying typologies to the practices of record collectors (as opposed to collectors in general) is an important analysis. They have not previously been explored in temporal or nostalgic terms, only described (and oft derided) en masse - 'The vinyl subculture is 'made up of those who, for various reasons, resist technology or progress and determinedly cling to the artifact, collecting or preserving a part of it because of the meaning and experience contained within' (Plaskettes in Yochim and Biddinger 2008 p. 184). However, the contemporary collectors are not technological luddites, far from it, their resistance - where there is resistance - is articulated on a number of levels. Firstly, in terms of the way they access and share their vinyl records - 'Technology [h]as offered a venue to catalog your personal collection and to search the internet for all sorts of records out there. However, the move to digital recordings and releases has taken away from the specialness of it all'<sup>132</sup>. Secondly, in relation to their listening habits 'it's rather preserving traditional established technology. Furthermore, nowadays the old technology is combined with new technology via mp3 download codes in records. I listen to a lot of music on an iPhone as well when I'm on the go'<sup>133</sup>. Thirdly, in terms of their feelings of resistance, one collector, a forty-three year old male from Olympia, suggested not resistance but that he was

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131 Respondent 308 a 33 year old male from Finland

132 Respondent 163 a 24 year old male from Minneapolis, MN

133 Respondent 266 a 29 year old male from Rodgau

[A] bit disdainful. I've come to realize that consumers as a whole value convenience above quality. Digital sound has not proved itself to be of higher quality than analog, but it is easier to carry around, so it has won the day. MP3s are a great example. The highs and the lows are clipped and you aren't really hearing everything the artist recorded. Show someone a compressed video and they will immediately notice the poor visual quality but do the same with an mp3 and they will just shrug their shoulders. People trust their eyes more than their ears<sup>134</sup>.

And finally, as a way of testing a liking for music before investing in the purchase of it on vinyl - 'I don't think I am resistant to developments. I just prefer to use digital music as a way to judge whether or not I like a record enough to buy it on vinyl'<sup>135</sup>. Technology allows the contemporary collector the access to the past and, in the above instance, to *assess* the past. Whilst these collectors have a 'passion for collecting' that includes partial or temporary 'loss of all sense of the present' (Rheims cited in Baudrillard, 1994 p. 15), smart phone 'apps' such as CeeFrenzy, eBay, Around Me, create the collector as time traveller, able to access the temporal regardless of the spatial. As Pearce suggests: "Free' time becomes something different when simulation and nostalgia are at the heart of everyday experience' (1998 .p 52). If the record collector is a time traveller, 'a record is a time capsule and a phonograph is a time machine' (Eisenberg 1987 p. 37).

However, let us 'look fondly back' at nostalgia's etymological and medical origins. Nostalgia is (was) a disease, a deadly (if not always fatal) disease, a disease that has killed many<sup>136</sup>, a disease that threatened epidemics in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, a 'contagious disorder'. An affliction that threatened military operations, and *so* worried the upper ranks of the military, that malingering recruits would be threatened with being buried alive if they persisted in the complaint. The word itself was coined by Swiss medic Dr Johannes Hofer in 1688 and is only pseudo-Greek; being culled from two Greek words: nostos – meaning homecoming, a return to a native land, to return home, and algos – variously defined as ache, pain, suffering or grief (depending on the translation); the English equivalent being Homesickness. This spatial element of nostalgia as opposed to its contemporary fixation with temporality, is worthy of some exploration both in general terms, and in relation to record collecting.

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134 Respondent 170 a 43 year old male from Olympia, Washington

135 Respondent 215 a 20 year old female from Las Vegas

136 'They had in fact died of meningitis, gastroenteritis, tuberculosis; but everyone blamed nostalgia' Ibid.



Hofer also suggested different terms for this lethal affliction: the aforementioned 'nosomania' and also 'philopatridomania', but these terms failed to gain currency in medical or any other discourse. Originally, it was a diagnosis of a condition afflicting Swiss soldiers fighting away from home and was studied and treated as an illness, an illness that one doctor suggested thrived on its own symptoms and was effectively a 'hypochondria of the heart' (cited in Boym, 2005 p. 7). However, after the creation or discovery of nostalgia, certainly after the definition was accepted, it became a European epidemic as seventeenth and eighteenth century travel (and military service) became more widespread and the notion of a fixed home and ancestry became less stable: the more complex the notion of home the more likely *homesickness* would be. The patriotism of nostalgia is also evidenced by the varying words of a 'radically untranslatable nature' (Boym, 2005 p. 12) from poets and intellectuals of differing nationalities all attempting to claim some special linguistic relationship to nostalgia – for Germans *heimweh*, for Spain *mal de corazon*, *litost* for nostalgic Czechs, *Toska* for their Russian counterparts and *Tesknota* in Poland. For Portuguese speaking countries such as Brazil *Saudade* evokes its own particular longing, a longing that differs from the various Slavic and European meanings and serves to highlight the peculiarities of what exactly one would miss about one's homeland. But all, invariably, would.

Sehnsucht conjures up horn calls far off in the dark forest, the poignant glow of the sunset, which we will never reach no matter how quickly we race to the horizon, the snow capped peaks of a distant mountain range. Beauty, distance, and the sense of something infinitely desirable just beyond our grasp: it is perhaps in music that we can feel its full effect (Lachman 2003 p. 71).

The pride with which nostalgia is linguistically claimed is countered by an American Doctor, Theodor Calhoun who called it a 'shameful disease that revealed a lack of manliness' (cited in Boym, 2005 p. 6). Calhoun was proud of the previous failure of nostalgia to take hold in America, although this may be to do with the relatively short 'past' America had at this point in time (Calhoun was writing in 1864, during the Civil War - when nostalgia first spread, virus like into the North American continent) and the lack of 'remoteness' the collective American States' pasts had to draw upon.

The symptoms of this new mania were varied but 'auditory nostalgia [was] of particular importance' (Boym, 2005 p. 3), with Scottish soldiers being banned from playing bagpipes when away from home in case it triggered nostalgia in the troops. At other times, once nostalgia had established itself, this music of home was used as a

cure for the disease or at least a way of easing the symptoms that 'caused the afflicted to lose touch with the present' and left those with early symptoms 'hearing voices and seeing ghosts' (ibid). These ailments could be treated; Hofer suggested a variety of medical interventions – leeches, purges, emetics – other cures offered varied from the seemingly logical trip home (offered by Swiss and other European medics) to the more radical 'public ridicule and bullying' as well as 'more manly marches and battles' (ibid p. 6) offered by Calhoun, the American military doctor.

Another native of Switzerland – Rousseau – also commented on the power of music over Swiss nationals a little later in the eighteenth century. Commenting on the playing of the 'Rans-des-Vaches' it was suggested it would cause the Swiss troops to 'melt in tears, desert, or die, so much would it arouse in them the desire to see their country again'. Rousseau also claimed the music would not have the same effect on other nationalities and from this suggested it 'Does not act precisely as music, but as a memorative sign' (cited in Boym, 2005 p. 4). Or that it was not the intrinsic qualities of notation and musical notes but the cultural association of pieces of music with cultural memory. 'The music of home, whether a rustic cantilena or a pop song, is the permanent accompaniment of nostalgia' (Boym, 2005 p. 4). This medical and philosophical idea is echoed in more populist and contemporary commentary on music's relationship with time, and increasingly with the past:

I have music that is from periods of my life that I don't like musically so much anymore but they act like a diary of that time, I like how a song can bring back memories like a photograph - I keep virtually no photos of my life... but you can traverse my adulthood (when I started collecting proper) via a big chunk of my collection - both personal and professional life<sup>137</sup>.

Or as Kelly suggests: 'In the popular imagination, music narrates history' (in Kelly and McDonnell 1999 p. 231). Ideas about the past, about history have changed, not just in terms of postmodernism where our 'Disenchantment with today impels us to try to recover yesterday' (Lowenthal, 1985 p. 33). In more specific terms Wolk suggests that 'record collecting and trying to change the world are roughly the same thing' (in Reynolds 2011 p. 149). But time, like nostalgia and history, has shifted in terms of our understanding of it across time at a variety of intervals; for instance the invention of the mechanical clock in the thirteenth century (shortly after the development of musical notation and the first written 'recordings' of music – and heralding the shift from the folk stage to the art stage explored in chapter one). Time, as well as being dissected into measurable units, was also split into the more philosophical divisions

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137 Respondent 190 a 47 year old male from Auckland, New Zealand

of past, present and future where we were here (spatially) as a result of the past (which had gone temporally). The collapse of modernism's 'Grand Narrative', the collapse of any cohesive sense of progress, of Utopia to come has, 'In these postmodern times, when so many threats and obstacles to constructing and maintaining a coherent, consistent self abound,' Wilson suggests, 'the acts of remembering, recalling, reminiscing, and the corollary emotional experience of nostalgia may facilitate the kind of coherence, consistency, and sense of identity that each of us so desperately needs' (2005 p. 8). Whilst Wilson suggest these things give stability to self, the complexity of the objects and our relationship with them was highlighted by the respondents, one collector giving concrete examples:

But music isn't really something you can know completely. It's always changing. If records do anything for my knowledge of music, it helps bookmark the sentiment of certain bands and albums in my life. Recently I had picked up T. Rex's 'The Slider', an album I haven't heard since freshman year of high school, 4 years ago. When I played it on my turntable for the first time, it brought me back to the classic rock bands I grew up on in 8th grade and onward. It shifted me into an area of music I hand't explored in quite a while. So the stuff I know about music is never constant, because my preference is never constant. It's all in the flow, and the records help keep me on that flow for as long as I ride it<sup>138</sup>.

The past is both remembered as, and constructed as, a time that has, in a variety of narratives, far more utopian qualities than the future would appear to offer us. If music narrates history and accompanies nostalgia, it is of little surprise that nostalgia and record collecting should be discussed together. This may be due to some relatively simple ideas or serendipitous events. If vinyl production started in earnest in 1948 and ended in its heroic phase of production in the nineteen nineties (a decade in to the third disc age) and the 'golden age' of popular music started with Dylan and ended with Nirvana (Hayes 2006) (roughly speaking the 1960s to 1990s), then vinyl, as the technological carrier du jour of this golden age, carries with it an aura of authenticity attached to this historic/nostalgic golden period.

### **Types of Nostalgia**

But nostalgia as well as being a democratic disease is also, like record collecting, a disease of 'individual sickness' (Boym, 2005 p. xvi). Like collecting and like collectors and the various states commodities can occupy, a variety of typologies

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138 Respondent 79 a 19 year old male from Long Island, NY

has been offered. Brian Turner (1987 p. 150 - 151) suggests that the paradigm of nostalgia has four major dimensions. Firstly the idea of 'historical decline and loss', where we have exited the 'golden age' that represents home. Secondly 'The loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty' where the value systems of the 'golden age' appear to be missing in the contemporary world. The third dimension, 'The loss of individual freedom and autonomy', is the aspect of nostalgia that positions the individual in a world where they are 'subordinated to the rationality of instrumental reason and capitalist relations of production'. Finally Turner suggests: 'the loss of simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity', all further restrained by the bureaucracy of the age. Whilst on a physical level, vinyl represents, or represented, the physical and the tangible, the real and the material of music consumption, its decline in standing can represent loss of both the value systems and the physical products that (now) represent them. 'I mourned the loss of the booklets and packaging'<sup>139</sup> suggested one collector. Similarly, vinyl can - as was discussed in the previous chapter - be away of resisting the present as a way to celebrate an imagined past that speaks, to its community, of certainties and fixity - moral or otherwise. And whilst Turner's nostalgic dimensions take on a Marxian quality suggesting 'the isolated individual is increasingly exposed to the constraining social processes of modern institutionalized regulation, which gradually undermine the individual, who is strangled within the world of state bureaucracies' (ibid), this, like many negative explorations of nostalgia, does not necessarily reflect the feelings and experiences of record collectors. 'it's fun grabbing nostalgia from High School on vinyl and randomly popping it on every now and then'<sup>140</sup>. Whilst this light hearted approach to 'High School' nostalgia contradicts some of the negativity expressed in the role of nostalgia, it should be noted that this particular collector was twenty-three years old and this particular aspect of their lived experience was yet to gain any sense of Lowenthal's remoteness. Janelle Wilson suggests that nostalgia can be social, in the sense that it can be personal, shared or a commodity as well as a nostalgia being a way of thinking about, imagining or describing the past.

[N]ostalgia is an intra-personal expression of self which subjectively provides one with a sense of continuity. Nostalgia is an interpersonal form of conversational play, serving the purpose of bonding. Nostalgia is a form of ideologizing or mystifying the past. Nostalgia can be used as a cultural

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139 Respondent 148 a 36 year old male from Rome, Georgia

140 Respondent 115 a 23 year old male from Kansas City, MO

commodity derived from the experience of a particular age-cohort and transformed into a market segment (2005 p. 20).

And whilst Wilson hints at the market segmentation through nostalgia, the dual aspect of modern music on a nostalgic format means that record collecting is a market segment that is not necessarily driven by demographics - 'I love the nostalgia that listening to records provides, and I love having something that I can pass on one day'<sup>141</sup>. I would argue that beyond this intra-personal experience of market segmentation where nostalgia can be used as a cultural commodity, cultural commodities can be used as displays of nostalgia and expertise in ideological aspects of record collecting and musical histories. Whilst markets of nostalgia can be created by industry - much like the manufacture of rarity - nostalgic markets can be a form of resistant consumption. As Taylor suggests: 'Fans are not true cultists unless they post their fandom as a resistant activity, one that keeps them one step ahead of those forces which would try to market their resistant taste back to them' (in Hills 2002 p. 27). Respondents described their social engagement with others through record collecting, not in terms of nostalgia exactly, but if the vinyl record is a deliberately chosen object that represents the past, the engagement with it is, I would argue, a nostalgic one (this social aspect of collecting will be explored in chapter seven). 'I ended up bonding with my best friend over the summer going back and forth to a record store close to town. Its helped me get closer to people I never really knew that well originally'<sup>142</sup>. As a non-normative way of consuming music, the bonding experience can be both significant and pervasive through life experiences - 'My collection is shared with my spouse. And the first conversation we ever had was about music. Also it has created and solidified friendships with similar-minded people. We also tend to prefer cities with good music stores for our holidays'<sup>143</sup>.

Fred Davis suggests – although importantly he does so in a thesis in 1979, a few years before the explosion of postmodern reflection and the cries of the end of history – that there are three successive orders of cognition and emotion in regard to nostalgia: first order (or simple) nostalgia, second order (or reflexive) nostalgia and finally third order (or interpreted) nostalgia. In simple nostalgia the dichotomies of then and now and good and bad are intertwined to create a relatively one-dimensional sentimentality perhaps most often expressed in the term 'the good-old-

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141 Respondent 182 a 32 year old female from Clayton, New Jersey

142 Respondent 79 a 19 year old male from Long Island, NY

143 Respondent 308 a 33 year old male from Finland

days'. Whilst for Davis these are the individual's days, for the contemporary nostalgic these can be from any era but most often the 'golden era'. In reflexive nostalgia Davis introduces a Freudian theme much akin to the ego where not only does the nostalgic acknowledge the impossibility of the return but also acknowledges the selective construction of the nostalgic memory, effectively policing the nostalgic memory. In this scenario the nostalgic brings in McCarthyism to counter the white-picket fence, or in musical terms brings in The Archies' 'Sugar Sugar' to counter Captain Beefheart's 'Trout Mask Replica'. There is a realisation that those 'old days' were both good and bad in varying measures. In interpreted nostalgia, Davis suggests that the knowingness of the emotion is brought in to play at a deeper level and a more questioning element to the purpose of the nostalgic feelings expressed. This self-awareness of the purpose of the nostalgic feeling is again one of personal history and experience. However, these elements can be further bifurcated in relation to the lived/unlived experience, with the inclusion of nostalgia for cultural commodities, ideologies and practices of a pre lived era. This makes Davis's ideas only partially useful in this thesis as there is no place for nostalgia for the unlived in his work. Whilst the lived experience can be edited in nostalgic terms - the original context of the individual and their cultural memory can make an impact. For the unlived experience there is no context and so the collector/nostalgic has, in one sense, greater freedom to construct a 'perfect' past.

Whilst Davis's model makes three divisions in the relationship with the nostalgic past as a singular 'lived' idea, Svetlana Boym (2005) splits nostalgia along its etymological lines going back beyond the Swiss medical naming to the two Greek terms that together define the condition. *Nostos*, she suggests firstly (Although Lowenthal offers *Nosos* in his definition) – the return home - this is what Boym argues is restorative nostalgia, a nostalgia which 'puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up memory gaps' (p. 41). And secondly *algia* (again Lowenthal offers a different version *algos*) – pain or suffering – this is what Boym calls reflective nostalgia, a condition that 'dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance' (p.41).

### **The Lived/UnLived Experience**

I would suggest an initial simplistic division (along nostalgic lines) in the collecting habits of those buying music that coincides with the division made in the previous

chapter of the lived and unlived experience. Simon Reynolds (2011) explores the parameters here in terms of the 'recent past' and distinguishes 'Retro' from other forms of looking at the past – history or nostalgia by situating it as a condition that is concerned with its immediate past, meaning within living memory. He also suggests that Retro is different as the source material is retrievable, which makes reliable and rigorous copying of it possible for the first time. He links the idea to the twentieth century by its association with popular culture and more than this to an eclectic approach to it; its 'playfulness' making more than a nod to postmodern theory particularly in relation to pastiche, the 'appropriation of forms and styles' (Roberts 2002 p. 125) to create an homage to Hayes' golden age.

But within this recent past there are distinctions to be made. Firstly there is a blurred division between those born into the era of vinyl's position as premier method of musical delivery and those born into the era of vinyl's demise. Beyond this technological development there are those whose taste in music transcend the lived or unlived experience. Those whose nostalgia is for, partially or completely, the lived experience, can be aligned with Boym's category of the restorative where nostalgia's function is to repair or reinforce memory gaps of the individual's life. What may distinguish this kind of restorative nostalgic from the reflective, may be as simple as their date of birth. There is a faction of the record collecting fraternity who *were* there (both spatially and temporally) in any particular era of the production of vinyl or shellac (although obviously these groups are getting smaller in some cases – early blues and folk). These collectors are patching up actual memory gaps, they are essentially returning home and vinyl allows them to do so without the 'modern machinations' of the CD or MP3 formats. These foreign formats, that did not exist at the time of initial release, point out their distance (temporally if not spatially), from home by speaking to them in a language, or format, of another country. Rather than the past being a foreign country where they do things differently, the future, or the present is the foreign country here where alien formats recreate the language of the past but always retain their foreign accent. There may be 'an element of nostalgia in middle aged folk rediscovering their records and firing up the turntable again'<sup>144</sup> suggests one collector - although not self referentially. This notion was confirmed by another collector of a similar age discussing the vinyl from his 'Teenage years (I just reacquired these records because of emotional value)'<sup>145</sup>. One's teenage years and the

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144 Respondent 1 a 43 year old male from London

145 Respondent 276 a 47 year old male from The Netherlands

music soundtracking them were a common thread through the discussions of the respondents; their imagined and remembered pasts illuminated from the present. One twenty three year old respondent reminiscing that ‘The music I listened to as a teenager helped shape who I am, and having records of that music are important keepsakes for me’<sup>146</sup>. However, it is worth pointing out here that the music one listens to in one’s teenage years is not necessarily the music that was released during one’s teenage years and this can complicate this initial splitting of nostalgia, and I will return to this notion when I have discussed the second group. The experience of nostalgia, at least for Davis, works through the focus of the nostalgic in terms of figure and ground.

[T]he nostalgic reaction in such situations consists of a psychological inversion of the figure-ground configuration of daily life. Much as in the familiar gestalt silhouette of the vase that suddenly is seen as two faces in profile, the nostalgic reaction similarly inverts that which is *figure* and that which is *ground* in our lives. During the developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood it is, on the mundane plane of daily life, the anxieties, uncertainties, and feelings of strangeness about the present and future that constitute *figure* for the youth while *ground* is composed of familiar and likable persons, places, and identities from the past. [...] the nostalgic reaction inverts the perspective: the warmly textured past of memory that was merely backdrop suddenly emerges as *figure* while the harshly etched silhouette of current concerns fades into *ground* (Davis 1979 p. 58).

It is not made clear in this argument what happens to those who think fondly of times before their lived experience. In contrast to those that *can* return home through this vinyl revisiting and return to teenagedom, there are the collectors of vinyl (and of course memorabilia etc) originally produced and distributed before they were born, or even, as The Beatles sang, before their *mothers* were born. These, I would argue, are Boym’s ‘reflectives’. These collectors are arguably homeless and nomadic. They were never at the home they so yearn for, they have never been to the spatial/temporal past and can only wallow in Boym’s ‘imperfect process of remembrance’. These collectors may not have been born during the ‘golden era’ of popular music but wish to turn to it, if not return to it, rebuild it, construct it through the vinyl object(s) that permeate their collections; after all, ‘The yearned-for past also inheres in its relics and records’ (Lowenthal, 1985 p.xix) and as such to collect them, to own, arrange and narrate them, ‘To have a piece of tangible history links one with its original maker and with the intervening owners, augmenting one’s own worth’ (Lowenthal, 1985 p. 43). The language of nostalgics showing their position to

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146 Respondent 73 a 23 year old male from New York



these objects, one collector suggested there was 'Also - the antique factor. There's something fascinating about holding a record from the 60s and listening to it and imagine it's over 40 years old'<sup>147</sup>; or as Evan Eisenberg suggests: 'The true hero of consumption is a rebel against consumption. By taking acquisition to an ascetic extreme he repudiates it, and so transplants himself to an older or nobler world' (Eisenberg 1987 p. 15). To extend the spatial metaphor, these collectors can only build the map to home, draw it through collecting, whilst looking for it. 'My taste has long been informed by music that was made before I was born. Soul, 80s punk, and power-pop all pre-date me considerably, but that's the music that means the most to me'<sup>148</sup>. This allows them a place in this history (as well as its curator), to be on their way home to a time where they may have felt more comfortable – and again without the tell-tale machinations of the present that shatter the illusion. 'One of my favourite parts of albums is the artwork- how and why it looks the way that it does. With digital music, so much is lost. I prefer vinyl to CD for a variety of reasons, but mostly due to the historical aspects of the medium'<sup>149</sup>. The CD I have argued<sup>150</sup>, can only act as the post card home – it highlights through its very being that one is not at home, that one is here, now, not there, then, when CDs did not exist. Of course there is a more logical explanation for having a preference for music that was made before one was born. An eighteen year old collector from Connecticut simply states that more of their collection is from before they were born because 'More music was made before I was born than after'<sup>151</sup>. Beyond this rationality, collectors described their relationship with vinyl in historical terms. 'Records from before I was born offer a material link to the past, like holding and listening to history'<sup>152</sup>. 'All my records are from before I was born. I have been drawn to the music of the past. Discovering how popular music has changed in themes and emotions from the early part of recorded music to now'<sup>153</sup>.

This again situates a difference between the restorative and the reflective collector; the restorative may well be seeking a simpler time that they were party to in

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147 Respondent 11 a 38 year old male from Sweden

148 Respondent 144 a 23 year old female from Wisconsin

149 Respondent 148 a 36 year old male from Rome, Georgia

150 IASPM conference Liverpool July 2009 - see appendix 15

151 Respondent 70 an 18 year old female from Connecticut

152 Respondent 72 a 22 year old male from London

153 Respondent 187 a 20 year old male from Seattle

their youth. Reflectives may well be rejecting contemporary values, culture, ephemera, but it is a selective rejection; a rejection of what is being 'fed' to them rather than how it is fed. 'Many seem less concerned to find a past than to yearn for it, eager not so much to relive a fancied long-ago as to collect its relics and celebrate its virtues' (Lowenthal, 1985 p. 7). Whether reflective or restorative, the collector questions the present 'By converting the past into a Utopian home-stead, nostalgia may lay the foundations for a radical critique of the modern as a departure from authenticity' (Turner, 1987 p. 154).

### **The Limits of Nostalgia**

Whilst this is a simple division along the lived/unlived nostalgias, the restoratives and reflectives, it is important to return to the point raised above that what one engages with, musically, in one's teenage years is not necessarily the contemporary popular music and wider culture that is produced at that time. One can hear the music of other countries and other eras, the music played by relatives, by parents who, in turn, may well be engaging in some nostalgic consumption themselves. One's own experiences are not distinct from family experiences and so the music that can be heard during childhood or adolescence is not just the music that we choose to encounter. As described by respondent 77:

I was really into Punk in my teenage years. So most of the records I bought during that time are punk. I grew up listening to my dad's collection. When I was about 15 my dad gave me his collection so I have lots of classic rock albums from before I was born. Even though these weren't in great condition. I love these as much as any other. These records turned me on to Otis Redding, Al Green, Bob Dylan, the Stones, etc<sup>154</sup>.

At times that music can be the music that can then inform the developing, changing narrative of the tastes of the collector.

I think that the reason most of my records are from the 70s and 80s (those from the 70s and very early 80s would be from before I was born) is that the first records I came in contact with were my mother's, and she mostly had records from her teens and early twenties. Her musical taste influenced my own, and so when I started collecting records that was still the type of music I was into and wanted to listen to in the vinyl format<sup>155</sup>.

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154 Respondent 77 a 33 year old male from Austin, TX

155 Respondent 39 a 29 year old female from Alabama

And then there are those that describe only certain elements of their record collections as a nostalgic engagement with music.

Records from my teenage years make me feel nostalgic, and I love listening to them from time to time. Records from before I was born are my favorite, they make up a majority of my collection. I grew up listening to Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and The Beatles, so I love collecting these records that were released well before I was born<sup>156</sup>.

There are, as argued above, complex relationships with even the most simple attempts at the division of nostalgia. I would argue that these typologies are a series of sliding scales rather than definite typologies – how distant (either temporally or spatially) does a collector have to be to qualify as reflective? And can a collector from the UK with a fascination (instilled in the fifties and sixties) for surf guitar music for example, ever return home? Or can he or she only ever return to a place where their temporal nostalgia is relieved or authenticated? As they were never in the mythical Californian ‘Surf City’, their spatial nostalgia can never be assuaged in the ‘unproblematic geographic location of home’ which ‘cannot account for the possibility of a dislocation as constituting the foundation of ones being or at any rate one’s collecting’ (Talpade Mohandry cited in Schor, 1994 p. 259). In this case the nostalgia becomes what I would add to Boym’s reflective/restorative dichotomy as a self-reflexive nostalgic, or as a character from Toby Litt’s novel ‘I Play Drums in a Band Called OK’ puts it ‘what I felt nostalgic for now was my ignorance and my idealism. I longed for my longing because all I had now was my *having*’ (2008 p. 157). Similarly the reflective nostalgic can have very real memories of music that forms the basis of their nostalgia and collection, if the music before their birth was played to them in their youth by parents, relatives etc.

But interestingly, what returns as nostalgia for the parental generation constitutes a kind of new experience for the young generation [...] more intriguing yet, when today’s adolescents reach middle age it is probable that their nostalgic revivals will include symbolic fragments and residues of what had been the nostalgia of their parents. This second time around, passed on reflection of their parents’ youth is, to be sure, bound to be a highly attenuated version of the original, having upon receipt already been smoothed and prettified through the filter of the parent’s nostalgic memory [...] but questions of the historical accuracy or contextual fidelity of nostalgia-borne echoes from one generation to the next are, as far as people’s collective identity is concerned, a good deal less important than the fact that they occur at all. Indeed, given the severe historical dislocations of the modern world and the rapidity of social change, it seems unlikely that this leapfrogging of nostalgic memory over

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156 Respondent 127 a 21 year old female from Miami, FL

decades can continue in unbroken fashion for more than a few generations (Davis 1979 pp. 61-62).

This long passage is important to discuss as Davis, the first sociologist to explore nostalgia, initially claimed that 'the weight of testimony seems to suggest (we shall have more to say on this later) that the past which is the object of nostalgia must in some fashion be *personally experienced* (Davis 1979 p. 8 my emphasis). It was not until the late nineteenth nineties and early two thousands, that this distinction was challenged. Whilst Holbrook tentatively challenged this notion suggesting, that 'it does seem plausible that one could identify nostalgically with people, places, or things from a bygone era that one has experienced only through books, films or other narratives (Holbrook in Goulding 2001 p. 568), Andrew Wernick suggests that 'the term's further extension as a mildly contemptuous descriptor for golden age myths of all kinds' (1997 p. 219) is acceptable. This counters Davis's claim that one can only feel nostalgia for something that we have direct experience of. The vicarious nostalgic then, experiences

[A] strong sense of identification with figures and movements from previous eras, and an affiliation with the past, or more specifically with periods that were felt to have been aesthetically or intellectually superior to the present [...] This was coupled with a need to preserve these legacies for the present and the future [...] as such identification was based more around an emotional or spiritual association, rather than a need to recreate and experience a fun-filled pastiche of a particular period (Goulding 2001 pp. 584 - 585).

It also does not take into account the long history of British, and more widely speaking, western, youth cultural practices, mentioned in the previous chapter, where a rebellious rejection of the present creates, for the briefest moment, a void of ideology, style and practice. This can only be filled with imagined futures or imagined pasts. Whilst there are those subcultural groupings that engage with future fetishisation, such as Cybergoths, most post-war British youth cultures have filled the void with romanticised notions of the past. For the Teddy Boys it was Edwardian dress. For the Hippies it was the natural fabrics and ideologies of a pre modern world. Punks may well have engaged in bricolage, but it was a bricolage of past and spatially remote elements. In essence, youth - and by association - pop culture has constantly engaged with past practices as a way of distinguishing themselves with the present. This practice is itself, older than subcultural practice, or at least subcultural theory, Elizabeth Wilson introduces another kind of nostalgia that situates this practice in line with the rebellious and for the rebellious nature of bohemianism (a graphic

representation of the models of nostalgia and the lived/unlived experience can be found at the end of this chapter). For her there is a nostalgia *for* Bohemianism that may well invoke a bohemian attitude or behaviour which, she argues, is always nostalgic in the first place. Beyond this, she also suggests that 'Bohemia was simultaneously associated with nostalgia, located from the very beginning in an idealized past' (Wilson 1999 p. 14) with successive bohemians,

[P]lacing of the 'real' Bohemia always in the past represents a displacement of the perennial unease about the authenticity both of the claim to 'be' an artist, and the authenticity of art, particularly experimental art. Bohemian nostalgia also expresses a chronic ambivalence towards experimental art's 'opposite': mass culture' (Ibid).

Record collecting is, like subcultural practices before, one such way of situating a mass product in opposition to mass culture. After all, the music on these mass produced objects can be avant garde as well as commercially driven, and as vinyl production becomes situated as a heritage act, the product itself can be situated in a romanticised, bohemian past. A 25 year old collector from New Jersey simply stating 'I still appreciate music as an art form and not just another mass produced product'<sup>157</sup>, whilst another collector believes that

[T]he pervasive popularity of digital music has, for many reasons, bred a general lack of regard for artists and their work as a complete body. I view vinyl records as interesting artifacts of a time when music fans listened to and appreciated music as the artist intended it'<sup>158</sup>.

After all, one person's old records are potentially someone else's new records, the longevity of ownership or the multiple ownership of the record giving the object status - 'The fact the artefact has a history. How potentially off beat and bizarre they can be. A cool physical form given to the strange and esoteric'<sup>159</sup>.

This bohemian nostalgia, whether restorative or reflective, drawing on subcultural practices that make physical the ideological dissatisfaction with the present - however partial - links back to the chapter of this title; *Nostalgie de la bou*. This nostalgia, the literal translation of which is nostalgia for the mud, is one where the nostalgist is unable to escape the depravity of the past (Harvey 2009). Its first use in 1885 in the play 'Le Mariage d'Olympe' by French playwright Emile Augier, where a character damns another by saying 'Mettez un canard sur un lac au milieu des cygnes,

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157 Respondent 205 a 25 year old male from Essex County, NJ

158 Respondent 217 a 25 year old male from Minneapolis, MN

159 Respondent 4 a 42 year old male from London

vous verrez qu'il regrettera sa mare et finira par y retourner'<sup>160</sup>. Later uses of the phrase, including one in 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' tended toward the sexual and the crossing of class boundaries in such trysts. Here I would argue it can be used both in the literal sense as a nostalgia for dirt in the pops and crackles of vinyl, in the crude physical interaction (discussed in the next chapter), alongside the ideological return to previous practices. And whilst, as discussed in previous chapters, vinyl itself can transgress, be in between, object, objet, abject, abjet, Eisenberg's (1987) very rich, very poor and very odd return to previous practices and products without the class distinction of either traditional subcultural theory or the connotations of sexual transgression noted.

That the pasts are multiple, depending on both collector and collection was established in the previous chapter. The ways in which the sample collectors engage nostalgically with the past further complicates the notion of popular music history and the objects that have been produced there/then. Nostalgia is not a constant feeling or emotion, much like other emotions and the collectors here display a variety of engagements with it. The lived/unlived division does play a part here, not in terms of how the respondents are nostalgic, but what they are nostalgic for. As Andrew Wernick argues, this 'might be individual, but it also might be collective and historical' (1997 p. 219). They can have nostalgic feelings for both the lived and unlived experience simultaneously and this can drive certain aspects of their collecting habits. Beyond this the complication of the music, as opposed to the format brings in what Wilson describes as the 'ideologizing and mystifying of the past', where the collectors may well have differing feelings about the music of the past but a more cohesive collective feeling of nostalgia, politically about records themselves.

[T]here is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control, that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces. Popular culture is always a culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology' (Fiske in Wilson 1999 p. 26).

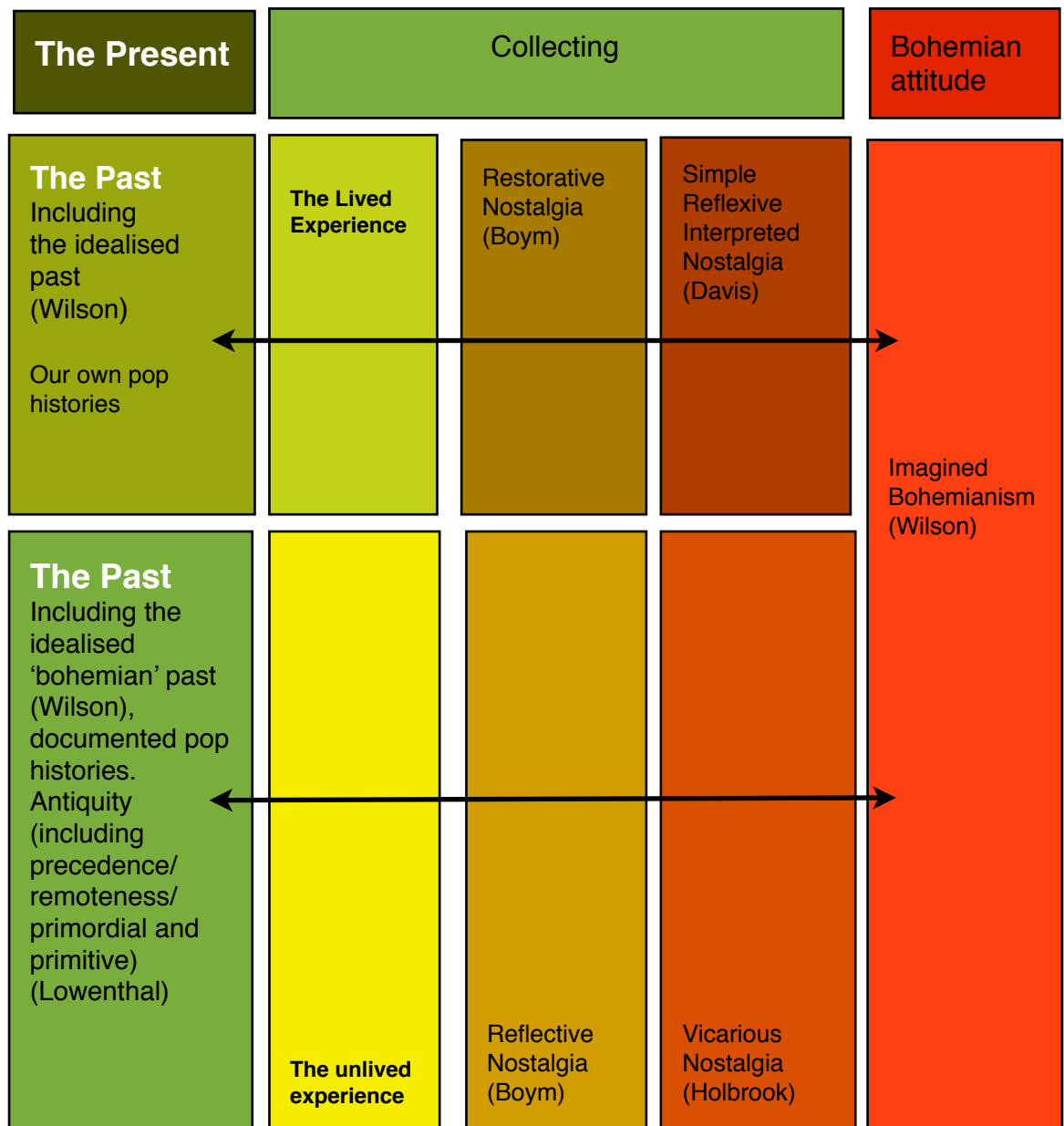
Whilst theories of nostalgia have not previously taken on board the ransacking of the past by subcultural practitioners - a practice that was theorised by members of the Birmingham School before Davis's fundamental book on the sociology of nostalgia - this too goes some way to explain the connection between contemporary record

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<sup>160</sup> Put a duck on a lake in the middle of swans, and you'll see that he will miss his pond and end up going back there.

collectors and popular culture as a form of symbolic resistance. It also allows for fandom of eras well into the unlived experiences of record collectors and music fans in general as an extension of resistant fandom practices established in the nineteen fifties. The taste of these self-reflexive, reflective and restorative nostalgics is explored in the next chapter.

Fig 14. A model of Nostalgias



The above model shows how the present maps against the models of nostalgias discussed in the chapter. It is divided against the lived and un-lived past



## **Chapter Six:**

# **The Taste (& Feel, Sight & Smell) of Vinyl**

Taste does not come by chance; it is a long and laborious task to acquire it  
(Sir Joshua Reynolds in Bayley 1983 p. 15).

Did you hear me touch you with my eyes?  
(Bryer, Muir et al. 1971).

The previous chapter explored the idea that vinyl, as a medium, a format, is both a way to access a variety of pasts and also a marker of these various pasts themselves. The dimensions of nostalgia as marker of loss (Turner 1987) or a strategy for dealing with loss musically and ideologically was explored. If vinyl is being used to build a collection that then demonstrates something of the collector's self in relation to this loss, their relationship to music and specifically to the past, then individual records and the collection as a wider entity speaks of taste. To talk of taste and collecting vinyl records is to say nothing and everything. Records themselves are carriers of recorded sounds and as such have held almost every kind of music within their grooves; certainly up until their demise as the premier format of music consumption. One respondent succinctly sums this up when responding to the question 'what is it that you like about records?', he explained it was because 'There is music on them'<sup>161</sup>, and he was not the only one to do so. As discussed in chapter one, in the earliest days of record collecting, the medium itself was not of great importance in the discussion of taste. Collecting classical works with particular conductors, orchestras and soloists was, and still is in this particular sub group, the marker of quality. Record collecting was, as previously explored, established before the formats that most contemporary collectors cherish were introduced. In 1947, a year before the launch of the 33 1/3 long playing record, Paul Affelder's book 'How to Build a Record Library: A Guide to Planned Collecting of Recorded Music' was published. This was not the first, or indeed the last, book to be produced on the subject but the focus was on taste – how to acquire the most tasteful library – rather than on the records themselves as objects. 'Only when records began to be taken for music itself (rather than as 'records' in the strict sense of the word)' (Thornton 1995 p. 27) could the

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161 Respondent 308 a 33 year old male from Finland

thingness of music, their recordness become invisible, acting as I have argued, as their aura. As such, vinyl records, standardised by size, by shape and to some extent colour, whilst acting as the aura and authority of 'music' itself, could say nothing about individual tastes: rock and roll looked like classical, pop looked like jazz. Only the music, once released from these identical records alongside the record sleeve, could speak of taste.

### **Records as a marker of taste**

In the contemporary world however, collecting records says something about the tastes of the collector perhaps above and beyond the tastefulness of the music held within them. In chapter three I outlined Evan Eisenberg's model of the need to collect. The final two needs he outlines are the need to belong (discussed in the next chapter) and the need to impress others or self. Here he suggested that the love of a cultural form, or format, did not necessarily mean that one liked it. That is loving records does not necessarily equate to liking music. This distinction is illustrated in a 1991 edition of Peter Bagge's underground comic *Hate*. Bagge drew a series of prophetic panels where Buddy - the anti-hero of the comic book - meets Phil and they joust about their tastes - Eventually it boils down to one thing when Buddy asks:

'Tell me, do you own a CD player?'

**'Of course not'** [Phil exclaims - The bold type representing his disgust.]

'Hmm, Maybe this guy's alright.' [reads Buddy's internal dialogue.]

(Bagge 1991 p. 13)

Formats, in the contemporary world, speak of taste as loudly as the music held within them; whether the microgrooves of the vinyl record, the pitted surfaces of the CD or the ones and zeroes of digital files. Whether we are supposed to associate with the Buddy character in Bagge's work or to scoff at his (sub)cultural snobbery is unclear. Either way we are positioned by our response.

Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed (Bourdieu 1979 p. 6).

As with previous chapters, such as the discussion of vinyl collecting's place in collecting discourses, the focus here – taste – does not sit easily within one theoretical

discipline. At times those theories of taste cannot be easily applied to record collectors and their collections. Records, generally, are positioned within the sphere of popular culture and therefore popular cultural tastes even though the parameters of what can be recorded are as expansive as any musical or artistic hierarchy. This is, in part, because records are still invisible as objects in broader collecting discourses, grouped together with other media - 'Records, tapes, CDs and videos were put in a group together, and books and photographs were added to the same group' (Pearce 1998 p. 32). However, within the narrower, specific vinyl collecting world those records speak a hierarchical language of connoisseurship, capital, resistance and resistant consumerism, a variety of nostalgias, knowledge, bohemianism and canonical scholarship.

Studies of popular culture have tended to embrace anthropological notions of culture as a way of life but have spurned art-oriented definitions of culture which relate to standards of excellence [...] High culture is generally conceived in terms of aesthetic values, hierarchies and canons, while popular culture is portrayed as a curiously flat folk culture. One is depicted as vertically ordered, the other as horizontally organized. Of course, consumers of popular culture have been depicted as discerning, with definite likes and dislikes, but these tastes are rarely charted systematically as ranked standards (Thornton 1995 p. 8).

Following a broad cultural trajectory alongside postmodernism, the collapse of many cultural, economic, social and artistic distinctions, and their relationship to cultural capital and popular cultural taste, cannot be pinpointed to a specific moment or moments. Instead they unfold slowly through the second half of the twentieth century alongside the collapse of the present and future into the past. A move from hierarchical and monolithic taste culture with Thornton's 'flat folk culture' at its base, to myriad taste cultures, each with their own particular and often peculiar hierarchies, have created a peculiar association to the things we choose to surround ourselves with.

[T]he rapid-fire pace of capitalism is destroying our relationships to objects. All this drives me back, but what drives me is a desire to connect, not to relive things. It's not nostalgia. [but] spaces for ecstatic regression we homage the past to mourn, to celebrate and to time travel (Muhly in Reynolds 2011 p. 83).

Muhly's suggestion rejecting nostalgia whilst simultaneously defining it. The accumulation of these things from the past/present and how they are presented and present themselves in accordance with our tastes has been a phenomenon that runs concurrent with the development of mass produced objects.

[B]eginning late in the seventeenth century, is the emergence of an astonishing number of institutions for making a diversity of human artefacts public – as commodities, usually for pay – in order to satisfy a burgeoning demand for the delights, but also for the social distinction of connoisseurship (Abrams in Gombrich 2002 p. 43).

In the contemporary taste world, or more specifically within the contemporary vinyl collecting taste world, it would appear almost impossible to suggest that there were any ‘works of so-called ‘light’ music or classical music devalued by popularization [...] and especially songs totally devoid of artistic ambition or pretension’ (Bourdieu 1979 p. 16). Whilst for Bourdieu, the music itself is the marker of taste, of capital and of class, in the contemporary world, vinyl itself *before* the music is engaged with, speaks - if not in terms of class - of capital and distinction regardless of the quality of the music within them. In fact, that which is without artistic ambition or pretension can hold a special place for the collector and specific kinds of collectors who amass novelty records, library records, bubblegum pop of the seventies, lounge and other musics once considered merely kitsch or throwaway. Rather, I would suggest in a new post-vinyl economy, ‘A new hedonistic consumer has come into being, whose demands are no longer regulated by an ‘economy of needs’ but by an ‘economy of desire and dreams’, or the longing for something new and unexperienced’ (Gronow 1997 p. 74). The dream and the dreamlike feature in the narratives of the collectors here: ‘A collector probably has a list of the dream records they always look for’ suggests one collector<sup>162</sup>; mental or physical, achievable or distant ‘I have wish lists, wants lists [...] records I dearly want but can’t afford. My ‘lotto winners’ dream is to live a simple life buying and collecting records in a run down house for the rest of my days - surrounded by friends and beer’ responds another<sup>163</sup> (qualifying the statement with a parenthetical post script ‘I’m not a socially inept loser’). Or one step further: ‘My dream is to own my own record shop’<sup>164</sup>. The new and the unexpected in Gronow’s new taste world can be situated (as discussed in previous chapters) both geographically and historically and, of course, can be situated as/in both.

Exoticism or strangeness can play a part in this taste construction whether spatial or temporal. ‘The formative principle in exotic collecting is the extremely eccentric or bizarre character of records outside the canon of popular as well as ‘high’ culture’ (Vaher 2008 p. 343). Whilst Vaher has a specific taste area, if not a genre, in

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162 Respondent 220 a 37 year old male from Oregon

163 Respondent 190 a 47 year old male from Auckland

164 Respondent 127 a 21 year old female from Miami

mind in this study, he draws on the work of Vale and Juno (1993) who describe 'Incredibly Strange Music' as 'easy listening, promotional, novelty/comedy, religious, sound-tracks, spoken word, children, celebrity, as well as instrumental headings like accordion and organ' ( p. 2). Whilst in this argument there is an attempt to situate a subset of collectors away from the canon of popular music itself, arguably, and at least to some respondents, the format itself can be seen as strange or exotic, outside of popular tastes, or imagined to be eccentric and bizarre, even if not actually described as an 'Incredibly Strange Format'. 'I could never buy digital music. It's like paying for something invisible. I want something to hold, something physical to account for my love of music, but CDs just seem too easy. You can make CDs at home. Vinyl is special'<sup>165</sup>. Or, as Wendy Fonarow suggests, 'Vinyl is thought of as the original form of musical recordings, and though it is a technologically mass-produced object, it has become traditional when contrasted with the newer CDs' (Fonarow 2006 p. 48). This distanced, harder to find, aspect of vinyl was a common response from the collectors. It, I would argue, situates vinyl itself as exotic. Once the music has been stripped away, vinyl is outside of the canon - although within the collecting world, only that which is *on vinyl* can be considered within the canon. The positioning of vinyl as difficult to find or engage with was described sometimes in economic terms; the notion of paying for a tangible object. Others, in turn, distanced themselves entirely from CDs, associating them with the digital cultural world fit only to be transferred to MP3 file. 'With CDs, it always just feels like it's ripped to digital and forgotten. The vinyl is more hands on, and the pops and crackles seem to add to the experience of listening to an album'<sup>166</sup>.

At other times the difficulty of vinyl, in terms of the physical effort needed to find them in the first instance was discussed. 'Before Civilisation, so the legend goes, man hunted antelope, wildebeest and woolly mammoth. Subsequently, Island Records began to release gatefold vinyl with pink inserts, and he began to hunt that instead' (Cox 2008 p. 24); and whilst Cox's language is deliberately humorous the same language is used by collectors in serious tones. 'The hunt of finding them, owning the physical copy'<sup>167</sup>, or 'The challenge of finding them. Anyone can find the CD or MP3 of a recording. But hunting down the vinyl can be tough. Even with the

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165 Respondent 215 a 20 year old female from Las Vegas

166 Respondent 116 a 21 year old male from Flagstaff

167 Respondent 119 a 22 year old male from Ontario

likes of eBay and Discogs'<sup>168</sup>. Reynolds furthers this idea in the two fold implication of online record shopping. On one hand music is easier to find, buy, value and sell using these shopping and valuation sites, and on the other, this means that there is greater competition and expertise. 'Online mechanisms for finding, auctioning and price-comparing like eBay, Gemm, Discogs and Popsike have radically transformed the collecting experience, while decreasing the likelihood of finding a bargain in a second-hand store – since the market value of a record is only a few mouse clicks away for the owner' (Reynolds 2011 p. 96). Beyond the hunting down of vinyl records, the physical effort need to play and engage with them was discussed. 'Their sound, the way they are made, how they seem more like a piece of art than say, a CD or a download. How it is not a throwaway product, it is something to cherish, protect and dedicate yourself too [sic]. Plus, it keeps the sanctity of music intact'<sup>169</sup>. These comments are, arguably, an attempt by the collectors to distance themselves from popular cultural practices and certain, specific developments in technology and *not* from popular culture itself. Much like the fashion system can form reactions to the notion of fashionableness.

Such a fully developed fashion mechanism can provoke a counter-reaction as is the case if, instead of a fashionable set of clothes, an ordinary outfit is chosen by the consumer. In other words, consumers can get tired of continuous change and 'eternal' novelties and resort to something which is known and safe. By doing so, they can feel 'at home' in their clothes and oppose the alien social forces which tie them to a mechanism of perpetual change (Mayntz and Nedelmann 1987 in Gronow 1997 p. 80).

This resisting, or partial resisting for many respondents, of the developments of technology - at least in terms of music consumption, as opposed to music production, can be read as an attempt to distinguish themselves *within* the cultural world nostalgically - rather than positioning themselves on the outside of it. This is done through, what is now, a conspicuous display of the music collection in a world where the collection can be hidden or accessed on demand.

Today, people define themselves through the messages they transmit to others through the goods and practices that they process and display. They manipulate or manage appearances and thereby create and sustain 'self-identity'. In a world where there is an increasing number of commodities available to act as props in this process, identity becomes more than ever a matter of the personal selection of self-image. Increasingly, individuals are forced to choose their identities (Warde in Gronow 1997 p. 5).

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168 Respondent 180 a 38 year old male from Hamilton

169 Respondent 114 a 21 year old male from Leeds

As such, most respondents would buy records via the internet if that was the appropriate form, either through eBay, Discogs, via artists' or record label's websites. They would similarly listen to MP3 players, and in general terms engage with some contemporary technology and 'Pick up ideas of the past, but always through the filter of the present' (Blumer in Gronow 1997 p. 102) as a way of distinguishing themselves against the mainstream - 'I love technology and new trends so I try to enjoy them as long as possible. Vinyl is just another medium, and it just happens to be the medium I prefer'<sup>170</sup>. A slight distinction but a distinction nonetheless.

[C]ollecting vinyl [provides] opportunities to experience works by artists marginalized or excluded by conventional narratives, thus contributing to a comprehension of popular music far more complex than the relatively conventional understanding of those [...] whose consumption of music was limited to CD purchases and/or downloaded music files (Hayes 2006 p. 66).

Other collectors define themselves against the mainstream. 'I was obsessive at uni and less so but still keen to discover interesting new bands, DJs, genres. Big part of my perception of myself as outside the mainstream'<sup>171</sup>. Archivists, protectors, hunters, diggers, cherishers, the collectors attempt distinction.

[D]istinction [...] is one principally discussed as that between the 'hip' world of the dance crowd in question and its perpetually absent, denigrated other – the 'mainstream'. this contrast between 'us' and the 'mainstream' is more directly related to the process of envisioning social worlds and discriminating between social groups. Its veiled elitism and separatism enlist and reaffirm binary oppositions such as the alternative and the straight, the diverse and the homogenous, the radical and the conformist, the distinguished and the common. The mainstream is a trope which, once prised open, reveals the complex and cryptic relations between age and the social structure (Thornton 1995 p. 5).

## Visible Vinyl

Records have become more beautiful than they once were, at least theoretically. Whilst artwork will be discussed later in this chapter, here I refer to records themselves as no longer taken for music itself, no longer invisible, but - beyond their position as 'aura' - taken for a marker of taste, a marker of the past, a marker of connoisseurship, a marker of meta-authenticity, an

'[A]uthenticity' which its fans found in this music was defined not by its anchorage in the past, nor by the integrity of its performers, but by its ability

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170 Respondent 200 a 25 year old female from Dulles

171 Respondent 80 a 28 year old male from Buchanan

through its brighter aura, to articulate for its listeners a place of belonging, an ability which distinguished it from other cultural forms, particularly those which promised 'mere entertainment' (Moore 2002 p. 219).

This beautification happened partially through their trajectory from 'waste' product, that is the left over remnants of capitalist (over) production, as invisible, to luxury product (discussed in chapter two) - 'When consumers exhibit a willingness to pay a higher price for a functionally equivalent good' (Bagwell and Bernheim 1996 p. 349). Once cutting edge, vinyl production is niche and nostalgic and unnecessary for the production and consumption for music itself. Where once it was invisible, now its size, weight, bulk and fragility, make it more visible, more beautiful than ever it was. 'A lot of people just don't get it. But records, to me, are important. Music should be able to be manhandled, purchased in hard copy, and take up a reasonable amount of space'<sup>172</sup>. This collector currently owns five hundred records. What a 'reasonable amount of space' is, is again a variant in collecting culture with one collector (with two thousand records) stating 'My wife is getting concerned that we're running out of room in the house'<sup>173</sup>. In the contemporary world of digital production and consumption of music via online stores and download services (or P2P) the antiquated, redundant production of vinyl sits closer to the sphere of the hand-made, the artisan, than to downloading or side-loading. The room, effort and bulk of records, their physicality extending in to 'violent acts of appropriation [that] are necessary to transform the 'shit of capitalist production' into the sacred objects of authentic youth subcultures' (Thornton 1995 p. 9). It is, through its physicality, more expensive, and in a world of free streaming and downloading, even the cheapest vinyl product will have a free equivalent. And as Gronow suggests: 'The more expensive an object is, the more beautiful it is considered. Consequently, anything hand-made is not only more expensive but also more beautiful than an object made mechanically' (1997 p. 39). Here the mechanical is one step closer to the hand-made than digital production (physical or download), much like the letterpress produced book in comparison with e-readers. Both represent a deliberate emphasis on an often expensive, nostalgic preference for physical production that was once cutting edge but since replaced with technologically advanced formats that offer differences in the physical engagement (as opposed to the intellectual).

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172 Respondent 76 a 17 year old female from Ontario

173 Respondent 336 a 49 year old male from Bristol



Respondents were asked what was the most they had ever paid for a record. The majority of collectors had spent less than a hundred and fifty dollars for their most expensive record. However in the current market, as Reynolds points out, it is not always possible to heroically uncover the bargain records - one collector<sup>174</sup> had spent two thousand five hundred dollars on a copy of The Flaming Lips and Heady Fwends on blood red vinyl - one of an edition of ten. Similarly record consumption has moved into the sphere of luxury in that it neither 'serve[s] human well-being as a whole' (Gronow 1997 p. 37) nor does it still have its once practical easy to use quality - the whatever and whenever of listening (noted by the 52 year old Beach Boys fan earlier)<sup>175</sup>. In the contemporary world further dimensions have been added: *wherever* I want to, and further, even if I don't 'own' it. Vinyl is now, in a world of consumption that relies on a metaphorical collector in the cloud to care for and play music from the ether, often described as 'fairly fragile'<sup>176</sup> - 'scratch[ed], worn, broken'<sup>177</sup>, heavy and cumbersome (certainly in comparison to MP3s).

### **A Sense of Taste**

The notion of finding a 'diamond in the ruff' will be discussed later in this chapter but the 'love or the sound' should be addressed first. It is inevitable perhaps that the notion of the sound of vinyl records has to be discussed, but one I enter into reluctantly. The debate over the sound quality of the CD as opposed to vinyl is one that is still ongoing from wildly different positions. Neil Young's claims, in relation to digital, that 'We'll come out on the other end and it'll be okay, bet we'll look back and go "Wow, that was the digital age. I wonder what the music really sounded like. We got so carried away that we never really recorded it. We just made digital records of it"' (cited in Milner 2009 p. 185). This is countered with Roger Lagadec's hypothesis that

If you could find strange creatures that had never been exposed to music, and you were to make a comparison for them between the best manufactured LP on the planet and the CD version of the same recording and then ask which sounds better, they would look at you strangely and ask whether you are out of your

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174 Respondent 59 a 36 year old male from Laurel Canyon

175 Respondent 293

176 Respondent 234 a 53 year old male from Dunedin

177 Respondent 135 a 31 year old male from Pittsburgh, PA

mind. Because to them, with no musical tradition, the CD would obviously be running circles around the LP (cited in Milner 2009 p. 229).

There are differences between the sound of CDs and LPs - an LP that was cut with silent grooves would, when played produce 'a nice, soft, round, pink noise. Everything you're listening to on an LP is being heard through that filter of pink noise [...] It gives the record a sense of a little warmth' (Bob Woods, Cited in Milner 2009 p. 230). A warmth that is not present in the CD. 35% of collectors mentioned the sound quality of vinyl as one of the reasons they chose to engage with music and collect in this specific format - many simply pinpointed 'the sound' as their preference, 54% of those who mentioned sound added to this with the word 'warm' or 'warmth'. Only one collector expanded away from this description of the sound with

Vinyl is mastered with less dynamic range compression due to the listening environment it is aimed at, and it retains more data from the original masters. The result is a much more fun (bassy and ... Well ... Dynamic) sound with more separation between the instruments. It doesn't fix bad engineering decisions during recording, but getting vinyl usually means better mastering and a better experience<sup>178</sup>.

Beyond this, the descriptions were emotive and vague with few respondents mentioning specific differences in the mechanics of sound recording and playback. What this does suggest, however, is that 65% of collectors engage in their practice for reasons other than the sound quality of music. Respondents were not given a range of options to choose from in their preference for vinyl but simply asked what they based their preference on. 25% of respondents described their preference through the physical nature of vinyl, tangible, tactile, intimate and physical were among the responses 'I like the tactile sense of holding a record. I have all the music I could ever want at my fingertips digitally, but there's something nice and satisfying about putting on a record'<sup>179</sup>. The 'doing' of listening to popular music was an important aspect; in part the participatory nature of vinyl listening with the regular changes of records, the flipping from side one to side two 'The ceremonial, almost sacramental, act of taking a record out of its sleeve, dusting it and listening to both sides without switching it off or flipping to a new track [...] the only time I ever really listen to a record all the way through is on a turntable'<sup>180</sup> or 'The lack of intimacy between someone and their music. There's no connection when downloading, but there is an

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178 Respondent 262 a 28 year old male from Fort Worth

179 Respondent 42 a 25 year old male from Nashville

180 Respondent 61 a 42 year old male from Dublin

entire intimate experience when purchasing/playing vinyl'<sup>181</sup>. This ritualistic experience of vinyl extends into the many other areas of vinyl consumption and the listening process but, like the listening experiences and accompanied rituals are discussed as individual practices, engaged with in solitary.

It has reinvigorated my anticipation for albums coming out. There is a very tangible product to by [sic], sometimes in extremely limited quantities. The entire experience is second to none from getting a brand new album, to putting it on a turntable and really putting forth effort to listen to it [...] There's a ritual to listening to vinyl and a conscious effort to immerse yourself in an artists creation<sup>182</sup>.

This 'lack': lack of intimacy, lack of physicality, lack of conscious interaction, as described by collectors in relation to the ephemeral world of the MP3 and the culture of streaming, masks the tension between the audio, the visual and the haptic as sensory experiences. The music physically released from the micro grooves of vinyl records is disembodied, detached from the performer but connected to the physical engagement with the sleeve and the record in the process of playing and acquiring records - 'Artwork and something i can touch are important to me. I also enjoy going to a store and shopping for records'<sup>183</sup>. This lack, as described by John Corbett (1990) has, arguably, a new dimension since the time of writing. In 1990 the CD was yet to gain total supremacy over other formats only to be made redundant by the non physical instant digital file, and as such there was for Corbett only physical reproduction. In his argument, he mobilises Laura Mulvey's (1975) arguments and suggests that

In order better to understand popular music as an eroticized mass-commodity, we may conceive that gaze as directed toward-not a representation of, but the empty space of-that which threatens it: nothing. Lack. The technology of reproduction specific to our experience of popular music, that of recording and playback, carries with it the mechanism for its insertion into the economics of compulsive consumerism. For it is the lack of the visual, endemic to recorded sound, that initiates desire in relation to the popular music (p. 84).

Twenty three years later vinyl, I would argue, no longer represents the lack in only the ways that Corbett argues. In the contemporary world of popular music 'The threat of absence, of loss, creates a nostalgia for the fullness of a mythical past; pleasure is inscribed in its memory - the gap' (Ibid p. 85). and whilst Corbett describes 'the

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181 Respondent 119 a 22 year old male from Hamilton

182 Respondent 42 a 28 year old male from unknown region of United States of America

183 Respondent 56 a 30 year old male from Alberta, Canada

object's story of becoming obsolete', in collecting practice, it is the obsolete object's (vinyl) story that creates an experience in opposition to the lack of the physical. 'Turntables generally leave the record in plain view, while the disc machine consumes the CD, removing it visually and further concealing the playback process. Thus, a spatiality inherent in the technology of the record-a vestigial sense of materiality or depth-is absent in the playback of the compact disc' (Ibid p. 90). And in this scenario the record is bare; it is, like any and all other records a black disc - a visual reminder that the artist is not present. The engagement with the disc and record sleeve is another physical aspect that in the contemporary world represents the actuality of music beyond this lack and combines with its position as historical marker; beyond the music, beyond the black disc it is 'What the object presents to the eye, then, is the sensation of touch as much as sight' (Baldwin 2007 p. 107). A multi-sensory experience of 'The history & heritage of the format, the iconic cover sleeves'<sup>184</sup>.

The creation, the art of the record extends beyond the 'formal and technical' (Fabbri 1981 p. 53) aspects of music production and into the visual world of the cover and beyond into the tastes of collectors

I like that records are a larger canvas, so to speak, for the album cover and other art. My favorite records are the ones with interesting cover art. I also like the way they sound, and I like that when I listen to a record, I'm hearing it the way people would have heard it when most of the records in my collection were originally released. Most of my records are from the 70s and 80s, so for me it has a lot to do with feeling like I'm listening to the music in a "historically correct" manner<sup>185</sup>.

For some respondents it is simply the large size of the artwork, sleeve or cover that gives vinyl its advantage, but like the notion of sound it is rarely expanded upon beyond this. Of course this in part would enter into discussions of genre worlds and taste worlds and the associated artwork that goes along with it. However, there are those that collect vinyl records based on a particular aspect of the cover. The website LPcoverlover archives and categorises submitted covers into over a hundred different categories from Advertising, via Chicks Dig Records to XXX. 'Amongst pop music cultures, novelty and rarity displace uniqueness. This may be an instance of what Benjamin called the 'phoney spell of a commodity' but, in this way, records nevertheless enjoy a kind of attenuated aura' (Thornton 1995 p. 69). That Sarah Thornton's comments were written nearly twenty years ago should be noted. The

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184 Respondent 46 a 34 year old male from Ireland

185 Respondent 39 a 29 year old female from Alabama

quality of the vinyl is both actually and ideologically heavier in the contemporary world; the 180gm aura of the work of art. 180 gram or higher. 'I look for the highest fidelity pressings. 45rpm LPs if possible'<sup>186</sup>. The sleeve, or the connection between sleeve and the music on the record is also an important marker of collecting where

One of the best feelings as a collector is picking out a random record solely based on the sleeve art, taking it home, playing it, and being completely surprised at what I hear. It makes record collecting so much more worth the money when it hits that feeling of pride and shock when you pick out something really noteworthy<sup>187</sup>.

### **Taste, Condition and Patina**

Whilst the range of designs of the record sleeve and the permutations of sleeve production are as endless as the music held within the vinyl, it is perhaps the condition of the sleeves and the records that speak of the collectors' tastes. There are a range of approaches to collecting second hand records and the condition they are in. There are books and an established code of conditioning which causes endless debate and discussion among collectors. In America the grading discourse is predominantly driven by Goldmine magazine and in the UK it is Record Collector magazine and the accompanying Rare Records Price Guide. Here the grading is on a sliding scale from Mint, through Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor, and finally bad. With the exception of mint which appears to be a binary (mint or not) the others can be pre or suffixed with a plus or minus. One of the UK based forums for collectors is named after this grading system 'Very Good Plus' and five per cent of all respondents (as well as myself) are members of the forum group. Whilst some collectors seemed to not care too much about the condition of the records and/or sleeves the remainder seemed to fall into two very distinct camps and many collectors responded with lengthier responses to this area of questioning. On one end of the scale are those that hope to find, or will only buy those records that are in very good condition or better. In record descriptions this would be written as VG/VG. The first VG to indicate the condition of the record and the second for the condition of sleeve. 'My first rule of collecting is condition, I want at least Near Mint on vinyl, VG+ for sleeve. I like 1<sup>st</sup> pressing - hate picture discs and love vinyl only b-sides'<sup>188</sup>, or 'There's a special place

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186 Respondent 168 a 27 year old male from Spokane, WA

187 Respondent 79 a 19 year old male from Long Island, NY

188 Respondent 59 a 36 year old male from Laurel Canyon

in hell for people who wrote on their album sleeves. Nothing bums me out more than when I find a great album, in great shape only to see a name scrawled on the back cover'<sup>189</sup> And the gap between description of a record in a listing by a seller and the perceptions of what exactly 'very good plus' might mean to a buyer - even with written descriptors - can be the beginning of discussion or argument on listings and forums.

I feel lots of owners are too generous with condition grades and it can be a real bummer to buy a so called "VG+" record and receive it covered in scratches and unplayable. this is partly why i try to buy mint or nm condition listed records, because even if they were a bit generous with the nm grading, it's still a really good copy. i try to be the change i want to see in this world, and am very strict when grading my collection. buying mostly pristine condition items also makes me think about how much they've been thru because, if its near mint, it shouldn't have been thru much. writing on labels and sleeves tho, but i guess it was more common back when records were the only music format and you didn't want your sister stealing your new album...i still don't like it. i have 1 piece in my collection with minimal sharpie on the centre label, but it was \$5 and my gf loves the song so i see no loss there<sup>190</sup>.

At the other end of the spectrum are those that positively embrace the marks, ring-wear, creases, clippings and cuttings kept inside the sleeve and in some cases writing that adorn some of the detritus that is out there.

I like natural history museums, the dustier and more old fashioned the better. I love to paw over things at flea markets and garage sales and antique stores, trying to pick up the faint resonance of the past, the echoes of other people's lives that are left behind, like finger prints on their tools and jewellery and books and records. I do believe that mere objects can transmit, to the imaginative viewer, some ineluctable sense-trace of where they've been, who handled them and why (Strasbaugh 2001 p. 185).

Some of the respondents comments moved well beyond Strausbaugh's 'ineluctable sense-trace', but certainly cover the who has handled them. 'Yes! I have a few records with sleeves that are so beat up & scratched & taped like man, this one's been through a lot, someone really loved it. I have a few with names written on the center label or with an old school sticker name tag. I have one that says "Christmas '69" in really nice handwriting. I wonder about it a lot'<sup>191</sup>. The sense of wonder can lead beyond the imagination and into real world research.

I recently looked up the address on a tag on one of my records and googled the man's name: he had died around the time I bought the record and lived near the

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189 Respondent 323 a 43 year old male from New Jersey

190 Respondent 40 a 27 year old male from Woonsocket, RI

191 Respondent 263 a 20 year old female from Washington

store in Detroit where I got it which lead me to believe someone dumped his old records there when he had died. That really gave me pause but also made me think about how the music had a life, and that there was a reason he bought that specific single. Since I don't care too much about quality for some records, many of mine have names and addresses on them. I love the ones that say "For Diana" or "For Jim" or something on them, that the song was special to the previous owner<sup>192</sup>.

And sometimes the records were a kind of informal family heirloom.

[O]f course! I think it is neat if the previous owners write on the sleeves, like on a couple of mine my uncle actually owned and he was really into Zappa so on some of the records he just wrote 'zappa zappa zappa' and you just got to think why in the hell he would do that, you know? also it is cool if people write their name on it. that way you know it was important to someone, that they would care if they lost it<sup>193</sup>.

Sometimes it is not additions to the artwork, the writing of names but the biographical or accidental additions to the package that give meaning to records in terms of their trajectory. One respondent claimed he was 'Not a fan of people who write on records. But I do enjoy finding news clippings inside records and any other oddities. Two weirdest items I found in a record was a report card from 1977 or a gay porno mag in an Elton John record'<sup>194</sup>. Broadly speaking it is the collectors from the younger end of the respondents that appreciate the marks and writing on records - the visibility of its history - and older collectors who 'prefer' mint condition - a pristine record in spite of history. However, these 'rules' tend to be flexible as this descending narrative from a collector demonstrates - 'Ideally first UK pressings, condition must be VG+, price usually Record Collector prices or 50% less of that. Bend condition rules in charity shops etc where prices are less and then get replacement sleeves etc later'<sup>195</sup>. Whilst this is a general trend amongst the respondents, it may be read in terms of immersion within collecting culture as well as their respective chronological ages and their relationship to the lived/unlived experiences. And whilst younger collectors may, like the collector below, prefer the original pressings in a way that mirrors the older collectors, it is also generally the younger collectors who ponder the previous lives of records.

I love the fact that many first pressings I buy have been owned by others. I think about who they were and what their lives were like, and if we'd get along. If

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192 Respondent 142 a 20 year old female from Illinois

193 Respondent 76 a 17 year old female from Southwestern Ontario

194 Respondent 180 a 38 year old male from Hamilton, Ontario

195 Respondent 306 a 42 year old male from Oxford

they're in good condition, I'm grateful. However, this isn't always the case. I once ordered an original first pressing of Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* with the original photographs of Claudia Cardinale in the sleeve, and when it arrived in the mail, there were pen marks on Dylan's face on the cover. I was very upset<sup>196</sup>.

There is a more open collecting discourse regarding such things that have clear monetary implications when it comes to the economic value. In the 2010 version of the grading system, 'writing' is covered by the word 'defacement' and is associated with 'the cover and its contents being torn, stained and/or defaced' (Shirley 2011 p. 1439) and would be graded as 'fair'. In economic terms this would mean that the value of the Flaming Lips album mentioned earlier would, if the price reflects the value (it has no current 'book price' as it came out after the latest edition), drop from \$2,500 (in mint condition) to \$450 (in fair condition) if the owner were to write their name on it. This disparity in collecting culture can be read in between two similar terms. Firstly that of 'patina', or the distinction between wear and tear, and secondly that of 'aura' in terms of cultural value. Patina however, is a more complex term than can be covered by whether a record sleeve has writing on it or not or measured by a seven point grading system. It has been described by Appadurai as

[A] general term to deal with that property of goods by which their age becomes a key index of their high status, disguises a deeper dilemma, the dilemma of distinguishing wear from tear. That is, while in many cases wear is a sign of the right sort of duration in the social life of things, sheer disrepair or decrepitude is not. Wear, as a property of material objects is, this itself a very complicated property that requires considerable maintenance. The polishing of old silver, the dusting of old furniture, the patching of old clothes, the varnishing of old surfaces – these are all part of the embodied upper classes in many societies [...] In short patina is a slippery property of material life, ever open to faking as well as to crude handling (Appadurai 1996 p. 74).

How to treat, clean, protect and care for records is linked to attitudes toward the condition and history that the record brings with it to its current owner's home and again brings in notions of ritual described by one half of a collecting couple thus. 'Boyfriend loves original pressings. I'm not picky. Rules: sort alphabetically, always put back in plastic cover with opening on top. If you take out the record, leave its neighbor sticking out so you know where it goes'<sup>197</sup>; or as Appadurai suggests 'The distinction between heirloom and junk is not patina as such, but also the successful semiotic management of the social context' (Appadurai, 1996 p. 76). The care of vinyl and attitudes toward the mint (that almost impossible grading) record can be

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196 Respondent 127 a 21 year old female from Miami

197 Respondent 133 a 29 year old female from Richmond



discussed as a *lack* of patina in the sense that Appadurai describes. That is, whilst polished silver or waxed furniture shows the care, over time, of a valued heirloom or antique and demonstrates very visibly patina, in the record collecting world it is the absence of evidence that is patina. 'I take great care of my records and hate when I see a cool record in terrible condition'<sup>198</sup>. That is, a truly cared for record is pristine, has been kept in a specially designed polythene outer sleeve, kept upright, not too tightly pressed against other records, still has its inner sleeve and any accompanying posters and/or extras.

[P]atina [is] a truly scarce resource , for it always indicates the fact that a way of living is now gone forever. Yet this very fact is a guarantee against the newly arrived, for they can acquire objects with patina, but never the subtly embodied anguish of *those who can legitimately bemoan the loss of a way of life* (Appadurai, 1996 p. 76 my emphasis).

As for who has the right to legitimately bemoan the loss of a way of life, this is arguably not linked to class in the way Appadurai explains, but instead linked to nostalgia for a 'golden age' or the practices and culture of it in a way that *creates* distinction rather than maintains it.

Very picky with first pressing, more than 90 percent of my collection is first pressing. I buy oldies from garage sales and thrift stores usually in new to good condition which I am very particular about. All records are stored in anti-static inner sleeves and clear plastic outer sleeves. I do not let anyone but myself pull any record out because I am always worried they do not know how to handle them and will either get fingerprints, scratches, or drop the record<sup>199</sup>.

If maintenance and care then represent patina by way of lack, it is the subtleties of pressings, lamination, size of record label logo, run out groove messages, typographical mistakes that perhaps create the sense of 'aura'

Degrees of aura came to be attributed to new, exclusive and rare records. In becoming the source of sounds, records underwent the mystification usually reserved for unique art objects. Under these conditions it would seem that the mass-produced cultural commodity is not necessarily imitative or artificial, but plausibly archetypal and authentic (Thornton 1995 pp. 27 - 28).

That is, the ability to recognise the first from the second pressing, the UK pressing from the American pressing, may be at once the ability to recognise or create the aura of the work of (mechanically reproduced) art and the ability to conjure value from waste - 'out of shit a treasure arose' (Laporte 2000 p. 16) These purchases seem less

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198 Respondent 47 a 35 year old male from Portland

199 Respondent 64 a 23 year old male from New Jersey

like commodities than capsules of possibility (Reynolds 2011 p. 86) and the ability to do this amongst other collectors is a defining point in the social distinction of taste.

What the support for flea-marketry represents more, perhaps, than affection for the secondhand is the desire to find style, but obliquely, and splendor, but tackily, and so put an ironic distance between the wearers and the fashionableness of their clothes. The ironic approach is an essential part of style in clothes by now – an air of saying something quite intense but only in a footnote. This approach has grown up out of flea-market and “nostalgic” fashion (Fraser in Davis 1979 p. 93).

One respondent acknowledges that the journey into certain taste rules is one that is inevitable: ‘I’m not yet at that point that I care about first pressings when I’m buying, but I must admit that I think about it when I know I own a first pressing myself, and my friends are buying a newpress. I feel superior hehe’<sup>200</sup>. And whilst aspects of what Fiske suggests about taste on a broad level can apply here - ‘tasteless and vulgar, for taste is social control and class interest masquerading as a naturally finer sensibility’ (in Wilson 1999 p. 26) there is perhaps little by way of class interest, but more about distinction within social groups and how that taste is displayed. It is this, the knowing, the competitive, and the shared (or not shared) knowledge that creates the social world of the collector.

If a person is the best judge of his or her taste, it is both useless and impossible to teach anyone the standards of good taste. On what grounds could any particular scale of taste be preferred to another, and how could it alone demand the status of legitimate or good taste that, somehow, is exemplary and binding by its nature? (Gronow 1997 p. 10).

The exploration here has been an attempt to establish a way in which to discuss aspects of taste as they relate to contemporary record collectors within the framework established. Whilst the music taste of collectors cannot be entirely removed from discussion of their record collecting, the thingness of music clearly plays quite a significant part. Record collecting has become a *visible* marker of taste, of what one owns, at the very moment in culture that music has become invisible, ephemeral and unowned. This physicality of vinyl plays further parts in the construction of collecting taste. Beyond the collection as a physical thing, the now exotic and strange nature of vinyl, its archaic and cumbersome qualities in both the playing and buying of music, become heroic and drives dreams, wishes and desires beyond any hierarchical notion of *musical* taste. Collectors hunt things, find jewels in unlikely places and then ritualise their selections in strange ceremonies. They choose

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200 Respondent 55 a 21 year old male from Trondheim

records based on what they look like at times as much as they choose records because of what they sound like. Whilst there is no singular way to describe their tastes, the way in which they value the physical is a commonality. Whilst older collectors seem to try and find (or hunt) records that have been treasured and looked after and show perhaps the most careful *wear*, the mint (lack of) patina of the careful record owners, younger collectors tend to revel in the past of vinyl, its historicity, the previous owners and the value the record had to them - the tear to patina's wear - that they played the record that much; that they cared so much for the record they would write their name on it to prevent confusion, that they would write the artist's name repeatedly on the cover to express fandom or other issues. In both of these categories, those that valued wear, or tear, collectors claimed that they 'love objects with a history and a patina'<sup>201</sup>. Either way, the way the past is displayed through the physical appearance of the record. Patina can be seen by the untrained eye, and then complicated and communicated by a grading system. Aura appears to be a quality bestowed upon records by knowing collectors, through knowledge and learning about musical history and production variants. The following chapter explores the social aspect of collecting - how these notions of grading and of aura create social distinction for the individual collectors beyond the setting of their collection.

It's absolutely fascinating. I do think second hand records have an aura[...]. I would rather have an OG because of it's history as an artifact than an reissue. I kinda think why collect records at all if you don't have this feeling - just about everything is available for your consumption in another format., usually free<sup>202</sup>.

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201 Respondent 170 a 43 year old male from Olympia Washington

202 Respondent 4 a 40 year old male from London

## Chapter Seven: The Social Life of Collectors

The phonograph knows more about us than we know ourselves  
(Edison 1888 in Milner 2009 p. 34).

And the small fame that you've acquired  
Has brought you into cult status  
But to me you're still a collector  
(Weller 1979).

The previous chapter explored ideas of what taste is and how collectors find it in, and project it onto, objects themselves. It debated how they come to value and know the records they collect and also how they come to understand the varying economic and cultural values of, and gain knowledge about records they are yet to collect in various pressings and in various states of decay. This personal relationship between individual and object creates a particular notion of authenticity; the articulated authenticity of the record itself - its patina, its pressing and its heritage. This relationship positions the vinyl object within the potentialities of abjection, as object or objet. Firstly, there is the authentic relationship between the collector and the(ir) collection, how they feel about it as a body of records. And then there is the authentic relationship between the collector and their music taste as represented by the collection. This chapter explores the articulation of this personal authenticity in a social world of collectors; between the collector and other collectors, between collectors and the culture of collecting. This dual aspect of 'authentic taste' has been explored previously - although in a different social sphere - by Sarah Thornton who suggests that

Between the production and consumption of records discussed here, two kinds of authenticity are at play. The first sort of authenticity involves issues of originality and aura; this value is held most strongly by DJs. The second kind of authenticity is about being natural to the community or organic to subculture; this is the more widespread ideal. These two kinds of authenticity can be related to two basic definitions of culture: the first draws upon definitions of culture as art, the second relates to culture in the anthropological sense of a 'whole way of life' (Thornton 1995 p. 30).

In this case the individual collectors all occupy the space Thornton marks out for the DJ and the community is the collective of record buyers and collectors across the globe, meaning that there are multiple authenticities being articulated by

individual collectors, depending on the typologies and experiences that have been explored in previous chapters.

There are arguably three ways of exploring this articulated taste and authenticity; how the relationship with the physical object becomes a 'whole way of life', between collector and records, collections, the consumption of records and other collectors where 'Records can be a wonderful life experience'<sup>203</sup>. Firstly there is the knowing about music as distinct from knowing about records (although it could be argued that knowing about records inevitably means also knowing about music). Secondly through ownership. Owning a record is distinct from not owning a record. Whilst this might appear self evident, there are arguably two ways of not owning a record. Firstly, in a market where there are streaming services and video services such as Spotify and YouTube, engaging with music or owning music in a non physical form does not necessitate the consumption aspects of vinyl culture - storing, sorting, shopping and so on. That is, on the one hand there is no *need* to own a record in order to listen to music and on the other hand, for certain music consumers there may be no *desire* to own a record. Secondly there is potential to own records, the wanting of a record that one does not own yet; the lack of a specific record or records from the lives and collections of vinyl enthusiasts, where there *is* a desire to own a record. These 'not owned' records form the wish lists and dream buys and dream vinyl experiences discussed in the previous chapter, where collectors declare 'I am desperate for a first pressing of "Presenting the Fabulous Ronettes"'<sup>204</sup>. or that 'If I could get my hands on an early pressing of London Calling from the Clash I honestly think I would cry with joy'<sup>205</sup>. Here a CD, download, cassette or copy does not wholly compensate for this lack, but may do partially although perhaps in musical terms only - 'I have started to use some digital forms of music, but no, I just love vinyl and will always have a vinyl copy of records that I love if at all possible and a HiFi to play them on!'<sup>206</sup> claimed one collector; another declared 'No CDs and no 7" - there's too many LPs to check out and I have to limit myself somewhat so it doesn't get out of hand. (OK - the occasional 7" has slipped through the net, but not CDs)'<sup>207</sup>. Whilst collectors

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203 Respondent 4 a 40 year old male from London

204 Respondent 142 a 20 year old female from Illinois

205 Respondent 197 a 20 year old female from North Carolina

206 Respondent 118 a 53 year old female from UK

207 Respondent 11 a 38 year old male from Sweden

used a variety of formats to listen to music, they were hierarchical in their descriptions of them.

The meanings of consumer goods and the meaning creation accomplished by consumer processes are important parts of the scaffolding of our present realities. Without consumer goods, certain acts of self-definition and collective definition in this culture would be impossible (McCracken in Dittmar 1992 p. 70).

And thirdly, owning a record is distinct from knowing about music or vinyl production. That is, just because one owns a record one does not necessarily know about either the music held within it, or the cultural or economic value it holds as an object. 'I like to do the research as much as owning'<sup>208</sup>. This triumvirate of knowing - knowing music, knowing vinyl and knowing what one does and does not own - results in both an amount of objects and an amount of knowledge - their taste. What collectors do with this cumulative knowledge and cumulated objects, in a social narrative and in social action is how their taste is mobilised, shared and exchanged.

I do not believe that the relation between a person and a physical object ... is ever a simple affair between a person and a thing; it is always a triangular relation between at least two people and the thing in question. The object is a pawn in the game, an instrument for controlling and defining the relation between two or more persons (Isaacs in Dittmar 1992 p. 36).

For there to be a relation between people and their objects, and then a second person (or more), there firstly has to be the choice of object, or accumulation of objects to form the relationship and this, arguably, is a social or at least public aspect of taste. 'People living in a modern society are relatively free to choose and, at the same time, almost forced to construct their own identity, and that in this process consumption plays a significant role' (Gronow 1997p. 99). The trajectories of collectors into choosing records as objects of identity construction and record collecting/shopping as playing a role in this process, are multiple and dependent on a number of factors and hence create different social relationships. From those who had an accidental encounter with vinyl as a format or object of desire, where respondents suggest that they 'Became a collector by chance, someone bought me a 7" as a gift, I had not bought one before and fell in love with the format immediately'<sup>209</sup>, to the context of becoming conscious at a young age of existing family members and their engagement with the medium, 'It always used to fascinate me when I saw my Dad's turntable spinning around when I was younger, wondering how the sound actually came from

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208 Respondent 12 a 35 year old male from Brighton

209 Respondent 46 a 34 year old male from Ireland

it'<sup>210</sup>, or a more distanced observation of behaviour (rather than the object) 'osmosis from collector Dad and DJ brother'<sup>211</sup>. The objects themselves, as encountered in the world of consumption, can be the origin of collecting "They looked like a cool thing to collect"<sup>212</sup> and, of course, market forces can lead to the engagement. 'I was tired of not having "vinyl only" releases. My first purchase was "Fly Farm Blues" by Jack White purchased at third man records'<sup>213</sup>. Those collectors in their mid to late thirties and older had, broadly speaking, a different set of social trajectories; they would arguably have some experience, whether their own or of their families engagement with music consumption, when vinyl was either the primary or a competing carrier of music production. These collectors can be situated as being within the lived experience of the age of vinyl. Of course, even within the 'golden age' of recorded music in its physical form, there was difficulty in maintaining the collection, finding and hearing the music one wanted to.

[O]ne afternoon about 1930 a young music-lover called Patrick Saul went into the London Gramophone shop in Cranbourn Street run by Mr Wilfrid Van Wyck and Mr W. Rimington and asked for Dohnanyi's Violin Sonata in the arrangement by Lionel Tertis. To his amazement he was told that it was 'out of print', it was deleted. So he walked on to the British Museum determined to hear the recording at least, even if he couldn't buy it. He was told that there were no gramophone records at all at the British Museum. (Which was not quite true but probably what nearly all the staff at the Museum imagined.) The realization that such performances seemed to be disappearing for ever was, Mr Saul said later, like a child hearing about death for the first time (Day 2000 p. 239).

These collectors, with lived experience of vinyl's dominance, had instances where they returned to vinyl after a period of either digital consumption of music or a lack of music consumption in any format. 'Bought records as a kid, went to sell them recently and realised how much better vinyl sounds, particularly reggae, which I can't listen to on digital'<sup>214</sup>; or some grew up with vinyl as the dominant music format and at some point came to describe their accumulated records as a collection.

I always thought vinyl was special... Something about how carefully they had to be handled. By the age of 8 or 9, I started wanting my own records, and my dad seemed to like that I liked records, so he indulged me. When I got to be a teenager, I started frequenting yard sales so that I could accumulate cheap used

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210 Respondent 9 a 23 year old female from Kent

211 Respondent 10 a 45 year old female from Western Canada

212 Respondent 93 a 20 year old from New Mexico

213 Respondent 179 a 20 year old male from New York

214 Respondent 297 a 46 year old male from London

copies, then I began learning about the value some LPs had, and began looking for them. Then started trading/selling to support my habit<sup>215</sup>.

The buying and selling of records, the exchange of knowing what a record is worth, buying it cheaply and then exchanging it for further economic capital can, in Sarah Thornton's (1995) expansion of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (1979) become a category she terms *subcultural capital*, a form of capital that encapsulates how these collections and their associated knowledges and practices can be exchanged in a triangular social context, between collector and object and another human actor - collector, record store employee and so on. '[S]ubcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know'' ( p. 11). To be in the know, suggests that there is a know to be in - something definable, sharable, exchangeable, the habitus of our engagement with vinyl and how it contributes to our understanding, our dispositions. Both knowing *and* being. This knowing can be both 'objectified or embodied. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the forms of fashionable haircuts and carefully assembled record collections' (Thornton 1995 p. 202). An aspect of taste then, for collectors, moves beyond the relationship with the object and into the relationships between subject, object and others.

[P]ossessions symbolize not only the personal qualities of individuals, but also the groups they belong to and their social standing generally. This means that people express their personal and their social characteristics through material possessions, both to themselves and to others. It also means that we make inferences about the identity of others on the basis of their possessions (Dittmar 1992 pp. 10 - 11).

A response from a twenty year old female collector from Washington State demonstrates the multiple trajectories of taste through firstly the appreciation of music, secondly the connection to the artist who produced the music, thirdly about the construction of self, fourthly the relationship with tangible material culture and finally how that construction of self can be read by others.

I think record collecting says that I appreciate music in it's truest form, that if I like something I'll buy it to support the artist instead of just ripping it online. I also think they give off a vintage vibe & tell people that I like to do things myself (placing the needle on the record & such)<sup>216</sup>.

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215 Respondent 176 a 53 year old female from Virginia

216 Respondent 263 a 20 year old female from Washington



This adds an extra dimension to Dittmar's discussion of possessions where she suggests they - possessions - act 'as enhancers of social power and status, or as means of self-expression, individuation and individuality' (1992 p. 58). This dimension - the physical engagement with the object - that is specific to certain tangible objects such as records, or how those tangible objects are utilised by their owners, gives a physical and visible aspect to knowledge and taste.

[T]he activity of individuals is motivated by two opposing social forces or goals. On the one hand, they are willing to be integrated into a social group by imitating others; on the other, they are willing to distinguish themselves from others and emphasize their own individuality and uniqueness by adopting something new, not shared by others [...] the resulting process is self-dynamic because these opposite stages of making a distinction and emulating others automatically follow each other, and in so doing give rise to one another. A novelty adopted by everyone is no more a novelty and has to be supplanted by another 'real' novelty (Gronow 1997 p. 77).

As such, collecting is the first level of entry into the group, and the collection the articulation of sameness within the group. Novelty, as Gronow calls it, is then articulated through the content of the collection in a number of ways. This presentation of the collection as novel was often primary in the articulation of distinction. The most common articulation of taste was to discuss music as a marker of taste without mention of the format; however, at the most basic level, vinyl itself was a marker of demonstrating that taste physically, as proof of taste. One respondent stating simply that collecting and displaying records demonstrates 'That I have taste'<sup>217</sup>. Other respondents discussed their collections in terms of the potential of meaning that their records *would* say *if* viewed and how this would create distinction. 'I think it *would* indicate that I have a very diverse, eclectic taste, and that I know what I like upon hearing it. I have a very good sense of what I do and do not enjoy sonically'<sup>218</sup> (my emphasis); or 'I feel like *if* someone looked at my record collection they would immediately know a lot about me and I'm proud of my taste in music'<sup>219</sup>. (my emphasis), Many of the younger collectors described this building of a collection in terms that constructed a definite sense of self, as saying something about them.

I guess it says everything about me or I wouldn't have bought any of the records. I can definitely say that you can recognise in what kind of a mood I was for a certain period of time when I recollect which records I bought during which period of time. E.g. if I bought a lot of older records last Autumn then I was in a

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217 Respondent 273 a 28 year old male from Dortmund

218 Respondent 21 a 20 year old male from Ottawa

219 Respondent 237 a 21 year old male from Tennessee

"no good new music around" mood and then I'll buy say 10 albums of newer bands because suddenly they all released a great album again<sup>220</sup>.

To borrow from Umberto Eco, 'I speak through my collection'. The biographical collection is a cumulative self portrait, a physical representation of self to be articulated in the world. 'In a culture in which the supreme goal is to have – and to have more and more - ... how can there be an alternative between having and being? On the contrary, it would seem that the very essence of being is having; that if one *has* nothing, one *is* nothing' (Fromm 1978 in Dittmar 1992 p. 4). As discussed in the previous chapter, whilst vinyl masks the 'the lack of the visual, endemic to recorded sound' (Corbett 1990 p. 83), its tangibility represents the having of music as opposed to not having - and as Fromm suggests, having is being - it embodies knowledge, an embodiment that can then be socially mobilised in two ways. Vinyl, I would argue represents a sense of being as well as this knowledge. Being in the sense of the physical collection as it represents taste *in* music and their relationship to/with it and also in the physicality of collecting vinyl as distinct from musical taste.

### **The Social Collector/Collection**

From this potential of meaning collectors had an incremental approach to describing their records as meaningful in their construction of self. 'People spend a good deal of time handling, comparing, discussing, thinking about or photographing their possessions, particularly newly acquired ones. Most people have to talk about and use their new stereo for a few days before it 'feels' theirs. Such practices can be viewed as an attempt to claim from those objects their symbolic properties: they personalize them' (Dittmar 1992 p. 88). Where they reflect personal qualities as a whole or (as above in a chronological portrait) a linear or pictorial representation of self. 'I do sometimes post pictures of my records or of my new radio/turntable online'<sup>221</sup> and many of the collectors used services such as Discogs where other users can browse your catalogued collection.

I don't know that it says much of anything about my taste to anyone other but me. To me? I'd like to think it says my tastes are refined but adventurous, and show an open-mindedness and attention to a wide range of aesthetic

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220 Respondent 266 a 29 year old male from Rodgau, Germany

221 Respondent 39 a 29 year old female from Alabama

possibilities. To most people, though, my collection probably just indicates that I'm a pretentious bore<sup>222</sup>.

Others posed their vinyl tastes as a marker of difference or a display of self as distinct from mainstream tastes. 'It shows that I care a little more about my music than people who just listen digitally. It also kind of shows that I'm a bit of a music snob'<sup>223</sup>; or moving on from the self portrait to an outward statement that can potentially be read negatively - 'Musically it probably says "hey look here's another hipster who listens to vinyl"? I don't know. To me, personally, it says I've got a really cool physical way of *showing off* my favorite bands'<sup>224</sup>(my emphasis). Others attempted to describe what vinyl meant as a marker of taste, how it contributed to the discourse of collecting and what owning a particular record, particular pressing, in particular condition means in the articulation of taste.

I think having a vinyl collection says that a person cares more about music than the average person. And not to sound elitist, but I think when you see a person owning vinyl by a certain artist or band, you tend to trust them as being a "superfan." You're more prone to believe they're invested in that particular artist. I think that's a good thing<sup>225</sup>.

The common thread through these descriptions of taste - whether regarding self or others was a notion effort and/or commitment to music itself that was demonstrable through time and effort taken in the construction of the collection where 'to collect the obscure is to refuse the mainstream' (Straw, 1997a p. 11).

I think that a love of vinyl shows a certain level of care for music and a commitment to listen to it in a way that is often not convenient. There is also a treasure hunt aspect to buying records in used stores and thrift shops that can't be found when buying an mp3 album from itunes. In this respect, buying and curating a vinyl collection displays a certain level of adventure in finding new music and a certain level of patience and dedication<sup>226</sup>.

This curatorship also had a political dimension. Many of the younger collectors said that their collections were a commitment to paying for music in a world of free downloads - 'It shows that I care about how my music listening experience happens.

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222 Respondent 89 a 33 year old male from Oklahoma

223 Respondent 227 a 23 year old female from Canada

224 Respondent 115 a 23 year old male from Kansas City

225 Respondent 143 a 25 year old male from Lubbock

226 Respondent 17 a 40 year old male from Grand Ledge, Michigan

It also shows that I support my favorite artists because a lot of them aren't backed by major labels so a 20\$ vinyl sale really helps them'<sup>227</sup>.

### **The Politics of Record Shopping**

The politics of record shopping do not sit particularly well with traditional notions of subcultural consumption beyond the return to the past set out in chapter five. In particular the notion of youth has become more complex and fluid in the years since these initial ideas were set out. Nor do these practices sit well with the consumption models set out by theorists challenging the ideas of the Birmingham School - 'The assumption that youth cultures are mainly hedonistic, individualistic and politically disengaged, or are concerned only to assert their authenticity via the accumulation of subcultural capital, has been significantly undermined' (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003 p. 14). However, these social practices do still create meaning, albeit outside of parameters of youth or class. Record collectors may well be explored more sympathetically using Michel Maffesoli's notion of 'tribus'. That is, whilst *musical* 'taste' may still formulate group identity in a more traditional subcultural sense to subsets of collectors of vinyl (or collecting of music in general) where articulations of resistance of dominant culture or parent culture are articulated through specific genres of music and the cultural groupings and the social and ideological expectations associations with them (Fabbri, 1981 Frith 1996), record collecting transcends the markers of taste *in* music and positions members as a coalition of disparate groups who share 'patterns of consumption' where there is the 'existence of an ethical aesthetics, and art of living which emphasizes 'getting along' and getting by so as to maintain the solidarity of tribus and facilitate everyday social interaction' (Maffesoli 1996 p. x). The borders of these groups are not as rigorous as those of the traditional subculture, they are not marked by the spectacular elements of style, nor by specific musical tastes. They do however have 'strong powers of integration and inclusion, of group solidarity. These powers are displayed and actualized in initiatory rituals and stages of membership' (Ibid). 'The tribalism that you get from physically owning it and putting it on my shelf. Saying "Yes, that is a product I own"'<sup>228</sup>. This group also felt

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227 Respondent 321 a 23 year old male from Gilbert Arizona

228 Respondent 53 a 22 year old male from London

that there were genuine collectors and what they termed hipsters<sup>229</sup>. 'All hipsters play at being the inventors or first adopters of novelties: pride comes from knowing, and deciding, what's cool in advance of the rest of the world'(Greif 2010), and Greif goes on to discuss that in this play of distinction hipsterism, or at least the allegation of it, is seen as a negative, as bandwagon jumping but also opens up the accusation that those engaged in hipsteresque activities are not originators but hipsters themselves.

Taste is an acquired position to 'differentiate' and 'appreciate' [...]to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction which is not (or not necessarily) a distinct knowledge, [...] since it ensures recognition (in the ordinary sense) of the object without implying knowledge of the distinctive features which define it (Bourdieu 1979 p. 466).

Who is to know who is an originator, and who is following a cultural trend? How does one articulate a sense of self when the same object can embody authentic engagement or hipster consumption? 'In part at least, people express who they are through their material symbols, and understand and judge who others are through the possessions these individuals own. But from what has been argued so far, it is clear that the meanings of material possessions with respect to the owner's identity and must be socially shared in order to function as symbols' (Dittmar 1992 p. 79). The problem with hipsters in any analysis of popular culture is complex. It could be argued that they thin out the social status that vinyl, as cultural marker and display, provides for collectors as bohemian practitioners. It could also be argued that once the derogatory notion of the hipster has been noted in a particular culture it is then difficult to note who is and who is not a hipster. It is difficult to know who was first to get to the past - whose practice is "real' bohemian (good) and the phoney (bad)' (Kreuzer in Wilson 1999 p. 12). The vinyl record, the first pressing, keeps silent on such issues - it holds no opinion of its owner as hip or hipster, bohemian or bourgeois - it sits at the intersection of these dichotomies and as such other forms of subcultural capital, of 'hipness' have to be brought in to play in the casually displayed elements of taste, which arguably expresses hedonistic tendencies of indulgence in a world of convenience. '[H]edonism is also functional to the economic system by judging people as much by their capacity to consume and by the lifestyles as by their capacity to produce' (Gronow 1997 p. 22); to position this kind of engagement as hedonistic or bohemian, challenging and nostalgic is to position the practices and knowledge of collecting, over the collection itself. If 'Bohemia is always yesterday' and 'On the cusp of the real/phoney dichotomy was the bohemian' (Wilson 1999 p. 14) then the

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229 Respondents 76, 96, 127, 330, 54, 207, 182, 204, 344, 104 & 312

'Bohemian' *culture* of collecting is more important than the collection itself (as static and physical, uncommenting); it is the being in the know rather than the being itself.

I think it dilutes the effort and love that legitimate record collectors have for their collections. Because it is so popular, especially among people my age, when I say I collect records, they say they do as well. What they mean is that they bought a portable Crosley player and a Bright Eyes LP on Amazon and think it is the same thing as combing a record store for a rare Spector single for three years<sup>230</sup>.

This respondent complicates the issue of where authenticity lies, or is created, in this social practice. It is not that Phil Spector's music is more or less authentic than that of Bright Eyes, this is a question for the sub sets of vinyl collectors and perhaps correlates to more traditional markers of subcultural identity and how taste operates there. It is the act of buying, of coming to, (those) records that creates authenticity in the mobilisation of them *into* the collection. Although 'There is plenty of new indie and mainstream music available on legal download sites, but the obscure, the out-of-print and the experimental often remain relegated to used vinyl bins' (Martens 2006 p. 12). Whilst vinyl's position in specific taste groups or subcultures may comment on the authenticity of the music itself, 'Authenticity is dependent on the degree to which records are assimilated and legitimized by a subculture. Authentication is the ultimate end of enculturation' (Thornton 1995 p. 66). In the broader culture of vinyl collecting the quality of the record itself can be the marker of authenticity, as well as aura, and this is generated socially by the collectors themselves - 'the distance between a record's production and its consumption is relevant to the cultural value *bestowed upon it*. When original performers are remote in time or place, as is the case with foreign imports and revived rarities, records can acquire prestige and authority' (Ibid. My emphasis).

### **The Social Knowledge of Vinyl**

It can be argued then, that it is in the nexus between the knowledge of music and vinyl, and the consumption of music on vinyl, where authenticity is generated and the knowledge is where taste and status lie. 'I am VERY knowledgeable about music and records. I pride myself on it. This knowledge is the one thing nobody can take away

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230 Respondent 142 a 20 year old female from Illinois

from me and I cherish it deeply<sup>231</sup>. The knowledge that collectors have varies and the outward declaration of this knowledge also varies against a number of variables, including the knowledge held by others.

I consider myself to be generally pretty knowledgeable about the entire practice of record collecting with special knowledge about my specific genres and artists that I like to collect. I value knowing this and having it as an interest and hobby that stems from my interest in rock history. Sometimes I feel like I don't know as much just because I don't have a huge budget for collecting and I haven't been doing it very long and I'm a younger girl, which isn't always respected in record stores, but I feel confident in my knowledge<sup>232</sup>.

Older collectors were less specific in how vinyl gave them a sense of self or a sense of taste or even their position in relation to knowledge. 'I think it says I'm too old for taste and am more interested in finding stuff out'<sup>233</sup> claimed a 40 year old collector. It may well be that certain aspects of subcultural theory can apply. Whilst, as Paul Hodkinson suggests

In another sense, however, it is possible to see how such a continuation in taste patterns among ageing individuals is symbolic of the transformation of consumer lifestyles into modes of cultural empowerment through which ageing individuals continue to construct and articulate identities and claim distinctiveness in contemporary everyday life (2012 p. 3).

It may also be that this collector and others of this particular age group have other aspects of their lives that give them a sense of self. That is, whilst the resistant and rebellious nature of music and vinyl production can be mapped onto younger collectors who may use it as alternative displays of capital, older collectors are not excluded from youth culture purely through their age. Although older collectors were clearly able to create and articulate this distinction, their descriptions were modest and certainly less bold than younger respondents. 'As an adult I learnt some of my vinyl was worth a little bit so I gradually developed an interest in collecting the rarer/more valuable items by the artist and the enjoyment (apart from a few favourite items) of buying them for a bargain and selling at a profit'<sup>234</sup>. Even when the sense of 'being in the know' is read in positive terms by others, there is a projection of that which the older collector is yet to know. 'My friends might think I'm well versed but the reality is the more music I discover the less I feel I know about music as a whole.

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231 Respondent 96 a 17 year old male from Newfoundland Canada

232 Respondent 142 a 20 year old female from Illinois

233 Respondent 4 a 40 year old male from London

234 Respondent 118 a 53 year old female from UK

Once you realise what a tiny fraction of recorded music you've actually been exposed to you get a bit of perspective. I never claim to know anything, which is probably accurate!<sup>235</sup>. Perhaps most succinctly summed up by a forty year old collector from London, 'I know a little bit about a lot of things but not overall and the more you know, the less you know you know'<sup>236</sup>. As well as the preference for physical objects the accumulation of records and subcultural capital has a physical dimension in the preferences for physical record shops. Although sixty nine respondents chose not to answer questions about their shopping habits, of those that did answer only five did not mention local, small, bricks and mortar, or specifically independent local record shops in their responses. Some respondents only shopped in the physical world where they went to 'Shops and flea markets. Never enjoyed online buying and have given it up apart from the odd thing on Discogs and a few new items from the artist/label'<sup>237</sup>. The record shop was described as a place of learning, of chance encounters and a place to engage in social as well as financial exchanges of capital. 'The best feeling I know is to go to a record store just to browse. Listen to what they are playing in store to get recommendations, talk to those who work there about music and other recommendations and look at all the cool cover art I can find'<sup>238</sup>. There is clearly a connection between the physical product and the physical act of accumulating those objects - 'there's a great record store call[ed] north little rock record exchange that is a great place to hang out and learn new stuff so I buy plenty there as well, especially vintage stuff'<sup>239</sup>. This was often contrasted with the experience of the online world and the shopping avenues that are open there. 'I enjoy searching through the racks rather than through pages on eBay'<sup>240</sup>. The time invested in knowledge and the time invested in shopping and accumulated in acquiring goods - 'unearthed in a junk shop - symbolizes a squandering of time and a competence which can only be acquired by long frequentation of old, cultivated people and things, that is, membership of an ancient group, the sole guarantee of possession of all the properties which are

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235 Respondent 1 a 43 year old male from London

236 Respondent 4 a 40 year old male from London

237 Respondent 5 a respondent who chose not to give details of age, gender or location.

238 Respondent 55 a 21 year old male from Trondheim, Norway

239 Respondent 90 a 29 year old male from Little Rock, Arkansas

240 Respondent 189 a 27 year old male from Melbourne



endowed with the highest distinctive value because they can only be accumulated over time' (Bourdieu 1979 p. 281).

Whilst many of the respondents spoke of the record shop and the positive experiences of being in them and interacting with others, there was little dimension of the social between younger collectors where collecting was the shared activity. The act of collecting, of accumulating taste was one that most of these particular respondents discussed in either modest terms or in terms of individual engagement.

Sometimes I will play records for anyone visiting, but I usually consider record collecting a fun and personal experience. I rarely talk to people about my record "finds" but I will enjoy a good record conversation that is revolved around the music and not the collecting itself. I'm nervous to sound snobbish when talking about my collection<sup>241</sup>.

To define oneself as a collector is to say that one has subcultural capital. This was the entry point into the respondent group, individuals were asked 'collect vinyl?' and then directed to the survey; as such this self definition was the required entry, the test needed before responding to the question. This subcultural capital and the individual's position in ascribing it to self or other, as Thornton notes, is a complex area. The collection has to appear as if by magic, effortless to be granted status in 'the eye of the relevant beholder'. And 'Nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard' (Thornton in Gelder and Thornton 1997 p. 203). Or as one collector from Belgium who bought an original pressing of The Beatles Sgt. Pepper for £4 (discussed in chapter two) quickly backtracked 'I buy records to listen to, not to brag about'<sup>242</sup>. Although the competitive nature of collecting was acceptable to talk about. 'I prefer to collect on my own because I can't handle losing a record to a friend who happens to hit a stack before I do'<sup>243</sup>. And whilst Gronow suggests 'goods may be said to take the properties of status symbols if the purchase of them is indicative of membership in a particular status group' (1997 p. 33), the 'getting' of those goods indicates complexity in terms of collecting. 'Man is initially posited as a private property owner, i.e., an exclusive owner whose exclusive ownership permits him both to preserve his personality and to distinguish himself from other men, as well as relate to them ... private property is man's personal, distinguishing and hence essential existence' (Marx in Bourdieu 1979 p. 280). The following quotes are included here as a way to counter the gendered language of Marx. Whilst the broad

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241 Respondent 188 a 27 year old female from Champaign

242 Respondent 57 a 29 year old male from Belgium

243 Respondent 219 a 30 year old male from Dickson, Tennessee

project is about collectors there are many distinctions yet to be made along the lines of gender - 'Pretty knowledgeable compared to most women my age. It's very important to me'<sup>244</sup> - or sexuality for instance 'Yes, I married a dude and his collection. It says a lot about someone...That I'm a feminist bad ass queer nerd'<sup>245</sup>. All points that will hopefully be addressed in the bigger broadening area of record collecting and music cultures. But to return to the Marx and the notion of property and the relation to it and other 'men' - On the one hand one has to have a collection to have status, and on the other one has to continue to collect to be a collector. As such, there is always doubt in the collection, never complete, always with omissions, always partial, never quite a collection, but as suggested in chapter four 'a collection to which there are no new additions, is really dead' (Freud in Forrester 1994 p. 227). 'I have a few friends that I talk to about it. Usually just giving each other heads up on if something we mutually like is coming out. I do have one friend that is really into collecting so I enjoy "competing" against him with who has what records'<sup>246</sup>. This is one area where older collectors had more to say than their younger colleagues, where their social circles and encounters were more likely to involve other collectors in terms of collecting itself. 'Most of my friends and colleagues collect records. It's a huge part of my social circle. I've bought records from all over the world and even travelled to get them'<sup>247</sup>, and then the articulation and sharing of those records with other collectors in a social setting.

Many of my closest friends are also collectors and the social outing of a record shopping day or hitting a record show lead to a day spent with friends. In addition, weekends with friends as well as dinners or other social occasions almost always involve each person bringing along a carton of records to spin at that particular function. We play a game called "flip it or skip it" where after a side of a record is played the next person has the choice to flip the record or spins something else. This game and our fervent belief in vinyl manages to exclude almost all digital music from our functions<sup>248</sup>.

This anti-digital, anti mainstream rhetoric that was common in the articulation of tastes in the vinyl collectors world, brings a new context to previous work that has explored both collecting and music in particular. Like the developments in music technology and the situating of vinyl in the past that require Corbett's work to be re-

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244 Respondent 302 a 23 year old female from Portland, Maine

245 Respondent 100 a 28 year old male from Rancho Cucamonga CA

246 Respondent 321 a 23 year old male from Gilbert Arizona

247 Respondent 180 a 38 year old male from Hamilton, Ontario

248 Respondent 17 a 40 year old male from Grand Ledge, Michigan

articulated in the previous chapter, the damning words of Bourdieu need to be revisited here.

The stockpiling avidity which is the root of every great accumulation of culture is too visible in the perversion of the jazz-freak or cinema-buff who carries to the extreme, i.e., to absurdity, what is implied in the legitimate definition of cultivated contemplation, and replaces consumption of the work with consumption of the circumstantial information (credits, exact composition of the band, recording dates etc.); or in the acquisitive intensity of all collectors of inexhaustible knowledge on socially minuscule subjects. In his symbolic class struggle with the certified holders of cultural competence, the 'pretentious' challenger [...] is likely to see his knowledge and techniques devalued as too narrowly subordinated to practical goals, too 'self-interested', too marked, in their style, by the haste of their acquisition, in favour of more fundamental' and more 'gratuitous' knowledge (Bourdieu 1979 p. 330).

Where Bourdieu discusses 'stockpiling' and the freakish behaviour of music fans in the accumulation of knowledge as demonstrating a lack of cultural competence, here, I would argue that these freaks and buffs are demonstrating both subcultural competence - in the sense of the music held within the microgrooves - but also arguably cultural competence in the knowledge of pressings and other 'gratuitous' knowledge. This is demonstrated by one collector's journey into knowledge of prices, pressings and other elements that may have been described as gratuitous. She paid '\$67 for an import copy of Cher's "Stars (1975)." I was young and bought it online from Brazil and then found a better copy in a 99 cent section of a store in Detroit'<sup>249</sup>. The competence marked by vinyl's position is situated as vinyl's new position as antique or, at the very least, antiquated status in society - 'Retro in its strict sense tends to be the preserve of aesthetes, connoisseurs and collectors, people who possess a near scholarly depth of knowledge combined with a sharp sense of irony' (Reynolds 2011 p. xii). Vinyl's pastness situates the collector as archaeologist and historian, as connoisseur and as scholar of the physical and cultural - 'a material object with historical resonance for many collectors, the physicality of the vinyl recording is a highly significant part of its continued appeal to collectors' (Shuker 2010 p. 68).

The practices and knowledges of collectors and how these create a social sense of taste are complex - 'the warm, vintage sound and the fact you can physically hold the music, makes more of a connection between just hearing the vinyl and being

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249 Respondent 142 a 20 year old female from Illinois

immersed in the sound'<sup>250</sup>. The knowledge of music and the knowledge of vinyl are clearly intertwined and create, reflect and articulate subcultural capital - 'I got two different jobs, one of which is now a career, thanks to record collecting. The obsession it created made me want to know anything and everything about the albums and songs I love. And the influences and related songs/artists that stems from them'<sup>251</sup>. The owning of records and the knowing about owning records, may mark out 'A key part of my identity'<sup>252</sup>, but how one buys or acquires records, how one is *seen* to acquire records is also key. The notion of *tribus* allows for these multiple trajectories into the world of collecting and a flexible notion of sociality and status once included. How this subcultural capital is displayed is also complex 'it's weird but record collecting tends to help inflate some folks egos'<sup>253</sup>, try too hard and capital is lost. This is further complicated by the music on those records. Here taste, subcultural capital, and other markers outlined by collectors in the subcultural world (as opposed the record collecting *tribus*) are also used to articulate difference and distinction. This double articulation - to borrow from (Clarke, Hall et al. 1975) - is not between subculture and dominant and parent culture but between individual and tribe and individual and subculture. This, again, can be further divided along lines of age (or lived experience) as well as markers of sexuality and gender until, of course, enough variables are presented to situate the original collector in singular, atomised cells of meaning. For there to be cultures and practices of record collectors there has to be a certain level of agreement on such cultural activities and practices.

This chapter has explored the social articulation of the cumulative concepts of the previous chapters - the vinyl record as 'thing', the trajectory of records as commodities, the idea of what is and is not collecting or not a collector; the past and how we access it through nostalgia as well as the broader individual elements of taste, are constructed. It is this articulation that that both discursively and physically creates the aesthetic 'value discourses' (Bennet 1990) introduced in chapter two. It is when this articulation is shared that the value discourse creates the valued subject, a

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250 Respondent 37 a 16 year old female from Manchester

251 Respondent 114 a 21 year old male from Leeds

252 Respondent 72 a 22 year old male from London

253 Respondent 256 a 38 year old male from Lincoln, CA

collector within the broad parameters of collecting taste practices that can be recognised by, and in, others as 'practical social ideologies' that 'supply the means of self differentiation' (Bennet 1990 p. 35). Where this has previously been discussed in terms of class differentiation (Bourdieu 1979) and then elaborated to include ethnic, gender or national/regional distinctions by Bennet, within record collecting, these judgements create distinctions between accumulators and collectors, the casual and the committed music fan, as well as the intricacies of intra-collecting distinctions by genre, location and/or era. In the following final chapter these elements and the idea of the varying cultures and practices of the respondents will be drawn together and the propositions of the opening chapter returned to.

## **& The Outro**<sup>254</sup>

In collecting, the details are always important  
(Gilbert, Doggett et al. 1995 p. 7).

I'm not a mental retronaut  
(Gingham-Kitchen 2011).

At the end of chapter one, I suggested that the 'vinylsphere' had separated off from the contemporary 'music industry' and was a new/old culture where the social exchange value of vinyl records still persisted. The music industry, driven by new digital technologies leased the right to play music in a system more akin to a world before music was a thing. In this newly emerging intangible world, music was once again an ephemeral experience accessed through the ones and zeroes of digital consumption. Vinyl's zombie-like status was now being described as a micro industry with its own problems and issues of production and distribution. Whether this separate vinyl culture was one of conservative nostalgics and technophobic luddites, or a world of nostalgic bohemianism fueled by a romantic desire to return to magical times, practices and music, was a dichotomy to which I stated I would return. Whether it was the 'capturing of the spirit of music into units [that]'killed' the special aura of sound' (Goodall 2013 p. 2), or the industrial practices of recording and selling music that reduced music to something to 'be bought and sold and discarded' (Ibid), the intervening chapters have picked thematic and conceptual approaches to explore elements of this question and the purpose of this chapter is to both return to that question through this framework and also to explore further how the respondent-collectors themselves define and describe collections, collecting and the place of vinyl in the new digital economies.

In 1983, just as we were entering the third disc era, that of the CD, David Buxton presented an article discussing the role of the record in the introduction of the star system. When discussing the record as object, he suggested that

Use value today should not be understood as something "natural" or even as being broadly determined by historical and social factors, but as a fluctuating, variable factor within the commodity itself, which depends on transformations or shifts in the abstract code of signs that regulate social use value in general. This code goes beyond mere "functional" use value, all the more so in products

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<sup>254</sup> The introduction and the conclusion to this work take their title from 'The Intro & the Outro' by The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band from their album Gorilla. Stanshall, V. (1967). The Intro & The Outro. Gorilla. T. B. D. D.-D. Band. London, Liberty.

lacking any precise functional use like the record; in this case the ability of the commodity to absorb signifiers is potentially infinite. This absorption can be called the commodity's enhanced use value (Buxton 1983 p. 429).

Now, thirty years later, I would argue that whilst it is still important that the commodity itself, as discussed in depth by Osborne (2012) still has a fluctuating use value within itself - or at least in relation to other formats - it is, counter to Buxton's claim, specifically determined 'by historical and social factors'. That is, the difference between the object as commodity - the generic vinyl record - and the music contained within it has been a recurring point throughout this narrative as a point of distinction, with the social, cultural and historical articulation and signification of them as objects brought to the fore. Whilst there have been broad and sometimes paradigm shifts in the industrial production of vinyl that have clearly impacted on consumption - the speed wars of the nineteen forties, the picture disc, the picture sleeve and so on - it is, for this narrative at least - the shifting social and cultural aspects of the engagement with vinyl as it 'persist[s] and circulate[s]' (Straw in Reynolds 2004 p. 305) due to its historical positioning that has been the focus. And whilst its use value as a deliverer of music, as a thing, is a distinct aspect of its use value, the social and historical qualities of vinyl as signifying object represent both use value and enhanced exchange value.

### **The Utilitarian Past, The Bohemian Present**

Beyond its thingness, the historical aspects of vinyl have, in the intervening decades, been brought into sharper focus and are no longer ahistorical as they were for writers working at the time of Buxton's comment. For these commentators and contemporaneous music consumers, vinyl was everyday, ordinary and utilitarian, the standard deliverer of music. Now vinyl is redundant, niche, quaint, vintage; a relic of the past. The past, Lowenthal (1985) - drawing on Hartley's 1953 novel - suggests, is a foreign country and, for the respondents here at least, the tourism business is booming. This narrative is not about the reasons for the broader cultural return to the pasts and accompanying nostalgia, nor the current popular cultural preference for 'retro' (Reynolds 2011). It has rather, explored the vinyl record as a marker of and deliverer *to*, the varying points in popular music history. As a marker of the past, vinyl, now two disc eras away from the present, represents what Lowenthal calls 'antiquity' which roots 'credentials in the past' (1985 p. 52). Whilst vinyl itself can be newly

produced and the music released upon it also newly written and recorded, the *idea* of vinyl as a deliverer of popular music sits in this notion of antiquity. The complication is when looking broadly at what I called, in chapter four, the lived and unlived experience of collectors. Whilst 'precedence', as one of Lowenthal's categories of pastness, 'makes things more precious: anything that was here *before us* gains status by virtue of its antecedence' (Lowenthal 1985 p. 53 my emphasis), it is complicated by vinyl's relatively short history or lack of remoteness and its distorted status as antique. The second disc era is within the living memory of many of the respondents and so whilst it is possible to speak broadly and abstractly about vinyl's position in antiquity, it, as a format, can only be regarded, in the theoretical past, as 'precedence' (Ibid) by *some* collectors. What is the remote past (Ibid) what is 'before us', for one collector, is part of the living memory of another. The vinyl traces of an act such as Nirvana stand here as an example of this division. Many of the younger collectors had bought reissues of their work. Respondents 123, 97, 321, 96, 72, 128, 127 and 328 who were 21, 20, 23, 17, 22, 29, 21 and 16, respectively had all bought repressed and original vinyl of Nirvana's albums and singles. The oldest collector of the sample surveyed, would have been thirty-four when their first album was produced in 1989. However, he - respondent 284 - did not mention Nirvana<sup>255</sup> but his interest and taste focused instead on progressive rock of the seventies - a nostalgia dissimilar from the Nirvana fans in that he would have been in his late teens in the early nineteen seventies; whereas only respondent 128 (29 years old) was alive when the first Nirvana album was released.

This difference in nostalgic practice explored using Svetlana Boym's (2005) model and correlated with the lived/unlived experience to situate their nostalgias, shows the complexity. For the older collector - the progressive rock fan - a restorative pattern of nostalgia unfolded where attempts are made to repair and patch-up the existing, real or lived memory. He is, by his own admission 'Old enough to have had a comprehensive collection of vinyl first time around. History repeats as they say...' his collecting of vinyl objects 'proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up memory gaps' (Ibid p. 41). For the younger collectors - the Nirvana fans - a reflective nostalgia takes hold, a passion for their unlived pasts drives their collecting. This kind of nostalgia 'dwells in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance' (Ibid). The late eighties and early nineties is beyond their lived

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255 Nor did he mention the nineteen sixties/nineteen seventies English group called Nirvana who, although releasing two albums, never achieved commercial success and longevity. Their output remains as collectible as the later American band of the same name.



experience and so here the vinyl object can be a way to effect a magical but imperfect return to this 'imagined' period of history at the end of the 'golden era' through what Appadurai (1996) calls ersatz nostalgia. Here vinyl is valued because of 'The history it represents'<sup>256</sup>, its distorted antiqueness remarked upon by collectors. 'I often think about records from the 60s and how ancient they are'<sup>257</sup> a 24 year old collector pondered, demonstrating the skewed attitude to the recent past as antiquity.

To divide the collectors purely along these lines would be reductive - 'cultures are never internally coherent or individed, never themselves based on value consensus; and cultures are never hermetically sealed from other cultures' (Slater 1997 p. 61). Record collectors collect music as well as records and their taste cultures factor in to their own particular culture of collecting, as well as the length of time they had been collecting. In fact of these collectors, the older, restorative nostalgic had been collecting vinyl for only two years and many of the younger collectors, by comparison, for a longer period of time. Whilst the division of nostalgia along restorative and reflective lines can be linked to the notion of the lived and unlived experiences of collectors and directly contradicts one of the propositions of Davis (1979) that one can only be nostalgic for the lived experience, this does not address the driver, the impetus, the dissatisfaction with the present and the resulting nostalgic record collecting for either category. One collector, echoing the model of nostalgia where 'the familiar gestalt silhouette of the vase that suddenly is seen as two faces in profile, the nostalgic reaction similarly inverts that which is *figure* and that which is *ground* in our lives' (Davis 1979 p. 58), suggested that 'For most people music is background, for collectors it is always in the foreground'<sup>258</sup>.

### **'Dig The Slowness'** (Donovan, 1965)

Whilst post war music based subcultures have shown a prevalence for returning to the past, this was usually stylistically presented through clothing choices rather than musically, even when music was a fundamental aspect of the subculture. However the stylistic appropriation of the past was homologous with the resistant and nostalgic ideologies of the cultural group (Hebdige 1979). Here, I would argue some of the collectors are mobilising the same ideological impetus - a rejection of the

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256 Respondent 96 a 17 year old male from Newfoundland, Canada

257 Respondent 139 a 24 year old male from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

258 Respondent 170 a 43 year old male from Olympia, Washington

present - although, rather than through fashion, they do so through the generic vinyl object as associated with these heroic historical and largely music based subcultures. Whilst only a few respondents situated their collections as an explicit resistance to industrial practices - 'Its two fingers to big companies and downloads'<sup>259</sup> - many collectors situated their listening to, and engagement with, vinyl as a way to symbolically resist the speed of cultural consumption. I would argue that this can be read as a subculturally-traditional, bohemian nostalgia, where an 'aesthetic approach to life' (Wilson 1999 p. 11) resists the ephemeral, fleeting digital culture of what Linda Stone, former Microsoft executive called 'constant partial attention'. In a multimedia and music saturated world, collectors suggested that they 'like that records make you slow down and pay attention'<sup>260</sup>; another commenting that they 'think the vinyl record is a very beautiful listening process'<sup>261</sup>. Others expanded on this slow, aesthetic experience:

There is also a slowness to records that I equate to the slow food movement to some extent. While of course you don't HAVE to listen to the whole side of the album, that's what happens - you don't just click the one song you like and leave it at that. You get a better sense of the artist/band and their range and abilities. Record production seems way more holistic<sup>262</sup>.

This was not necessarily posited as an 'anti' technological practice; as discussed earlier, most collectors use digital devices to listen to music at some point and many would use the internet to buy records. However, the majority expressed a preference for a slower shopping experience as well as a slower listening experience. They spoke of visiting real, independent, 'brick and mortar'<sup>263</sup> shops. 'Today's tribes and counter-cultures' suggests Elizabeth Wilson 'likewise emphasize aesthetic values, and, like many bohemians before them, express a profound disillusionment' (1999 p. 27) and much like these tribes, their involvement in cultural groups is more fluid, part-time and fractured than the practices of the heroic subcultures.

I don't consider it a resistance to technology, but more so to the lack of intimacy between someone and their music. There's no connection when downloading,

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259 Respondent 155 a 30 year old male from Liverpool

260 Respondent 223 a 33 year old female from Scranton, PA

261 Respondent 127 a 21 year old female from Miami, FL

262 Respondent 238 a 42 year old female from New Jersey

263 Respondent 216 a 26 year old male from Nashville, TN

but there is an entire intimate, exciting experience when purchasing/playing vinyl<sup>264</sup>.

It was also a partial resistance - or at least a way to resist at certain times - as a way of taking time to concentrate on one thing for a short amount of time. In this sense it was a way to step outside of new post subcultural practices where 'plural, fluid and part-time' (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003 p. 12) identities and practices are the norm, and to wallow in the heroic practices imagined in the lives of previous subcultures.

I still listen to music mostly through digital means. Vinyl allows a means of owning music in its physical form. It's bigger and more interesting than a cd with all the inserts / sleeve notes / different pressings and coloured vinyl etc. I listen to my collection when I want to set aside time to purely listen to something and do nothing else. I don't think collecting vinyl means you are resistant to modern advances. It's just a different way of listening to and owning music<sup>265</sup>.

If a bohemian restoration or a bohemian reflection is the driver and bifurcation of the nostalgia of record collecting, it is specific aspects of the vinyl object that allow an articulation of personal and social taste within collecting and broader culture that acts beyond, and contributes to, the articulation of musical 'taste' alone and sits within a wide and variable framework of collecting practice. To return to respondent 9's comments where

It always used to fascinate me when i saw my dads turntable spinning round when i was younger, wondering how the sound actually came from it. Now i feel its something thats kind of lost in modern day society, i like having a new record in my hands, unwrapping it, studying the artwork closely<sup>266</sup>.

Another situating it as a category of distinction:

Their sound, the way they are made, how they seem more like a piece of art than say, a CD or a download. How it is not a throwaway product, it is something to cherish, protect and dedicate yourself too. Plus, it keeps the sanctity of music in tact<sup>267</sup>.

For the respondents here, vinyl acts as a marker of taste in two ways. Whilst 'Today, people define themselves through the messages they transmit to others through the goods and practices that they process and display' (Warde in Gronow 1997 p. 5), the vinyl record works twofold. Firstly, as a marker of the respondent's preference for the

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264 Respondent 119 a 22 year old male from Hamilton, Ontario

265 Respondent 30 a 22 year old male from Haslington, England

266 Respondent 9 a 22 year old female from Kent

267 Respondent 114 a 21 year old male from Leeds

physical, that they 'like things to be tangible and real'<sup>268</sup> and that 'It shows that I care a little more about my music than people who just listen digitally. It also kind of shows that I'm a bit of a music snob'<sup>269</sup>. Secondly and articulated far more by the respondents, vinyl was a marker of their taste in music. However, as discussed in chapter six, taste was more forcefully articulated by the younger collectors, for whom it articulated 'self' beyond the two basic categories of taste - of music and the tangible.

I think record collecting says that I appreciate music in it's truest form, that if I like something I'll buy it to support the artist instead of just ripping it online. I also think they give off a vintage vibe & tell people that I like to do things myself (placing the needle on the record & such)<sup>270</sup>.

### **Luxury Collectibles**

These objects then are seen as special by collectors, special in the sense that they offer something more to the listening experience and to music fandom than digital files or CDs. Arguably then the LP or the single is now a luxury commodity. Luxury in the sense that they fulfill all five of Appadurai's (1986) qualities of luxury. They are restricted to elite groups, or as I argued in chapter two, an elitism is built up around their collection that makes them restricted. They are difficult to acquire, require specialist knowledge to engage with, have complex social semiotics and finally have a 'high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality' ( p.38). The vinyl object is mobilised by collectors to 'say a lot about me taste and personality'<sup>271</sup>. These luxury objects, whilst not expensive on a larger or comparative scale, are much more expensive than their cheaper legal, or free illegal equivalent. '[N]ot many other people today would pay way more money for an supposedly inferior thing than it would cost to download the music - so I still want the object and not just the sound it contains'<sup>272</sup> claimed one respondent; another adding that the collector 'treats them as treasures'<sup>273</sup>. One collector was clearly irritated by the elite luxury positioning of new vinyl: 'It's almost in some ways discouraged and being

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268 Respondent 111 an 18 year old male from Pennsylvania

269 Respondent 302 a 23 year old female from Portland, Maine

270 Respondent 263 a 20 year old female from Washington State, USA

271 Respondent 169 a 16 year old male from UK

272 Respondent 11 a 38 year old male from Sweden

273 Respondent 324 a 38 year old female from Pensacola, FL

branded as a luxury<sup>274</sup>. But not all vinyl records are luxury objects... Yet. Vinyl is, at the point of production, ordinary - mass produced, mass distributed and standardised by price. Once vinyl records leave their initial trails of production and begin their extended social lives they have a number of places, positions and values that they can take. All the while they remain democratically standardised, never quite letting go of their status as 'commodity by destination' (Maquet in Appadurai 1986 p. 16). After all, their destination has always been the record player, the collection. Once records become second hand, once they have left the shop and been played they could be argued to be worth very little. A complex set of social and cultural changes in musical tastes, band's and artist's careers and initial sales figures mean that, sometimes for short periods, sometimes over decades records become what I described in chapter three as abjet, both desirable and undesirable, shit and gold. Records are no longer utilitarian, they no longer represent functionality. There are more convenient, simpler, cheaper ways to access music and so records are unnecessary in that sense. As such, and combined with notions of rarity, vinyl inspires passion among collectors - they can cross Baudrillard's line between object and objet. But not all vinyl does and the same record can remain marginalised for some time, be worthless for years before becoming priceless. It has not changed. This spell of abjection, of uncomfortable in-between-ness existing in a stasis of potentiality between priceless treasure and worthless trash, situates vinyl records as abjet. A collector who pondered this issue did 'think about 'why' they were ever handed over to second-hand stores because I would never give them up'<sup>275</sup>. His finds seemingly remaining objet for some time to come.

The lack of utilitarian qualities of vinyl in the contemporary music listening world also weakens the parameters of collecting culture that have kept vinyl on the cusp of categorisation. This relies on exploring the notion of 'ordinary use' (Belk 2001 p. 67), the key phrase in the barrier to vinyl's inclusion in collecting definitions. On a literal level, records produced either now or at any point in the last sixty five years, are used in the way that they were designed to be used. That is their 'use value' has not changed. The record needs a record player and amplifier, speakers and accompanying cables to unfreeze the music within the microgrooves. The physical actions of machines and people remains the same, if brought into sharper focus through its contemporary context 'The cracks and static of dust on a record (IMO)

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274 Respondent 254 a 38 year old male from USA

275 Respondent 96 a 17 year old male from Newfoundland Canada

provide a rich, almost physical performance of a song'<sup>276</sup>. However, the enhanced exchange value and the specifics of the historical moment mean that it is no longer ordinary to listen to music in this way. The ordinary physicality of the player (as machine) is combined with the extraordinary physicality of the player (as person) whose practice is deliberately archaic, a marginal practice in the broader listening culture. If the collecting and playing of records can be positioned as extraordinary then their position with collecting literature and study would be hard to deny.

### **Condition, Grading and Patina**

At this point some further distinctions can be drawn that relate to the lived and unlived experiences attitudes and habits of collectors, that too contribute to the unordinary use of vinyl. Whilst the second hand record was a common, if luxury, acquisition in many collections - attitudes to the condition of them was complex. Broadly speaking those collectors who had some lived experience of disc era two (1948 to 1981, plus decline), or those embedded in collecting culture - again through longevity - had a different attitude to the condition of records and of covers - to their patina, 'the property of goods by which their age becomes a key index of their high status' (Appadurai 1996 p. 74). There were those whose lived experience was predominantly the third and fourth disc eras of the CD and the hard disc (and others, like I did at the beginning of this narrative, mark their lives through musical developments) one respondent stated their age through being 'born just as the CD started taking off'<sup>277</sup>, another collector explicitly situating their relationship to disc eras: 'Im 25 and vinyl was mostly popular pre me'. The historical traces of people were a highly valued aspect of the vinyl object for these collectors, traces that are exclusive to physical objects. 'I love having a sleeve with a name on it or a cover with a cigarette burn.' suggested a 33 year old collector 'It offers a more intimate view into the life and history than something digital'<sup>278</sup>. Although born on the cusp of the disc eras this respondent had only been collecting for a year but had immersed herself in the 'cultural cache to speak knowledgeably about collecting, especially in certain dive bars frequented by other (usually male) record collectors'. Other novice collectors

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276 Responent 54 a 24 year old male from Pasadena, California

277 Respondent 99 a 26 year old male from Philadelphia, PA

278 Respondent 223 a 33 year old female from Scranton, PA

used the marks, traces, writing and labelling of records as a way to ponder the social life of the record as opposed to the social standing of the music on the record itself

I was at a goodwill and found a bunch with a sticker that said Lloyd (remember the old style sticker guns) Lloyd had really good taste and I think about how these were his treasures. I hope he let go of them because he converted to digital or whatever but... I get sad thinking that he left this earth and someone dumped his LP's at the goodwill. I'm glad to give these previously cherished items a respectful home<sup>279</sup>.

The transfer of records from generation to generation was a common narrative, as well as debate of how the record articulates the social history of people.

I think about this all the time, especially because I work at a record store that buys used records. I get to see the previous owners sometimes, and I always think about the fact that they're parting with something that I'm going to buy and never want to get rid of. I love the marginalia left on sleeves and labels, too. I think it shows a connectedness and a relationship between people who love music. I don't know "Linda" or "Jimmy", but I have their records now. It's a feeling of legacy<sup>280</sup>.

And of the social history of the broader community and neighbourhoods.

this is something that has become of increasing interest in the last few years. Particular if there are markings, names, or other traces of that copy's past, I wonder about the context in which it was purchased; how it was listened to; what motivated the purging of said record from the collection. Because I buy most of my records locally (in my hometown), it's also interesting to see markings of retail outlets that are long gone<sup>281</sup>.

For the more established collector, as well as those who had continued to buy vinyl after its initial passing, patina was demonstrated by its absence, by its lack. When asked whether he ever wondered about the previous social lives of the records in his collection, one respondent said

No, I never wonder about such things, unless they've left an indelible mark of their previous ownership on a cover or label, in which case I curse their existence<sup>282</sup>.

Beyond this, the terminology of the collector through the grading systems of Record Collector and Goldmine crept into the narratives of these established collectors.

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279 Respondent 48 a 43 year old male from Houston, Texas. - Although having the vinyl disc era in his lived experience he 'recently dove back into Vinyl in fall of 2012 (stopped in mid 90's) . Had been purchasing a few LP's here and there but now it is the first option when adding to my library'

280 Respondent 144 a 23 year old female from Wisconsin

281 Respondent 135 a 31 year old male from Pittsburgh, PA

282 Respondent 292 a 48 year old male from the Netherlands

Generally I like my records to be a minimum of Ex/Ex grade in terms of condition (Record Collector scale). First pressings aren't important as long as the sound quality of subsequent pressings has not been compromised<sup>283</sup>.

As well as a knowledge of the pressing practices of different countries and the pressing particularities of individual records.

Condition has to be Mint or as near to, very few exceptions unless a rare acetate/ demo version of a collectible. Have to be able to get it well under the 'list' price if buying in auction. Will buy Mint limited editions/ verified authentic signature (usually charity auction items). Normally expect to have original and Mint/excellent condition sleeves and any other material issued on original release all present and correct. Any Japanese must have Obi's etc<sup>284</sup>.

These attitudes to condition had an impact on how the respondents might be considered in established typologies of collectors, although as both Susan Pearce (1994, 1998) and Roy Shuker (2010) point out, these types are not exclusive. There was an element of the souvenir collector across all collectors - that the collection represented some sense of the autobiographical that collectors 'see them representative of my self in a great way'<sup>285</sup>.

I think that its the sense of connection someone has to their collection. They've collected and curated this collection, fragments from the past, and have put together a collage of sorts. That is, the individual albums each have their own histories (known or unknown to the collector), but the collector has his or her own history with each piece in the collection. There's a sense of investment; certainly time and money, but also a record collection (again, like any collection) is reflective of one's tastes and to some extent, identity. Again, it's a matter of curation - even if for an audience of one<sup>286</sup>.

As noted above, as well as the 'personal memorial' (Shuker 2010 p. 6), collectors were interested in preserving the personal memorials of others in a continuing legacy. This lead to broader narratives, stories and knowledges where collectors were 'constantly seeking more musical knowledge. Music knowledge in general, not just about records, is as important to me as my college education'<sup>287</sup>. Here elements of the fetishistic collector were highlighted. Whilst collectors were writing/collecting their own stories they were also collecting/writing musical history through their collections - 'I enjoy music history and social revolutions so I've noticed most of my records revolve

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283 Respondent 270 a 47 year old male from Lymington, UK

284 Respondent 118 a 53 year old female from UK

285 Respondent 186 a 20 year old male from Seattle

286 Respondent 135 a 31 year old male from Pittsburgh, PA

287 Respondent 186 a 20 year old male from Seattle



around a shift in culture/society ie hippy, new wave etc...'<sup>288</sup> Many of the collectors had flexible rules around their collecting and so whilst systematic in some senses, they demonstrated a willingness to transcend their own rules as described in this lengthy passage from a 33 year old collector

I have loose rules. I used to be more of a completist, but I've shifted to wanting a tightly curated collection. That is, I adore R.E.M., but I have no reason to own a shit album like "Around the Sun," so why bother with it? At the same time, I don't want to limit myself to "masterpieces" or anything absurd like that. I just want to have a balanced selection of albums that I love and/or I think are worthwhile and/or interesting. I don't set a firm price limit, but I rarely spend more than \$30 on a record, and usually the records I buy are in the \$6-\$20 range. I prefer first pressings when affordable, but the only time I will preference an old pressing over a new pressing is if the audio was taken from a different source. For example, the latest Beatles vinyl repressings seem absurd to me. If I'm reading correctly (and maybe I'm not), the new Beatles pressings are from the digital remasters, which means there will be none to very little sound benefits to the vinyl format. In that instance, when I can actually get some of the records for cheaper, pressed from the original analog source, I'll preference the older. Otherwise, though, I buy records to listen to, so the pressings are of little concern. As for condition, again, if a record is playable and the sleeve in one piece, I'm game. I sometimes get frustrated at antique malls and other places where sellers don't really know about records are selling great records for \$30, but when I look at them, I'm not even sure the record would play on a conventional turn table it's so beat up. As long as something plays, and plays relatively cleanly, I'm game<sup>289</sup>.

### **Defining Collecting**

Toward the end of the survey respondents were asked about their collecting habits outside of the musical world as well as how *they* would define a record collector as opposed to someone who owned records (if there was indeed a distinction). There were definite themes that emerged in the responses. Passion for music was the dominant reply that respondents suggested defined the record collector. Beyond this they spoke of the love of the physical and the tangible as a quality. Some of the technical and cultural protocols were mentioned such as the care of records; one collector listing the specialist knowledge and care 'All records are stored in anti-static inner sleeves and clear plastic outer sleeves', before going on to show the fear of what would happen if those without the necessary knowledge of vinyl were to handle them 'I do not let anyone but myself pull any record out because I am always worried they

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288 Respondent 188 a 27 year old female from Champaign

289 Respondent 89 a 33 year old male from Oklahoma

do not know how to handle them and will either get fingerprints, scratches, or drop the record'<sup>290</sup>. Knowledge of music distribution and the commitment and dedication to the physical act of collecting was also commented on. Many of the respondents used the term passion to explain collecting. This passion was largely directed at music, and then further toward vinyl itself.

I think a record collector is more passionate and thoughtful about the records he includes in his collection. I also think a record collector has a deeper appreciation and more intimate knowledge of every record that he owns. In short, a record collector doesn't expand his collection for the sake of expanding his collection (as someone who buys digital music does!)<sup>291</sup>.

Finally a number of respondents made the claim that the collection has to be growing, or at least changing on a relatively regular time scale.

If you make a deliberate choice to primarily buy LPs instead of CDs or digital albums, you're a collector. The distinction is the active purchasing of LPs on a semi-regular basis. Whether or not you're aiming for a goal in your collection is moot, because not all collectors have a "goal"<sup>292</sup>.

I suppose the only real distinction I can think of is if the person still adds new records to the collection. A 50 year old guy who has 500 records that haven't been touched in two decades might not really be a collector whereas a guy with 25 records who actively purchases new additions is in my mind<sup>293</sup>.

Or as Freud suggested 'a collection to which there are no new additions, is really dead' (in Forrester 1994 p. 227). That the collection has to be fluidly changing and/or growing in order for the music within the collection to be enjoyed was touched upon by one collector who confessed:

I went through a stage about a year ago when I tried to stop buying records and listen more intently to the ones I already have. I found this to be much harder than I had anticipated<sup>294</sup>.

Whilst collectors were asked about the number of records they owned as part of the survey, only five respondents suggested that the number of records owned was what defined if someone was a record collector. Two of them just suggested that 'the amount' was key, but offered no number. The remaining three - three mid thirties

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290 Respondent 64 a 23 year old male from New Jersey

291 Respondent 217 a 25 year old male from Minneapolis, MN

292 Respondent 42 a 25 year old male from Nashville

293 Respondent 67 a 29 year old male from Birmingham, AL

294 Respondent 3 a 42 year old male from London

males all gave figures. 'anyone with a record collection over 50 is a collector'<sup>295</sup> suggested a collector from Birmingham. 'If you have a more than average amount of records :) (+100)'<sup>296</sup>, suggested a respondent from Belgium accurately giving the mode average of the respondents' record collections. However, a collector from Austin, TX countered both of these claims by suggesting 'Record collectors are in it for life. They aren't just buying records today because it is fad. I have a lot of friends with a 50 to 100 records but I don't consider them collectors'<sup>297</sup>.

### **Wider Collecting**

Of those who took part in the survey 158 respondents said that they did not collect anything else, or 'nothing really'. 186 of the respondents did collect other 'things'. This posed a dilemma. When attempting to categorise the collected objects I was tempted to put things in to smaller categories for ease of analysis and engagement. I recalled that this was one of the points that initially drove this project - that vinyl had been included in another category and had then lost all the nuances of its collecting culture. As such, I will not categorise them but many of the additional objects collected were connected to music - guitars, books about music, buttons, badges, concert posters, tickets all appeared. Some of these music based objects were categorisable within Marion Leonard's (2007) categories, discussed in chapter two. Predominantly they were either in the third category discussed, including set lists and non commercially produced items such as demos, or the fourth category, promotional material such as posters, concert tickets. There were a number of unrelated collections, and collections that were stated as unconnected. Baseball Jerseys, 'Owl things' and rocks. 116 of the collectors who collected other things saw a direct correlation between their record collecting and their other collection. Either as related through music, culture or nostalgia and a preference for vintage. Vinyl record collecting then can be seen as a widely varying set of practices. Whilst there is an established world-wide grading system, collecting protocols as well as a set of tools: magazines, websites, books, forums and networks, that dictate what collectors *should* value, collectors themselves - aware of these things - choose their

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295 Respondent 294 a 35 year old male from Birmingham

296 Respondent 269 a 33 year old male from Belgium

297 Respondent 77 a 33 year old male from Austin, TX

own pathways through collecting. This is often justified through the love of music. 'I really don't know "grams" or grading qualities. I know a bit about music from an opinion standpoint but, again, the lingo is pretty foreign. I don't necessarily need to explain in scientific terminology why something sounds good to me'<sup>298</sup>. However, the 'lingo and terminology' does help some collectors in their social articulation of collecting. 'This knowledge is important because it helps me relate to my peers in a social context of our music scene'<sup>299</sup>. I would argue that, for many collectors, the impetus to collect is initially driven by a bohemian nostalgia, 'It's never wrong to bring back what sounds/works the best'<sup>300</sup>.

Depending on the age and/or the amount of time collecting, other mobilisations of nostalgia can be used to explore the emotional connection - or attempts at connection to the past made by collectors. That a variety of attitudes to the records of the past are enabled by this divided nostalgia means that both the worthless and the priceless records re-enter the circulating pool of records and continue their social lives from the abject to the abject/object and potentially object again. Collectors are more than aware of the pastness of records, but also measured against their own place in the present. Whilst Wernick suggests the present 'bars any re-entry to Home via secondary substitutions' (1997, p. 222), the vinyl record is not, I would argue, a substitution. CDs would, through their modern machinations, substitute, bring attention to now and betray the past like a digital watch in a costume drama. Vinyl was there. As the authors of the 1995 Complete Introduction to Record Collecting suggest: 'collectors prize the first pressing of an LP above any later editions or reissues, because they want the authentic 'period piece.' (Gilbert, Doggett et al. p. 35). It is not a fetishisation of the past in its entirety, if it is a fetishisation of some of the musical and cultural practices of the recent past. Some collectors are wary of the current revival of vinyl. Not in the sense of the new records that are produced, but more in terms of the colonisation of their culture and what this might say about them. 'The only thing I don't like is 'hipsters' buying vinyl because they are trying to be cool. It's lame and gives record buyers a bad image'<sup>301</sup>. That record buyers have an image at all, shows the great shift in vinyl culture over the course of the decades since the introduction of the CD.

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298 Respondent 238 a 42 year old female from New Jersey

299 Respondent 189 a 27 year old male from Melbourne

300 Respondent 202 a 35 year old male from Spring Hill, TN

301 Respondent 96 a 17 year old male from Newfoundland, Canada

The place of vinyl has shifted since the high watershed of vinyl in 1979. At this point in musical history music was most commonly produced and consumed on vinyl. Vinyl was omnipresent and yet invisible through its everyday utilitarianism. Musical divisions, in this era, were largely drawn along genre and subcultural lines. In the current climate subcultural divisions and the demarkation of genre tastes appear to be of less concern than the formats that one listens to music upon. As such vinyl, refuses to go away, it speaks of imagined pasts, echoes practice and culture, a hauntological specter

[T]hat which is left for dead must, and will, lend its infernal energies to the articulation - and deformation - of any 'new beginning' or 'second innocence'. No philosophical structure or method, regardless of its rigour, can permanently bury its dead (Banham and Blake 2001 p. 181).

Or as one respondent put it 'you can't have the future without the past'<sup>302</sup>.

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302 Respondent 108 a 30 year old male from South Carolina

## The Run Out Groove

At the beginning of this study I attempted to situate this work within material culture at the intersection of studies of vinyl, of collecting, of nostalgias as well as the intersections of theory and journalism, of extreme case sampling of the famous (Milano 2003) and odd record collectors (Zweig 2000), (Eisenberg 1987). This was an attempt to create a space for the originality of the work, or at least to point out what had *not* been studied before. Whilst aspects of vinyl culture have been covered in chapters, papers and conference proceedings from a variety of angles and authors (Corbett 1990), (Laing 1992), (Hayes 2006), (Styven 2007), and Will Straw's work (1997, 2000, 2002), there had been no study of vinyl collecting itself. Whilst Roy Shuker's (2010), Richard Osborne's (2012) books on music collecting and vinyl as object and history, respectively have been longer and thorough studies of their subjects, no study of *collecting* vinyl using, adapting and arguing with/against collecting theory had been undertaken.

Similarly, at the methodological stage a grounded theory approach and non-traditional structure to writing was designed to integrate theory and (collecting) practice, to allow for these activities, rituals, socialities, rules and etiquettes to drive the theoretical. There are a number of divisions that have been made here for the first time; the division of recordings into disc eras and the establishing of differing collecting eras. Beyond this, new divisions of the past within studies of nostalgia have been made (demonstrated in fig. 14) that relate to records as material objects. As such, the findings here contribute to the growing study of physical music consumption and material culture within the sphere of cultural studies by situating the importance of the object to collectors and/as music fans and explaining the value of the spatial and temporal experiences it offers. The arguments presented about the use value of records and the changing and shifting use of records in a framework of contemporary formats will allow for collecting vinyl to be considered fully by collecting theorists, particularly in light of discussions of a variety of approaches to care, to patina. Now that the cultural and non-utilitarian engagement with the format has been presented, it can be argued that they now do fit a 'useful collecting remit' (Pearce 1998 p. 32). With this established (and this was in part, the point of the research) then aspects of what is here and what is not here offer rich avenues of future research, not least in collecting theory itself. Similarly, the thesis has taken the material object (through theories of collecting) to theories of nostalgia and situated music fans and wider collectors' practices with the material in a framework of

remembrance, homage and retro taste; connecting subcultural theory to broader discourses of historiography.

Whilst this work has taken a specific conceptual framework to the broad spectrum of collectors, further studies may benefit from focusing on specific groups within collecting worlds with niche tastes and practices. Nostalgia has been a fascinating area of both theory and practice and those collectors who immerse themselves culturally, sartorially and historically within music eras (as well as disc and collecting eras) are an avenue of potential research. Gender is of particular interest; it was ruled out at the beginning of this project and yet some of the data collected shows just how rich and important an area of study it is.

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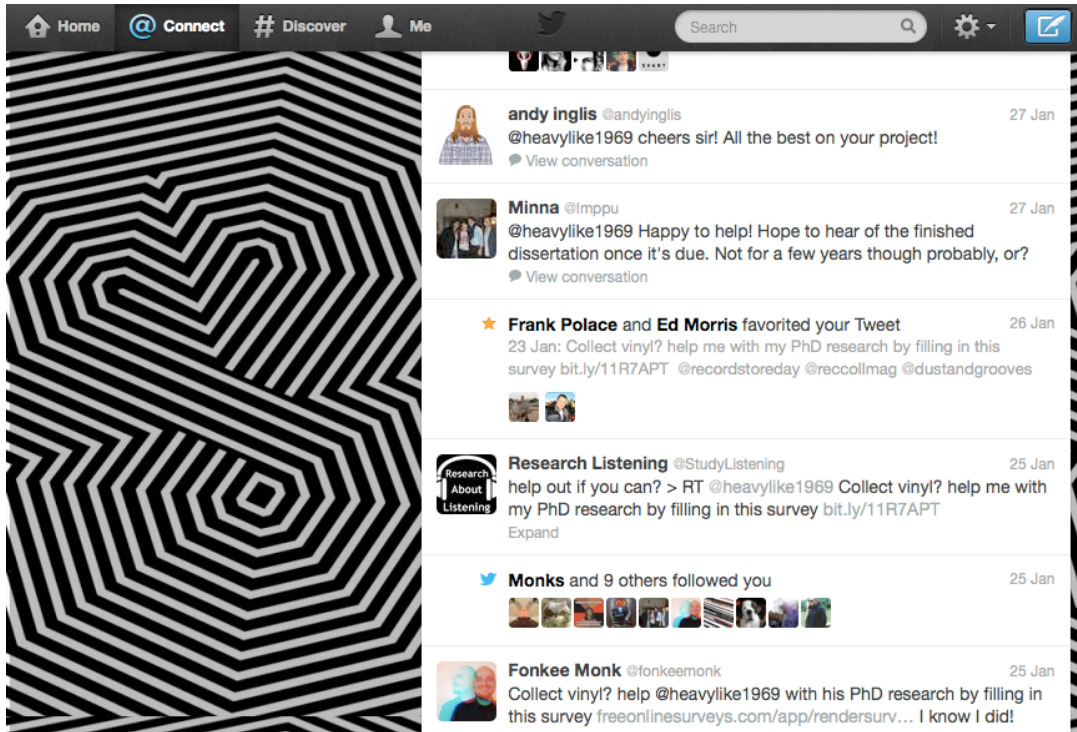
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Appendix One *Twitter grab showing the invitation (& responses to the tweet)*



## Sample Responses

The following are a sample of full survey responses. They were chosen to represent a cross section of ages, genders and locations within the broader sample population. They are all cited within the main body of the thesis.

### Appendix Two: Respondent 1 Full Response

#### **Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

#### **Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	London
Age	43
Gender	M
Occupation	Digital Consultant
Approximate number of records in collection	4000
How long have you been collecting?	30 Years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	£35
What was it?	Heart of the Congos' on Black Ark with hand painted cover

#### **Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	Someone left a Booker T and the MGs single (Green Onions/Bootleg) at our house, I loved it and discovered there was Green Onions and then took 6 months to track it down.
What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	Purely the music.

<p>What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?</p>	<p>LPs mostly - not really about the genre, more about the tracks. Main part of the collection would be jazz 40s-70s, Latin jazz, West African, disco, reggae 60s-mid 80s</p>
<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>Mostly about the quality of the record - doesn't have to be an original pressing but the vinyl quality has to be good and the condition VG+ or better. I have completed a couple of artist discographies but soon gave up on that - every artist has some duffers in the cupboard and completism in itself is pretty unrewarding unless the music is good enough to justify the purchase. The vast majority of my records are either things that I bought on vinyl because that was the format at the time (stuff I bought new at the time) or because it's the only physical format the music exists on. The older and more obscure the music the more likely that the original record is only place you can get the music.</p>

### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>Charity shops and second hand shops.</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>Don't really see it as a separate pastime which I devote time to. I'm always listening to or reading about music so it's just part of the fabric of my life and the collecting isn't so much a conscious accumulation as an inevitable consequence of buying music but rarely selling it.</p>
<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>Not sure you could infer much about my tastes other than they are varied but there is an element of wanting to preserve and share music that otherwise might disappear from history.</p>
<p>Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.</p>	<p>Make lots of mixes for people and occasionally DJ but no real world social connection other than online forums.</p>

How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?	My friends might think I'm well versed but the reality is the more music I discover the less I feel I know about music as a whole. Once you realise what a tiny fraction of recorded music you've actually been exposed to you get a bit of perspective. I never claim to know anything, which is probably accurate!
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#### Section Four: About second-hand records & the past

This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	X
Records from before you were born	X
Records from other countries	X
Records from a specific period in history	x
Other (please specify)	

If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these	Records form other countries, other eras - it's purely about the music.
Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)	...only when I find an obscure record from some distant part of the world and wonder how it ended up around the corner from me.
What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?	Someone who has definite goals for their collections - originals versus later pressings, specific labels and issues etc.
Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain	Not sure I understand that one. I guess a lot of records I own were recorded in a pre-digital age and sound better played on equipment designed for that.

#### Section Five: About other things

**This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.**

<p>What, if anything, do you collect?</p>	<p>Nothing! Grew up in a house filled with various collections which ultimately became millstones.</p>
<p>How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?</p>	
<p>How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?</p>	<p>I hadn't noticed! I see tiny runs of promo vinyl being pressed to accompany digital releases but not sure it constitutes a revival in anything other than marketing terms. There might be an element of nostalgia in middle aged folk rediscovering their records and firing up the turntable again (or penning a 'Vinyl is back' piece for the Guardian) but not sure many people are actively seeking new releases on vinyl which I think is probably a better measure of the health of that format. On the second hand side, shops are closing down all over the place and prices of once sought after releases are mostly in freefall. I don't see it coming back any time soon.</p>
<p>Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.</p>	<p>Many but prefer to wait and see if they turn up in my travels rather than ticking off a wants list via ebay. More fun and more likely to lead me to stumble across other good music along the way. The exception is a single that my wife and her siblings recorded as kids - would like to find purely for sentimental reasons.</p>
<p>Please add any further comments about your record collecting.</p>	<p>If the music is available in better quality on another format then happy not to have the vinyl. This means there's a slight element of self-appointed archivist when it comes to the vinyl I do own since most are old and/or obscure records...but in reality can't think of anyone who'd want my collection other than a shop or dealer.</p>

## Appendix Three: Respondent 4 full response

### **Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

### **Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	London
Age	40
Gender	Male
Occupation	Teacher
Approximate number of records in collection	1100 (800 lp) + 300 45s
How long have you been collecting?	I began collecting at 16 and collected for several years. Passion/addiction remained mostly dormant until about 4 years ago.
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	£70
What was it?	Jade Stone & Luv "Mosiacs" LP in Waxidermy Heatrocks for Haiti Auction

### **Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	I was obsessed with pirate radio in London as a teen (esp. Kiss FM) and this was an extension of that passion.
What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	The fact the artefact has a history. How potentially off beat and bizarre they can be. A cool physical form given to the strange and esoteric.
What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?	At the moment - private press US stuff, field recordings and a loose grouping of stuff that I can't really define. Part post-punk, part NDW, part minimal synth

<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>I don't like buying new reissues IF I could snag an OG with sufficient effort but I have no problem if it's something unobtainable. Price limit is about £50 infrequently but I won't think twice about spending a fiver. I have a pretty faint rule that I think it's more interesting to buy things that people I know IRL don't have. More interesting to acquire my own "discoveries"</p>
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### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>Most ebay, discogs with a smattering of record shops</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>Including the reading and the listening, 2 hours per day. Going up a lot more if have a big "session"</p>
<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>I think it says I'm too old for taste and am more interested in finding stuff out.</p>
<p>Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.</p>	<p>yes, in that many of my friends are people I know through VG+, and the music discussion connection is a way of hooking up with lots of people. In a broader sense, I started collecting records as a response to a break up, a way of marking a new phase, moving on, filling the time. Sublimation basically! The urge to buy shit all the time is fading a bit as I'm happier in other areas of my life.</p>
<p>How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?</p>	<p>I know a little bit about a lot of things but not overall and the more you know, the less you know you know.</p>

### Section Four: About second-hand records & the past

This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	
Records from before you were born	
Records from other countries	X
Records from a specific period in history	
Other (please specify	

If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these	Lots of the music I consume comes of
Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)	It's absolutely fascinating. I do think second hand records have an aura a la Walter Benejeman. I would rather have an OG because of it's history as an artifact than an reissue. I kinda think why collect records at all if you don't have this feeling - just about everything is available for your consumption in another format., usually free.
What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?	Being willing to spend lots of time and money on the cultivation of a collection.
Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain	No, not really as I also consume a lot of music as MP3s (mostly new hip hop)

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

What, if anything, do you collect?	Nowt. Wonderful life experiences, I hope!
How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?	Records can be a wonderful life experience.
How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?	Positive. I'm happy to see other people with the passion as it means my own will be easier to sustain.



<p>Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.</p>	<p>No, not really. I am more aware that there will *always* be something coming up that I want, if I'm looking for an excuse to spend money. The pit is bottomless - good, interesting records on OG at affordable prices. I'll never run out.</p>
<p>Please add any further comments about your record collecting.</p>	<p>I think possibly the most interesting thing with regard to me is sublimation as I said above. I wonder what other percentage of your respondents are butressing some other life changes through collecting?</p>

### **Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

#### **Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Kent
Age	22
Gender	Female
Occupation	Digital Assistant
Approximate number of records in collection	150
How long have you been collecting?	Approximately 3 years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	£60
What was it?	It was a limited edition Foals boxset with 2 heavyweight records, 2 7" and other collectables signed by the band.

#### **Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	My dad has always had an influence on the music i was brought up listening to. I inherited all of his records once he made the change to digital. The first record i bought myself was Rumours by Fleetwood Mac
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What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	It always used to fascinate me when i saw my dads turntable spinning round when i was younger, wondering how the sound actually came from it. Now i feel its something thats kind of lost in modern day society, i like having a new record in my hands, unwrapping it, studying the artwork closely. Nowadays they include the download codes aswell or a CD so it's the best of both worlds, however i prefer the sound of a record.
What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?	Mostly indie/rock, however i have some records in my collection that fall outside of this that i've inherited and i love them.
Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.	In some instances yes. Im currently collecting The Smiths LP's - first pressings only. I wouldn't buy a record that was in bad condition either, price limit is literally down to how much i have left each month!

### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)	I mostly buy records through artist stores or Amazon/eBay. Where i live there is 1 record shop and they are all VERY over priced.
How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)	I probably spend around 2 hours a week researching different records that are being released etc.
What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?	I think if someone looked at my record collection they'd be surprised that there's quite a wide range of genre's.
Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.	Not really, none of my close friends collect vinyl, however i've found that quite a lot of people in the music industry and a working environment are more inclined to start a conversation around it.

<p>How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?</p>	<p>I'd consider myself pretty knowledgeable about certain areas. It can be really important as you always have an idea of how much a record is worth, so if you find a shop selling it you know if it's over priced or not - it's just a case of how rare it is and if you can justify that price.</p>
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#### **Section Four: About second-hand records & the past**

**This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records**

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	
Records from before you were born	x
Records from other countries	
Records from a specific period in history	
Other (please specify)	

<p>If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these</p>	<p>Most of my records are from an era before i was born such at The Rolling Stones, Fleetwood Mac, The Beatles, The Smiths - I've connected with older family members over these</p>
<p>Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you many also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)</p>	
<p>What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?</p>	
<p>Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain</p>	

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

What, if anything, do you collect?	
How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?	
How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?	
Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.	
Please add any further comments about your record collecting.	

## Appendix Five: Respondent 39 full response

### **Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

#### **Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Alabama
Age	29
Gender	Female
Occupation	Teacher
Approximate number of records in collection	250
How long have you been collecting?	On and off for about ten years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	About \$30, have paid this for a few in my collection but wouldn't pay over this for any one record
What was it?	

#### **Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	My first record was Elton John's Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy. I mostly bought it for the artwork and the comic book it contained and didn't intend on actually playing it. Then my cousin gave me a record player that was left in her classroom by the previous teacher and I started buying more records and actually listening to them.
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<p>What is it about vinyl records that interests you?</p>	<p>I like that records are a larger canvas, so to speak, for the album cover and other art. My favorite records are the ones with interesting cover art. I also like the way they sound, and I like that when I listen to a record, I'm hearing it the way people would have heard it when most of the records in my collection were originally released. Most of my records are from the 70s and 80s, so for me it has a lot to do with feeling like I'm listening to the music in a "historically correct" manner.</p>
<p>What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?</p>	<p>As stated above, most of my records are from the 70s and 80s. I would say that most of them would fall into the category of rock, but I have some country and pop as well.</p>
<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>Because of my current living situation, I do not consider myself a serious collector and have only purchased one record in the past year or so. However, in the past I've not paid over the \$20-\$30 range. I have bought a few records without the cover, but only if it was a band/artist that I especially liked or was rare enough that I assumed I would not find another similar record at a reasonable price or even find one at all. For example, I used to be a huge fan of The Runaways, so when I found a single by lead singer Cherie Curry and her twin sister, I couldn't pass it up regardless of its condition.</p>

### **Section three: About your collecting**

**This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect**

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>I have bought records online, from record stores, at flea markets, from individuals, and have been given records by family members. I would say that all of my most recent purchases have been made online.</p>
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How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)	I definitely do not spend nearly as much time now as I did a few years ago when I was building my collection. I do have one book about record collecting with a pricing guide, but I haven't used it in several years. I am currently trying to get back into the hobby a little more, but I would say at the moment I spend less than one hour a week on my collection.
What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?	I think most obviously my collection says that my musical tastes are varied and that I don't necessarily prefer my music to easily accessed digitally the way most people do today.
Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.	I do talk about my records with people online at times, but I wouldn't say that they dominate any of my conversations with anyone or that I have ever met anyone solely based on my interest in records. I do sometimes post pictures of my records or of my new radio/turntable online and get a few responses, but they do not play any significant role in any aspect of my social life.
How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?	At one time I was somewhat more knowledgeable than I am now, but I would have never considered myself greatly knowledgeable about music or records. I do play guitar and that has lead to a few unique musical experiences in my life, but it is not a huge part of my life at this time.

#### **Section Four: About second-hand records & the past**

**This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records**

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	
Records from before you were born	X
Records from other countries	
Records from a specific period in history	X
Other (please specify)	



<p>If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these</p>	<p>I think that the reason most of my records are from the 70s and 80s (those from the 70s and very early 80s would be from before I was born) is that the first records I came in contact with were my mother's, and she mostly had records from her teens and early twenties. Her musical taste influenced my own, and so when I started collecting records that was still the type of music I was into and wanted to listen to in the vinyl format.</p>
<p>Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)</p>	<p>The only case in which this is true is probably that of the records given to me by my mom. I've wondered, for example, why she wrote her name RIGHT across Ace Frehley's face on his solo album. I could ask her, of course, but I just never have.</p>
<p>What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?</p>	<p>I guess someone who "collects" records is someone who actively seeks out those records that are particularly special to them. Someone who just has some old records laying around because they never took them out of the basement or because they look cool on the shelf don't appreciate the feel of lifting the arm and carefully placing the needle onto the tracks in the vinyl.</p>
<p>Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain</p>	<p>I don't really think of it that way, no. I consider it an appreciation for the methods of the past, but not a resistance to the evolution of creating music.</p>

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

<p>What, if anything, do you collect?</p>	<p>I have a lot of books and dvds, but I've never referred to either of those as objects in a "collection".</p>
<p>How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?</p>	<p>I guess in a way all three (records, DVDs, books) might reflect a somewhat introverted personality. I prefer to enjoy all of them alone in my own home, and most people who know me know that that is indicative of my personality.</p>

<p>How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?</p>	<p>I think it's great, and I hope that it means more records stores will stay in business and that I won't live to see the day when music is *only* sold digitally.</p>
<p>Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.</p>	<p>There are some that I don't have and would like to own, but not necessarily because I haven't found them. I would eventually like to own every KISS album, for example.</p>
<p>Please add any further comments about your record collecting.</p>	<p>I think it is clear that I do not classify myself as a "serious" collector, but I do enjoy looking at and listening to records, and I'm pretty excited just to be answering questions for a survey like this. Thanks for the opportunity.</p>

## Appendix Six: Respondent 46 full response

### **Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

### **Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Ireland
Age	34
Gender	Male
Occupation	Graphic Designer
Approximate number of records in collection	1800 - 2000
How long have you been collecting?	19
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	€40
What was it?	Beatles 1

### **Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	Became collector by chance, someone bought me a 7" as a gift, I had not bought one before and fell in love with the format immediately
What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	The history & heritage of the format, the iconic cover sleeves
What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?	Mixed, mostly 7", not specific genre

<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>No rules, once the quality of the disc is ok and it's of interest to me I'll purchase, not a fan of items which are not in original covers</p>
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### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>Shops, occasionally online</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>1 or 2 hours per week browsing in stores, maybe 1 hour per week online browsing</p>
<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>Only only thing it might say is that I have a preference for 80s &amp; 90s new wave/ indie</p>
<p>Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?</p>	<p>Fairly knowledgeable but it's not important to me, love that there is always something new to discover</p>

### Section Four: About second-hand records & the past

This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	
Records from before you were born	
Records from other countries	
Records from a specific period in history	x
Other (please specify)	

If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these	I enjoy the social/fashion background connected to new wave records/artists
Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)	Never occurs to me unless I see a specific handwritten note on the sleeve, but not important to me
What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?	The research I do before purchasing about what's collectible, rare
Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain	No I believe there is room for both and change is necessary for development of music and its industry

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

What, if anything, do you collect?	Nothing
How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?	
How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?	Excited and happy
Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.	No
Please add any further comments about your record collecting.	

Appendix Seven: Respondent 76 full response

**Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

**Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Southwestern Ontario
Age	17
Gender	Female
Occupation	Student
Approximate number of records in collection	150
How long have you been collecting?	Four years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	\$24
What was it?	Owen Pallett

**Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	I discovered a box of old 8tracks in my father's closet, and he bought me an old 8track player so I could listen to them. It had a record player on top, so I soon accumulated some records to play on them. I believe the first record I got was by the Beach Boys, but I don't remember what it's name is.
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What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	I love the sound of the crackle before it begins to play, how you can hold music in your hands and how incredibly fragile it is. I like collecting old records because I like the stories behind them, knowing that they are 'previously enjoyed' and the joy you feel when you find a diamond in the ruff. The hunt for music is so thrilling and worth every second.
What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?	Anything, really. I have soundtrack like My Fair Lady, Classic Rock like Queen and CCR, Indie like Vampire weekend and Born Ruffians.
Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.	Can't buy reprints of classic albums, for instance, the beatles. Nothing with a scratch through it unless it is a rare find ( Abbey Road was my only exception )

### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)	Local Used stores, online if not used.
How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)	depends on how much I have to look for ! if there is boxes and boxes I will look through them all. I remember one flea market last summer had a room full of them, and I had to have spent at least an hour or two in there. I read about music that online companies send to my email if I have time, but not if I don't.
What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?	It's all over the place, predictable in some parts and not in others. I don't think many people listen to both Vampire Weekend and Otis Redding?
Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.	Not really. Some of my friends started collecting because I was so into it, and sometimes we swap but most of my friends have different tastes than I, as I am not into country to anything too electronic.

How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?	Somewhat knowledgeable. It is important to me to know what I like and to discover new albums and sometimes a bit insulting that a friend hates what I have been listening to lately, but I am usually in the position of the DJ and my friends are mostly comfortable with that!
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#### Section Four: About second-hand records & the past

**This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records**

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	X
Records from before you were born	X
Records from other countries	X
Records from a specific period in history	
Other (please specify)	

If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these	I am for the most part not a fan of imports but I do have a couple. I was only born 17 years ago and that is about the time they stopped making classic records! and most of my recent favourite bands print on vinyl too so of course I must buy them.
Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)	of course! I think it is neat if the previous owners write on the sleeves, like on a couple of mine my uncle actually owned and he was really into Zappa so on some of the records he just wrote 'zappa zappa zappa' and you just got to think why in the hell he would do that, you know? also it is cool if people write their name on it. that way you know it was important to someone, that they would care if they lost it.
What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?	a record collector is someone who loves, takes care of and listens to all their records. someone who just has records doesn't necessarily use them.



Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain	Not really. people can listen to music any way they choose, like ipods are a great idea. portable music. just it depends on the person what kind of quality of music they think is best for them. if you don't care, you don't care, you know?
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### Section Five: About other things

**This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.**

What, if anything, do you collect?	old books, art ones especially. and classics.
How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?	they are both old. I look for them in used stores.
How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?	whatever. I realize that some people are doing it just to be hipster and in some ways that bugs me, but it is not a huge deal, I suppose
Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.	YES. I have been looking all over for an original Elvis album. Idk. just want to find one. also Cornerstone by Arctic monkeys, i just am constantly stalking my favourite stores rather than breaking down and buying it over the internet
Please add any further comments about your record collecting.	A lot of people just don't get it. But records, to me, are important. music should be able to manhandled, purchaced in hard copy, and take up a reasonable amount of space.

Appendix Eight: Respondent 79 full response

**Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

**Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Long Island, NY
Age	19
Gender	Male
Occupation	Student
Approximate number of records in collection	94 total (65 12", 1 10", 28 7")
How long have you been collecting?	Collection started during the summer after Senior Year of High School, 2 years as of this survey
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	\$28
What was it?	Radiohead's In Rainbows

**Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	I wanted to collect records for the experience of listening to an actual vinyl and building up a collection of a vast array of music. I think the first record I bought was David Bowie's "Let's Dance"
What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	It sounds natural. But I think that's pretty obvious. The one thing that really draws me to putting money on a record is a mix of familiarity and curiosity, i.e. buying a 12" of a favorite album that I've listened to countless times, or picking something new out of a bin that I've never seen or heard before.

<p>What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?</p>	<p>it's a mix of stuff, really. New pressings of independent bands that I can pick up at a merch table at a show, classic rock and blues albums at a record store, a bit of hip hop (I plan to get more), singles of brand new bands and well known artists, mainly classic rock or some form of electronic (mainly chill wave). I've started collecting more punk and hardcore records, both big name punk bands and lesser known local acts. I'm also looking to get more movie soundtracks, right now i only have West Side Story and Manhattan. Particularly Spaghetti Westerns like Day of Anger or Django.</p>
<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>never overpay what you can get online for cheap. The main record store I go to used to have all of Radiohead for +30/ LP. They're up on Amazon for half the price. However, if I find a record of a band I love that I know is hard to find, I'll pick it up on the spot regardless of price. As far as condition, if it's playable, I don't mind the dings and scratches too much.</p>

### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>Primarily at Record stores, like Mr Cheapos, Bleecker Street, or Academy Records. If I get them online, it's either through independent sellers through Storenvy, Amazon, or a band's merch site.</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>whatever time I spend looking at them online, browsing through a store, or listening to them. I can't really say how much time that is, it's just whenever I do it.</p>
<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>I think it shows a very wide array of emotion. One minute I could listen to Esther Philips or Marvin Gaye, a sense of relaxation and an easy going groove. The next it can be Bad Brains, rough and edgy, And the next could be Pavement or The Smiths, which is somewhere in the middle. Almost content.</p>

Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.	It plays a small part now. But I ended up bonding with my best friend over the summer going back and forth to a record store close to town. Its helped me get closer to people I never really knew that well originally. As far as what role it plays now, it's more of a private affair.
How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?	I think I'm fairly well rounded in my music knowledge. But music isn't really something you can know completely. It's always changing. If records do anything for my knowledge of music, it helps bookmark the sentiment of certain bands and albums in my life. Recently I had picked up T. Rex's "The Slider", an album I haven't heard since freshman year of high school, 4 years ago. When I played it on my turntable for the first time, it brought me back to the classic rock bands I grew up on in 8th grade and onward. It shifted me into an area of music I hand't explored in quite a while. So the stuff I know about music is never constant, because my preference is never constant. It's all in the flow, and the records help keep me on that flow for as long as I ride it.

#### **Section Four: About second-hand records & the past**

**This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records**

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	X
Records from before you were born	X
Records from other countries	
Records from a specific period in history	X
Other (please specify)	

<p>If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these</p>	<p>I like being able to have all different kinds of music at my disposal to listen to. stuff from the 90's, 70's, 60's, early 2000's even. And to mix and match different records from different eras one after another is an experience in itself. When it comes to older records, I'd prefer original pressings over reissues. I see it as owning a historical document of sorts.</p>
<p>Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)</p>	<p>Knowing that the year a certain record in my collection came out, someone held onto it for a long period of time, the possibility that it meant the world to someone, and that now it was given up and put into my hands, it's a sense of passing on a piece of a person's memory, a part of themselves and putting it up for someone else to enjoy. It's an afterlife for youth of sorts.</p>
<p>What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?</p>	<p>Knowing the ins and outs of a record, keeping them in pristine condition, being able to define the values of foreign presses and first run pressings of older records, this defines a record collector as an archaeologist of music, as opposed to someone who just buys them.</p>
<p>Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain</p>	<p>I don't really think it's a resistance because I have records and I still take advantage of the technological side of music production. I look at it as celluloid film versus digital imaging for movies and photos. Both have their own specific qualities and uses, which makes them both valuable on certain levels that one of the two can't reach.</p>

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

<p>What, if anything, do you collect?</p>	<p>I collect cassette tapes along with vinyl</p>
<p>How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?</p>	<p>It's a different medium for the music. The way a tape sounds is distinct from what a vinyl record sounds like, more notably the wavy-tape texture to the sound.</p>

<p>How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?</p>	<p>I think it's a great way for independent bands to still make some living off their music. It's also putting music back into a physical form as opposed to completely mp3</p>
<p>Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.</p>	<p>I can never feel complete with my collection unless I have Jimi Hendrix thrown in there, more specifically Axis: Bold as Love. There's still a large amount of records I'd love to have, but a Hendrix record is definitely the most critical to my collection.</p>
<p>Please add any further comments about your record collecting.</p>	<p>One of the best feelings as a collector is picking out a random record solely based on the sleeve art, taking it home, playing it, and being completely surprised at what I hear. It makes record collecting so much more worth the money when it hits that feeling of pride and shock when you pick out something really noteworthy.</p>

**Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

**Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Ranco Cucamonga, CA
Age	28
Gender	Male
Occupation	Nanny
Approximate number of records in collection	5,000
How long have you been collecting?	Seriously? For about 10 years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	\$30
What was it?	Band of Heathens "Top Hat Crown & the Clap Masters Son"

**Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	First record I ever bought was at a thrift store and it had scary sounds on it.
What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	It's a warmer sound and you have to take care of them...a labor of love.
What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?	Mostly girl rock, riot grrrl and garage.

<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>Has to be in atleast near mint condition and if the record has cosmetic scratches it must play or no dice. Don't mind getting a messed up record if it's one I will probably never own in mint condition because it's too expensive.</p>
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### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>Ebay mostly, shows, then amoeba and yardsales</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>Atleast a couple of hours a day.</p>
<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>That I'm a feminist bad ass queer nerd</p>
<p>Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.</p>	<p>Yes, I married a dude and his collection. It says a lot about someone.</p>
<p>How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?</p>	<p>Almost snobbish about it...that says it best.</p>

### Section Four: About second-hand records & the past

This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	X
Records from before you were born	X
Records from other countries	X
Records from a specific period in history	
Other (please specify)	riot grrrl



If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these	It was before I was active in the riot girl seen so it's me learning my herstory.
Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)	All the time.. I think is this record worn out because nobody gave a shit about it or did somebody just love it HARD
What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?	Condition, rarities, complete collection and love of collecting
Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain	No, I can be a nostalgia hound but I'm no purist. I got a record play that digitalized tracks but only so I didn't bang up my vinyl always having to riffle through em

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

What, if anything, do you collect?	Buttons and pins from concerts, tin toys and comics, mixtapes, boyfriends
How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?	I like having was I like around me
How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?	I'm not elitist or for one up manship of I was doing it before. If more people want vinyl...cool
Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.	Not yet...I have my ways. Well maybe calling out of context by Arthur Russell or Hole Celebrity skin
Please add any further comments about your record collecting.	Don't put them on the carpet, don't stake em and play em

**Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

**Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	UK
Age	53
Gender	Female
Occupation	Self-employed
Approximate number of records in collection	450
How long have you been collecting?	42 years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	£67.99
What was it?	Cliff Richard Acetate 7" Move It

**Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	Always had records in house, kids had own record player so didn't mess up our Dad's! First record I actually bought M Jackson 'Ben' LP
What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	The look, feel, and sound
What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?	Have tended to collect early Cliff Richard records that are more collectible. Although my collection ranges from classical to pop/ indie, some folk. Lot of 1960's but spans every decade. Last LP bought was released in 2011. If for pleasure listening rather than collecting, then it tends to be LP's

<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>Condition has to be Mint or as near to, very few exceptions unless a rare acetate/ demo version of a collectible. Have to be able to get it well under the 'list' price if buying in auction. Will buy Mint limited editions/ verified authentic signature (usually charity auction items). Normally expect to have original and Mint/excellent condition sleeves and any other material issued on original release all present and correct. Any Japanese must have Obi's etc.. No.1 rule: If buying from auction then preset max limit and Do NOT Exceed ( early days I found this extremely difficult to do, now I'll let things go rather than get caught paying over what I think something is worth. Also to remember to buy records for pleasure not just as an item in a collection</p>
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### Section three: About your collecting

**This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect**

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>eBay, local specialist auctions, charity shops, online sites if is a particular item, occasionally direct from artist</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>Used to spend around 10 hours a week, now my financial situation has altered so not as much...probably a couple of hours, this includes checking price guides either online or something like 'Record Collector'</p>
<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>It is split into those records I buy for pleasure and actually listen to, expressing an eclectic taste, to those that are generally bought for 'collecting' in a narrow genre and one which I have a reasonable knowledge about. Also the condition of records are paramount and I will not play a less than Mint record on my HiFi system (can't even have a fingerprint,) Very obsessional about the condition of them which I inherited from my Dad!</p>
<p>Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.</p>	<p>Not really, only if I buy direct from an artist at a gig. Often they are happy to chat and sign their records which makes a gig even better</p>

How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?	Music plays a large part in my life whether it be listening to other people's music or making my own - Both playing and producing. I have a very catholic taste and draw on many and varied influences. I read quite a lot about different aspects of music, I have one area of collectable vinyl that I have considerable knowledge about, but I enjoy learning about other areas
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#### Section Four: About second-hand records & the past

This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	X
Records from before you were born	X
Records from other countries	
Records from a specific period in history	
Other (please specify)	Artists that I enjoy

If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these	There are 2 parts to my collecting : personal which is artists and particular records that I enjoy listening to, and second, as a child then teenager I had a typical teenage obsession with a singer. As an adult I learnt some of my vinyl was worth a little bit so I gradually developed an interest in collecting the rarer/ more valuable items by the artist and the enjoyment (apart from a few favourite items) of buying them for a bargain and selling at a profit!
Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)	Yes, sometimes wonder about how come they've survived, especially if in excellent condition. Hate writing on sleeves and labels unless its a demo/ acetate, but this is hypocritical as I just have to look at my writing on some of my teenage years purchases!

What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?	Not sure, it could be about having specific genres or artists and trying to achieve a state of owning everything there is in a particular user-defined area. Maybe about actually listening to them rather than just displaying them on a shelf, maybe that the collection is ongoing rather than static.
Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain	No I have an extensive CD collection, I make and produce music so use lots of technology and software, I have started to use some digital forms of music, but no, I just love vinyl and will always have a vinyl copy of records that I love if at all possible and a HiFi to play them on!

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

What, if anything, do you collect?	Original craft/art, original posters
How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?	Not much, except some of the art and posters
How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?	It's great, each generation seems to rediscover it at some point and us oldies are often nostalgic, quite a few of my friends have asked for advice over the past couple of years as to where they can get record players from, and now starting to see them back in the high street.
Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.	Not particularly except for the 2 most limited copies ones of my particular 60s artist, have once or twice seen copy on eBay but sellers wanted way over market value so no deal. Generally I just wish that artists I come across would have the option to buy their music in a vinyl format as standard (maybe automatically offer at the minimum a limited edition vinyl version)
Please add any further comments about your record collecting.	

## Appendix Eleven: Respondent 127 full response

### **Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

### **Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Miami, FL
Age	21
Gender	Female
Occupation	Student, part-time barista
Approximate number of records in collection	325
How long have you been collecting?	5-6 years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	I paid for a first pressing of The White Stripes' Elephant for \$175. I also paid for a clear first pressing of Nirvana's In Utero for \$100.
What was it?	

### **Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	When I was fifteen, I asked my grandmother for a turntable for Christmas. The first record I owned was John Lennon's Imagine.
What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	I think the vinyl record is a very beautiful listening process. I also love the feeling of knowing there's a lot of history behind it-for example, I own a first pressing of The Beatles' A Hard Day's Night. Holding it in my hands, I feel like 1964 wasn't that long ago. The fact that it's tangible makes it more real.

What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?	I collect a lot of rock, 1960's-1970's and 1990's. Also a lot of indie rock and garage rock that's current.
Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.	I'm particular about the condition and the pressing. I prefer first pressings for older albums. However, for current bands, my favorite band is Radiohead, I bought the reissues because the originals are extremely rare. If I want a record badly enough, the price doesn't matter to me. But I try not to spend a lot of money on average trips to the record shop (which rarely happens, as I end up spending gobs of money).

### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)	I prefer shops, but there's about one in Miami that I really love going to. If I go on vacation somewhere, I scope out shops in the area and visit when I go. Austin and New York are my favorite cities to shop for records. Other than that, I love Discogs.com and eBay for particular rare records.
How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)	I spend a lot of time collecting and listen to at least one record a day (some days I'm busier out than others). I'm a journalism major and want to write for a music publication one day, thus, I spend a great deal of time reading Rolling Stone, Spin, NME, Consequence of Sound, etc. My dream is to own my own record shop.
What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?	Some of my friends jokingly call me a pack rat. I have them organized alphabetically and clean them frequently. I think it also says that my taste is different than most young adults my age, because the last thing I will buy a record of is anything EDM.
Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.	I've given my boyfriend and two of my friends turntables for special occasions. I've also met a lot of cool people that also collect records.

<p>How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?</p>	<p>As I stated previously, I want to be a music journalist and one day own my own record shop. I attend a lot of concerts and music festivals as well. This knowledge is extremely important to me.</p>
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#### **Section Four: About second-hand records & the past**

**This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records**

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	X
Records from before you were born	X
Records from other countries	X
Records from a specific period in history	X
Other (please specify)	

<p>If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these</p>	<p>Records from my teenage years make me feel nostalgic, and I love listening to them from time to time. Records from before I was born are my favorite, they make up a majority of my collection. I grew up listening to Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and The Beatles, so I love collecting these records that were released well before I was born. I love pressings from other countries because it's very interesting. I own a German first pressing of The Strokes' Is This It, and I love how it looks. From a specific period of history, I love records from the 1960's and 1970's the most.</p>
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<p>Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)</p>	<p>I love the fact that many first pressings I buy have been owned by others. I think about who they were and what their lives were like, and if we'd get along. If they're in good condition, I'm grateful. However, this isn't always the case. I once ordered an original first pressing of Bob Dylan's Blonde on Blonde with the original photographs of Claudia Cardinale in the sleeve, and when it arrived in the mail, there were pen marks on Dylan's face on the cover. I was very upset.</p>
<p>What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?</p>	<p>Record collectors play their records constantly. They also have a stereotypical personality-careful about the conditions of their records, knowledgeable about pressings and are constantly thinking about what records they want to acquire next.</p>
<p>Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain</p>	<p>I own an iPod and CDs and have 10,000 songs in my iTunes library, so I suppose I'm not "resistant". But I definitely prefer record collecting so much more, it's a passion rather than a way to listen to music. When I listen to songs off of Spotify, all I can think about is "this sounds so much better on my turntable."</p>

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

<p>What, if anything, do you collect?</p>	<p>I collect rare issues of Rolling Stone and some antiques from the 1960's, such as Beatles saltshakers and old manual cameras.</p>
<p>How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?</p>	<p>The time is all similar, mostly 1960's.</p>
<p>How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?</p>	<p>It makes me happy. When I was collecting vinyl in high school, it was looked at as odd. Now, because of it's resurgence, it's either looked at as "cool" or "hipster". Regardless of these perspectives, the resurgence has been a wonderful thing-I feel there a lot of people I can relate to now and more places to purchase records.</p>

<p>Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.</p>	<p>Two of the most rare records I would love to own would be the original pressing of The Beatles' Yesterday and Today (the "Butcher Cover") and the first pressing of The Velvet Underground &amp; Nico with the banana sticker unpeeled.</p>
<p>Please add any further comments about your record collecting.</p>	<p>I hope the resurgence of record collecting continues. Thanks for the opportunity to fill out this survey!</p>

### Record Collecting: About the research

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

#### Section One: About You.

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Illinois
Age	20
Gender	Female
Occupation	Student
Approximate number of records in collection	200
How long have you been collecting?	Eight years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	\$67
What was it?	an import copy of Cher's "Stars (1975)." I was young and bought it online from Brazil and then found a better copy in a 99 cent section of a store in Detroit.

#### Section Two: About your collection

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	My dad found a box of records in his basement when I was younger and so we bought him a turntable for Christmas that year. I became fascinated with them (I've always liked older music) and listened to it way more than them. And I realized I could start buying and enjoying my own records, and so my dad started taking me to used record stores.
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<p>What is it about vinyl records that interests you?</p>	<p>I'm very into rock history and owning a record is like owning a little piece of rock history. I also enjoy that they are so tangible, and that the music takes up physical space and importance which is something different for people who grew up with CDs but mostly MP3s, like me.</p>
<p>What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?</p>	<p>I have a near-complete Sonny &amp; Cher catalog, and I collect a lot of Springsteen, Phil Spector pop, '60s pop in general, and Motown (I'm originally from Detroit). I also have a small collection of Laurel Canyon and Psychedelic music.</p>
<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>I first buy what I want. If I know I want something, it doesn't matter too much if it is a first pressing or even a novelty reissue because my collection originally started out as me building a group of my favorites to listen to casually. That said, when I am buying artists I have more knowledge in (Sonny &amp; Cher, Phil Spector, Springsteen), I am way more careful and picky about the price, condition, and pressing. And it is with those few artists that I aim for completism, too. I have multiple copies of some albums because if I see one in better condition than the one I have, I buy it again.</p>

### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>I used to buy online (eBay and eBay), and have been to a few shows, but prefer to buy in local shops. I've lived in western Illinois, Detroit, and Columbus, so I buy primarily from the midwest. But if I am traveling somewhere, I like to stop into their record stores, too.</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>Usually every other weekend I will go out to a record store. I listen to my records daily. I spend a fair amount of time when I am off school reading rock history books and music biographies.</p>

<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>My taste is a bit eclectic, but all interconnected. I started off with Cher when I was younger (have no idea why, just loved her), and then found out about her work with Spector, which got me into his music, and then read about how Spector influenced Springsteen, which opened up a bunch of other influencers and influences to explore. I've mainly stayed around '60s pop, Motown, pop rock and rock and roll, though. I collect what I like.</p>
<p>Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.</p>	<p>None of my friends collect records as seriously as I do. Some think it is a fun nostalgia activity or something, and surely you've seen the resurgence of popularity of vinyl records among younger people: a lot of my peers think they are collectors but know nothing about it.</p>
<p>How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?</p>	<p>I consider myself to be generally pretty knowledgeable about the entire practice of record collecting with special knowledge about my specific genres and artists that I like to collect. I value knowing this and having it as an interest and hobby that stems from my interest in rock history. Sometimes I feel like I don't know as much just because I don't have a huge budget for collecting and I haven't been doing it very long and I'm a younger girl, which isn't always respected in record stores, but I feel confident in my knowledge.</p>

#### **Section Four: About second-hand records & the past**

**This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records**

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	
Records from before you were born	X
Records from other countries	
Records from a specific period in history	X
Other (please specify)	

<p>If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these</p>	<p>Most of my records are from the '60s, as that's where my main musical interests are. And since I was born in the early '90s, pretty much everything in my collection is from before I was born.</p>
<p>Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)</p>	<p>I recently looked up the address on a tag on one of my records and googled the man's name: he had died around the time I bought the record and lived near the store in Detroit where I got it which lead me to believe someone dumped his old records there when he had died. That really gave me pause but also made me think about how the music had a life, and that there was a reason he bought that specific single. Since I don't care too much about quality for some records, many of mine have names and addresses on them. I love the ones that say "For Diana" or "For Jim" or something on them, that the song was special to the previous owner.</p>
<p>What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?</p>	
<p>Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain</p>	

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

<p>What, if anything, do you collect?</p>	
<p>How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?</p>	

<p>How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?</p>	<p>I think it dilutes the effort and love that legitimate record collectors have for their collections. Because it is so popular, especially among people my age, when I say I collect records, they say they do as well. What they mean is that they bought a portable Crosley player and a Bright Eyes LP on Amazon and think it is the same thing as combing a record store for a rare Spector single for three years.</p>
<p>Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.</p>	<p>I am desperate for a first pressing of "Presenting the Fabulous Ronettes."</p>
<p>Please add any further comments about your record collecting.</p>	

**Record Collecting: About the research**

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

**Section One: About You.**

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	Dunedin
Age	53
Gender	Male
Occupation	Learning and development consultant
Approximate number of records in collection	400
How long have you been collecting?	Since 1975 - 38 years
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	< \$100
What was it?	can't remember. probably some Flying Nun Records obscurity.

**Section Two: About your collection**

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	Loved The Beatles and bought some Beatles 7" singles on holiday in Christchurch and The Essential Beatles which was a budget NZ only compilation in the early-mid 70s.
What is it about vinyl records that interests you?	When I started that was all there was. I started buying CDs for 15 years but then started returning to vinyl. I buy a mixture, often both versions. Anything I really like I'll try to get on vinyl, but CD is often more convenient to play.



<p>What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?</p>	<p>7" singles but less so now (have a few hundred, mostly 80s indie-pop). Vinyl LPs - some jazz some rock, mostly alternative rock/ pop, indie pop, experimental</p>
<p>Do you have any rules about your collecting? Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.</p>	<p>Don't collect as a collector, more just as a listener and music lover. I buy to play so condition is important. I generally won't pay more than \$50 for anything. I'm not going to collect for collecting sake or as 'investments' or collectibles. It's an active collection I play. It has a lot of valuable and collectible records in it but most of these were acquired at the time of release when their future value was unrecognised.</p>

### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>Shops - Too Tone Records Dunedin, or 2nd hand and new vinyl shops when I travel around NZ or overseas. Looking up the best record stores is something I'll usually do if I'm going anywhere new.</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>Very little - a few hours a week at most spent on buying and reading about music, more time spent playing music. I read Uncut music magazine and a few online websites and blogs.</p>
<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>Nothing... apart from being record/ music nerd.</p>
<p>Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.</p>	<p>Yes, most of my friends are music listeners and record collectors to a greater or lesser degree. Conversations are often about what we are listening to or have acquired/ liked recently.</p>

<p>How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?</p>	<p>Reasonably knowledgeable. I hope so - I have devoted a substantial chunk of my life to reading about, listening to and now releasing music (I run a small vinyl record label that sells albums around the world). I have done freelance music journalism (reviews, articles and interviews) in the past. My knowledge of music informs my taste and that is important when deciding what music to release. Small labels are like a curated music collection based on a person's taste so it is important to be able to recognise what is good (not necessarily what is commercial, but what other people with similar taste to me will like).</p>
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#### **Section Four: About second-hand records & the past**

**This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records**

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	X
Records from before you were born	
Records from other countries	X
Records from a specific period in history	X
Other (please specify	

<p>If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any differences in your collecting/enjoyment of these</p>	<p>Most of my LPs (and singles) are from the punk/ post-punk period (1976-84) and the alternative music heyday of mid 80s to mid 90s. That's when I was in my late teens and early twenties so probably buying most. Also have a lot of 60s LPs - psychedelic rock, etc.</p>
<p>Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you may also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)</p>	<p>Don't often think about a record's previous owners unless it is something unusual, rare or has a name I know written on it or inside. Not so keen on writing on the outside sleeve but original shop stickers are always an interesting insight into history as most record stores of the past have now gone.</p>

What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?	I may well be just someone who has records. I do collect some things just for the sake of having them or to complete as many recordings as I can by a much loved artist but I'm not obsessive about tracking every last release down at all.
Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain	No - I listen to CD, cassettes still, download MP3s, listen to music online. But to me vinyl is actually the most durable medium for music. It sounds odd as it is fairly fragile, but if properly looked after they last for decades and are very hard to lose compared to CDs, cassettes, and especially digital files. For something to have value it must be capable of being damaged, lost or destroyed. I prefer vinyl as a collecting medium because it is large, it is an 'object' with some intrinsic value or presence in its own right, even when just held and looked at.

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

What, if anything, do you collect?	Music books, surfing books. Again not obsessively, just things I am interested in. But over the years that means I have 'a collection' of these things.
How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?	Music books are usually artists in my collection.
How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?	Relieved and happy. I think it sorts out those for whom music is a noise and a commodity, from those who view music as a cultural item worth owning, preserving, sharing, passing on through time.
Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.	I have managed to find most of my 'holy grail' records over time. I'd like a Postcard Records version of The Go-Betweens 'I Need Two Heads' 7" single (I have the original Australian pressing). Acquiring the entire Postcard Records single collection would be great, but I'm not actively looking to do that.

<p>Please add any further comments about your record collecting.</p>	<p>Many of my most-prized records have a personal story with them. I can remember where and when (and why) I bought them. Like buying Can's 'Monster Movie' in their home city of Cologne when I was 16. So it is more than just the record that has value, but the memories and history that goes with it, which I suppose in collecting and antique terms is provenance.</p>
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## Appendix Fourteen: Respondent 292 full response

### Record Collecting: About the research

Below is a list of questions about you and your record collecting/collection it is in four sections totalling 20 questions. I would be very grateful if you could complete them honestly and openly. The research is about the practices of record collecting and not about individual collectors. Please feel free to answer as many questions as you wish with as much information as you are willing to share. Please be aware that by answering the questions you are agreeing to any information being included in the thesis and any subsequent publications that may result from it.

#### Section One: About You.

**This information will help me correlate any common themes against age, location etc.**

Location	The Netherlands
Age	48
Gender	Male
Occupation	Software Engineer
Approximate number of records in collection	14000
How long have you been collecting?	Since my first pay cheque in 1987
What is the most that you have ever paid for a record?	195 euro (1998 prices)
What was it?	a near mint Mellow Candle.

#### Section Two: About your collection

**This section asks questions about your collection, your collecting and your thoughts about your collection.**

How did you become a collector? (if you can remember please include the first record you remember buying)	There is no one moment I became a collector. It evolved I slowly became more and more interested in rock music from about the age of 14-15, circa 1980. I remember being interested in the idea of music that was not in the charts, and eventually began investigating secondhand releases. The first record I remember getting were birthday presents but the first I remember buying with my own money was Genesis 'Foxtrot' and Hendrix 'Nine TO The Universe'.
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<p>What is it about vinyl records that interests you?</p>	<p>Vinyl was simply the supreme format when I began buying albums in the early 80s. I never liked tapes. CDs were very expensive when they first arrived and like a significant proportion of music fans I found the reduction in size a major problem. Up to then I had no concept of my appreciation of the vinyl album as artefact, as a tangible object of beauty, like a well turned out book.</p>
<p>What kind of records do you collect (genre, era, singles/albums)?</p>	<p>I used to collect many genres though I have stopped buying jazz and heavy metal. I also stopped buying new releases around 2000 which worried me as it suggested to me that I wasn't interested in new things... but there is no point denying it. Also, the experience of the local record shop with new releases to listen to every week was shaken by the upheaval in the market; the reduction of music as an aspect of mainstream music played a role too; without a mainstream culture, a subculture has no point of reference. Nowadays I am interested in obscure 60s and 70s records and also obscure 80s records I missed first time around, though there are far less of them. I would say it's mostly rock and folk music, albeit spread over many subgenres. I buy more singles than I used to do, as LPs I want are harder to find.</p>

Do you have any rules about your collecting?

Please use this space to talk about your feelings about, for instance, condition, price limit, first pressings, completism and any other 'rules' that you impose on your collecting.

I rarely pay big prices (more than 25 euro) for anything unless I am certain something is rare. Most records I buy now are under 5 euro. I am pretty fussy about condition (min EX/EX) unless something is setriously rare or the record is 1 euro - I can happily spend 1 euro on a VG record simply to hear it. I try to buy only first pressings but I am not strict about it. If I want something, I'll buy it as long as its 'vintage'. I avoid modern pressings as I do not have time to investigate which ones have been mastered from CDs (a big problem in the reissue world). If I own a 3rd press, say, and I come across a 1st press for a reasonable price, I'll buy it and then try to sell the 3rd press. So I do upgrade, as far as pressings go. Completism: I have managed to rid mysel of the horrible habit of label completism which i suffered form for many years, i.e. if I found I liked 10 records on a label that had oput out 40, I'd search for the other 30! I did this with indie labels like Blast First, Homestead, Sub Pop (before Nirvana took off), and many other small US indie labels. Label collecting can lead to unexpected discoveries, but mostly its folly! I have a weakness for cover variations, e.g. foreign issues with different cover designs. I try to limit the number of these I buy, as you are essentuially buyign the same record again, justin a diff cover, but I do succumb rather a bit. Its much less painful with singles, as they tend to be much cheaper. I have other rules regarding my prejudices, e.g. dutch CBS pressings form the late 70s onward are poor; most non-US Epic presssigns for the 60s and 70s are poor; also experienced-based rules on the quality of pressings from various countries, etc, etc.

### Section three: About your collecting

This section asks questions about how, where, what and why you collect

<p>Where (and how) do you prefer to buy your records (Online, eBay, Dealers, Shops, Other Collectors)</p>	<p>My #1 choice is shops, but they are dwindling, and the 'movement' to save the indie record shop is ironically reducing the variation in these shops. Second would be record fairs. Markets and carboots is next. I also use ebay though its a soulless experience. Its not even real direct experience, which maybe explains the surprise I feel when I open a parcel that arrives 2 weeks later. I used to trade/swap a lot with other collectors but these days most people seem to prefer to sell on ebay, so trading these days is greatly reduced. I used to get sale and trade lists though he post on an almost weekly basis, but now I dont get anything form one end of the year to the other.</p>
<p>How much time do you spend on your collecting/collection (please also comment if you spend time reading about music/records and what you read)</p>	<p>Its difficult to quantify, it varies from week to week, but it is my #1 leisure time hobby... but you cant disappear into the batcave every evening after work if you have a wife and kids. So there is always compromise. Whenever I go anywhere, the potential for finding a market that might have a record stall is always uppermost in my mind. SO it occupies large parts of my idle thinkign time but somewhat less of my actual leisure time. I read lots of books about music, all sorts, including occasionally the odd biography. I used to read many magazines but as almost everything now is like a bad version of Mojo, I'm restricted (not by choice!) to Ugly Things, plus the occasional issue of Shindig! (looks fab, lacks depth) and Record Collector. Flashback looks promising.</p>
<p>What, if anything, do you think your collecting/collection says about you and your taste?</p>	<p>ABout me, almost nothing. They are just possessions. Their scale and condition might say I am a neat and dedicated type of person, I dunno. My preferences probably indicate my age, experience, upbringing, etc. About my taste: well, the records are my taste, or were my taste. Its the music I like or liked.</p>



Does collecting/records play any part in your social life? If so, please explain.	No. When I got to record fairs, I bump into acquaintances, chat a bit, but its no more than that. I share this itnerest witrh my brother, but we'd already socialise anyway.
How Knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about music/records? How important is this knowledge to you?	I used to think I was very knowledgeable but then I realised I'd only scratched the surface. There are whole genres I know nothign about (hip hop, funk, sunshine pop, etc). The knowledge is important in so far as I make use of it regularly, but thats all.

#### Section Four: About second-hand records & the past

**This section asks some questions about the journeys of second hand records and your relationship with music history/old records**

Please tick if a large proportion of your record collection contains any of the following (tick all that apply)

Records from your teenage years	X
Records from before you were born	
Records from other countries	X
Records from a specific period in history	X
Other (please specify	

If you ticked any of the above, please explain what it is about this era/country that appeals to you and the part that records play in this . If you ticked more than one box, please explain any diffeences in your collecting/enjoyment of these	I've already touched on this in my previous answers. Its too much to go into. Discovering the pop music history of other countries is a joy/revelation, like when you first discover theres more than just the Top 20.
Please comment here if you ever think about the life of second hand records before they entered your collection - previous owners etc. (you many also comment about your feelings about previous owners writing/comments on sleeves and labels)	No, I never wonder about such things, unless they've left an indellible mark of their previous ownership on a cover or label, in which case I curse their existance.

<p>What do you think makes a record collector (as opposed to someone who just has records)?</p>	<p>It's a grey area. People who, say, collect a particular artist, meanign they wish to own every single piece of vinyl from every country, I consider that kind of person a REAL collector, in so far as the artefacts themselves are what drives them, gives them pleasure. For me, records are things that I play. They contain music I want to hear. My interest in this may be beyond normal consumption levels, which may label me a collector, and I do value them as artefacts with intrinsic beauty, but principally I want to own all the Minutemens records because I love their music, but I do not feel compelled to buy every foreign pressing of every record they made. So, most people would not have heard of the Minutemen and so my owning all their records makes me a record collector, but I dont see myself as a pure collector, as I have no interest in tracking down every artefact.</p>
<p>Do you consider your preference for record collecting in some way resistant to developments in technology and music production? If so explain</p>	<p>Resistant to reductions in quality, yes. Resistant to the idea of consuming music as part of some other multimedia expereince, probably online: Yes! But resistant to technology developments: no.</p>

### Section Five: About other things

This section asks some final questions about collecting and other things you may collect.

<p>What, if anything, do you collect?</p>	<p>I tend to keep books I buy, so I have many books in the house but I am much less fussy about them. I used to collect comics but stopped many years ago. I have a weakness for things liek, say, old football trading cards, or toys I rememebr form my youth, or board games, but I almost never act on these impulses, which are just nostalgia.</p>
<p>How, if at all, do these things relate to your records?</p>	<p>An aspect of that nostalgia is undoubtedly part of record collecting, but overall I dont feel they do relate.</p>
<p>How do you feel about the resurgence of interest in vinyl records?</p>	<p>I wish it was allied to a resurgence in the reproduction of LP sleeves.</p>

Is there a record that you would truly love to own that you have not yet found? If so please explain.	There are a few things I have yet to find, yes.
Please add any further comments about your record collecting.	

[SLIDE] Record collectors occupy a liminal space within both the physical world of collecting and the academic literature that narrates it. On the one hand, in Britain at least they have been grouped together with CD collectors and make up 13% of all of those who 'collect' and their collections are significantly larger by number than other collectors (1998 pp. 51-52). This in itself is a contentious and emotive subject to the music collector one vinyl collector suggesting 'I just won't listen to CDs. They don't sound right. They don't look right. They don't feel right. I believe there is something intrinsically wrong with them. I listen to records.' (Dinizio, P. cited in Milano, B. 2003, p. x). But despite these attributes, because the objects of their collections can, and often are, used and valued as media they **'may, indeed, not fall into any useful collecting remit at all'** (Pearce, 1998 p.32). my intention today is then to question and narrate the nostalgic culture of vinyl record collector's and their collections. As (Muesterberger, 1994 p. 4) suggests **'Collectors themselves – dedicated, serious infatuated, beset – cannot explain or understand this all consuming drive.'**

With the increase in digital production and consumption of popular music<sup>303</sup> the practices of popular music's fans have also changed. With music storage available in non-physical formats, be they MP3 players or internet streaming, they each impact on the way we interact with stored music. This does not necessarily alter the desire to amass music. Simon Reynolds provocatively suggests that **'file sharing culture is basically an infinitely vast communal record collection'** (2004 p.306) - it does however impact on the attainability of music and the spaces of attainment where records **'persist and circulate'** (Straw, 2000 cited in Reynolds 2004, p.305). It also has some significant effects on the value of music (emotional or monetary) and leaves the **'vinyl junkie'**(Milano, 2003) looking backwards at a finite resource from an historical period bounded by technological production – and leaving vinyl **'to the very poor, the very rich and the very odd'**(Eisenberg, 1996 p. 211) as an anecdotal aside to this last point from my experiences of second hand record shops there is only the very cheap and the very expensive both of which represent some kind of heroic engagement with this finite source – either in terms of the one-up-man-ship of the

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303 The conceptual arrangement of songs has shifted from the single (with its b-sides) and albums (conceptual or otherwise) to the 'track' and the 'playlist'

bargain found or the dedication or the serious investment. The physical experience of collecting and the physicality of the collection has, I would argue, for a number of reasons become a nostalgic subcultural practice or what Evan Eisenberg calls [SLIDE] '*Nostalgie de la bou*' (Eisenberg, 1996 p. 211).

This is not the only way in which collectors of vinyl have been described, categorised or vilified – connoisseurship, hipness, custodianship, fetishists, archivists amongst others are ways in which we might see how the collection might be mobilised to make meaning for the collector themselves and to those the collector chooses to share the collection with. Sarah Thornton even puns about male record collectors judging each other by the size of their... collections.

The research itself is ongoing and this paper sits somewhere between initial postulations and interviews with collectors and has formally taken place over the last six months but has perhaps it has been ongoing since I bought my first record in 1978.

I moved to a particular area of London in late July 2007 and found there are a number of [SLIDE] music shops – some specialising in second hand vinyl only, some specialising in second hand media – cds, dvds, tapes, vhs [SLIDE]. These small independent and sometimes one man affairs have flourished in Camden town where the two chain stores – the virgin owned 'zavvi'[SLIDE] and the smaller chain Fopp [SLIDE] (both of whom sold vinyl) have both closed down within the last six months as well as the only shop selling only 'new' vinyl [SLIDE] (including reissues) leaving an area of London with a heritage of music (roundhouse) with second hand music shops in plentiful supply but no music stores selling brand new CDs.

It is problematic currently to describe *any* group of people as subcultural. There is debate within the field as to whether subcultures as they have been traditionally described still exist in any meaningful way at all.

Writers such as Maffesoli suggest that traditional markers such as class, youth or gender are no longer applicable but that '**consumption patterns and practices enable individuals to create new forms of contemporary sociality**' (in Muggleton & Weinzierl p. 12). This drift in study towards cultural engagement with the commodity form similarly problematises subcultural identity and study. Whilst writers from the Birmingham school

were discussing ‘**certain uses of material artefacts**’(Clarke, 1975) as far back as 1975 they were also discussing other markers such as territorial spaces, activities and value systems that accompanied and in some senses gave meaning to these material artefacts. These other markers or qualities have, in the contemporary field, lost definite qualities in favour of discussion of the fluidity of identities and performativity. Traditionally writing that discusses groups and their engagement with commodities as the driver of their cultural practices have tended to drift away from discussion of subcultures as autonomous groups of people creating meaning systems in opposition to dominant and parent cultures and move towards discussion of the fan who exists only because of the media that is, to borrow from Althusser, always already produced.

What this collapse or questioning of the traditional subcultural model allows for is mention of that terrible word ‘shopping’ – fans too resist this word, this ‘**feminine activity**’, collectors go looking for records [slide], hunting [slide] or digging [slide] but rarely do they go record shopping. Record *shopping* implies the cash exchange which Evan Eisenberg describes so well. [slide]

when I buy a record, the musician is eclipsed by the disc. And I am eclipsed by my money - not only from the musicians view but my own. When a ten-dollar bill leaves my right hand and a bagged record enters my left, it is the climax. The shudder and ring of the register is the true music; later I will play the record but that will be redundant. My money has already heard it’ (Eisenberg, E. 1987, p.20)

Angela McRobbie has discussed the role of second hand shopping at some length but in terms of the appropriation of previous styles by almost all of the post war british subcultures as a way of rejecting, and marking oneself as rejecting, contemporary values and appropriating the style and hence the values of a previous era. She describes how successive subcultures rejected contemporary values in subcultural terms and turned this rejection into a semiotic art form in the form of style. I would argue that whilst not spectacular in the way McRobbie describes, record collectors are involved in a similar practice - rejecting the present – its values, culture and music - through appropriation of

the past in terms of these self same values and that this appropriation has some specific divisions.

These divisions within the record collecting fraternity (and for the most part it is a fraternity) will make a difference when discussing their particular nostalgia. Within the record collecting world there are numerous cultures and individual practices but broadly speaking I would argue that there are those that collect music of or from their own 'era' a time that somehow encapsulates their teenage years, their musical awakening, the culture of their youth. And there are those as described by McRobbie that are appropriating a past that they were not part of. Essentially two collectors of different ages can have a different engagement with the nostalgia for the form and for the music within these forms.

There are those like author Bill Brewster who started their collections in their teenage years when making a statement – political or otherwise – through the formats bought and collected was not a discourse that existed for them at the time but only began when the music industry manipulated our buying habits until Cds became the dominant format, positioning those like Bill inside a discourse that gave shape and meaning to collecting and their collections by collecting vinyl only.

**'I started collecting when I was a teenager, and though I didn't have the mentality of a record collector then, I did enjoy the discovery of music that was new to me' (Marshall, 2004)**

To move on to the second group, these are the collectors described by David Hayes as

**'lament[ing] the passing of [...] a golden age of recorded music: a time when artists released albums containing important statements, unfettered by the interference of record labels.'**(2006 pp. 51-52) –

Hayes goes on to suggest that for this group the golden era starts with [SLIDE] Dylan and ends with [SLIDE] Nirvana

Whilst both of these groups may well be engaged in nostalgic resistance of **'the industrial regulation of popular tastes and modes of consumption'** (ibid) I would argue that the nostalgic practices of each group operates differently.

Whilst discussion of nostalgia in relation to popular culture invariably leads the researcher back to Jameson and the nostalgia film relying on the text to **‘reawaken a sense of the past’** (in Hayes, D. 2006 p. 53); I wish to mobilise a different use of nostalgia, one that perhaps looks at the different ways in which collectors may reawaken the past into multiple histories and narratives – both of themselves, musical histories and importantly musical geographies.

At this point it is necessary to step back a little and look at either the invention of, or the discovery of, nostalgia – both as part of the postmodern condition and as a disease of modernism. The term in its contemporary meaning, the way it is used by Jameson and in everyday language, came into being around 1920 and describes a particular relationship with the past.

but previous to this modern use, nostalgia has a more theoretically useful history.

Etymologically the word nostalgia is only pseudo Greek – it does draw on two Greek terms - Nostos and Algos – algos meaning pain or distress and nostos alluding to the return home – and this spatial dimension of nostalgia will be discussed again later.

The term was coined by a Swiss doctor - Johannes Hofer in 1688 as a medical condition, as a ‘disease’. He also suggested different terms for this affliction: ‘nosomania’ and ‘philo patri domania’ Originally, it was a diagnosis of a condition afflicting Swiss soldiers fighting away from home and was studied and treated as an illness. However after the creation or discovery, certainly after the definition became accepted, it became a European epidemic as seventeenth and eighteenth century travel (and military service) became more widespread.

The symptoms of this new mania were varied but **‘auditory nostalgia [was] of particular importance.’** with Scottish soldiers being banned from playing bagpipes when away from home in case it triggered nostalgia in the troops. At other times once nostalgia had established itself, this music of home was used as a cure for the disease or at least a way of easing the symptoms which **‘caused the afflicted to lose touch with the present’** (p.3) and left those with early symptoms ‘hearing voices and seeing ghosts’



Another native of Switzerland – Rousseau – also commented on the power of music over Swiss nationals a little later in the eighteenth century. Commenting on the French army’s forbidding of the playing of the ‘Rans-des-vaches’ it was suggested it would cause the Swiss troops to **‘melt in tears, desert, or die, so much would it arouse in them the desire to see their country again’**. Rousseau also claimed the music would not have the same effect on other nationalities and from this suggested it **‘Does not act precisely as music, but as a memorative sign’** (Rousseau in Scott, 1997 p.803)

This is another point for us to consider in the practices of contemporary vinyl collectors.

These symptoms, once removed from the language of the time can, I would argue, can be seen in the practices of record collectors in two ways using Svetlana Boym’s model of nostalgia where the word is split into its two etymological strands.

Firstly nostos – the return home

This is what Boym suggests is Restorative nostalgia which **‘puts emphasis on nostos and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up memory gaps’** (p. 41)

And secondly algia – pain or suffering

This is what Boym calls reflective nostalgia

**‘dwells in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance’** (p.41)

Here we can put our broad categories of collectors into two camps – those like Brewster who find themselves in a world where they are displaced by the shifts in technology and the way in which music is carried to us – having come to music in the age of vinyl records they find themselves in a world of CDs and MP3s but continue to rebuild the lost home, to patch up memory gaps in their actual lives and musical engagements . And secondly we can look at those who reject the technological world in which they live in an attempt to

return to a golden age but which is an imperfect process of remembrance. The golden age of Dylan did not actually exist in the way in which it is mobilised in contemporary culture – the tension between the music industry and the way in which it attempts to control our taste existed as much then as it does now. Indeed Columbia records ran an advertising slogan in April 1969 – the month it released Bob Dylan’s Nashville Skylilne proclaiming that [SLIDE] **‘the man can’t bust our music’** when arguably Columbia records were the very man they set themselves against

It could be suggested at this point that what I have argued so far could largely be exhibited by those that chose to buy music of the ‘golden age’ on cd or amass them as mp3s and to a large extent that could be the case. However, it is the levels of nostalgia that potentially drive the collector - when the desire to ‘return home’ is so strong that things that represent home but are distant from it will not do. I would argue that something such as [SLIDE] a cd reissue by an artist for instance could be seen as an iconic reference, a signifier, a postcard of that place – but the cd through its relationship with technology, its very physicality represents nowness.

[SLIDE]

The original vinyl however *is* the actual place – it circulated in the actual era of initial production, it witnessed the time, the context, the space, the grit and the dirt of the fandom and still – to the collector – contains this markers and as such has, unlike those initial listeners, remained unchanged, untainted by the passing of time. I have spoken at length with some of the workers and owners of some of these London stores and have started to record the conversations. James who works in Music and Video exchange spoke to me about the different kinds of shoppers who frequent the store. He suggests...

**Certainly recently I’ve seen quite a lot of middle aged older kind of men who have obviously had their families and obviously had their youth – they were young once and free once free of all those constraints and now they are buying back part of their youth, they’re buying Yes albums with the plum labels, they’ve got a bit of money behind them, they’re buying you know a bit of their youth.**

And then, alluding to Rousseau's '**memorative sign**' James suggests

**They're buying something for the memories that it creates.**

This memory creating is problematic for the collector like myself who were either not alive or very young during the chosen collecting 'era' what are the memories that these collectors generate? This is where the older form of nostalgia as a model may also go some way to describe levels of fandom for genres and styles that are spatially, geographically and arguably historically distant from the fan. But rather than in terms of returning to the known and knowable place these collectors (and I count myself among them) are returning to a place that is both unknown and unknowable and perhaps fictional where the building of the map 'home' seems to be part of the journey.

I spoke to a collector of early eighties New Zealand independent music who described the love of the genre in terms of the journey – I should state that the collector has never been to New Zealand.

My musical journey in the broadest sense has lead me towards that. [...] The things I've heard have lead me towards that now [...]It chimes a bell inside me somewhere and that's what I think defines me and that's how I want to be seen by other people.

This being 'seen by' other people extended to a desire to own and collect to archive original pressings of these records that were pressed in limited quantities and initially without international distribution.

To summarise I would suggest that exploring notions of collectors activity through this framework of nostalgia and the fluctuating concepts of subcultures and embracing the act of 'shopping' allows a space for discussion of record collectors habits and practices. I would argue that these collectors can be placed into three broad categories – even if these categories will be affected by the practices of genre specific collectors – firstly there are those collectors making restorative attempts through collecting – rebuilding memories.

Secondly there are those collectors who see some kind of authentic quality held within the grooves themselves. As Rodnitzky suggests – ‘if ever there was a counter culture surely it existed between those microgroove’. These collectors can never return home and are continually building a map to get to a place that does not exist.

And thirdly those who are nostalgic for geographically specific scenes such as New Zealand where ideologies and practices of those spaces can be appropriated through ownership of these displaced objects.

It is important to make a final note that all of these collectors within the second hand market do not contribute directly to the capitalist practices of the music industry of today but create a micro capitalism of collecting or what Angela McRobbie calls ‘subcultural entrepreneurialism’ this outsider quality is important - As Taylor suggests.

**Fans are not true cultists unless they pose their fandom as a resistant activity, one that keeps them one step ahead of those forces which would try to market their resistant taste back to them. (1999, p. 161)**

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Popular music is difficult to distinguish or disentangle from our sense of history – social, cultural, geographical, political, personal. And yet the very essence of recorded music means that it is not tied to its era of production but transcends the years through a variety of time-capsules or music formats to be listened and re-listened to regardless of its time of origin.

The relationship between music and history is also evident in the way we soundtrack our lives, the way **‘In the popular imagination, music narrates history’** (Kelly in Kelly and McDonnell, 1999 p.231) but conversely we might also suggest that *music history narrates the popular imagination*. This is evidenced by the proliferation of musical polls, all-time-best lists that collectively produce a notion of popular music’s canons and in turn generate sales, which in turn produce further canonisation and re-soundtrack previous decades leading for example to what Dave Haslam has called ‘The Abba-fication of the nineteen seventies’ (REF!)

Every time one of us buys a record or a cd, or any recorded piece of music in any of its past or emerging formats, we contribute to the history of popular music. Our buying, our downloading, our internet purchases collectively contribute to that notion of popularity measured in quantitative terms in the form of **‘the statistical, tabulatory, scientific irrefutability of the “top 40”.**’ (Corbett, 1990 p. 80) Charts are compiled, artists receive recognition for the ‘units’ that they shift. They are awarded silver, gold and platinum discs by way of this recognition as well as a share in the profits from this capitalistic endeavour. These relationships - between the artist and the label, between the artist and the public and the public and the industry and the notion of popularity – have been discussed at length by popular music scholars; whether it is discussion of the tensions between parties in relation to the development of popular music genres or in terms of industry’s involvement with the music produced by bands, singers and.

These arguments are presented perhaps most poetically by Evan Eisenberg (1987) when he tells us.

**‘when I buy a record, the musician is eclipsed by the disc. And I am eclipsed by my money - not only from the musicians view but my own. When a ten-dollar bill leaves my right hand and a bagged record enters my left, it is the climax. The shudder and ring of the register is the true music; later I will play the record but that will be redundant. My money has already heard it’**

What I want to explore here, is the complex interplay of histories; primarily the contributing practices and cultures of a different and industrially marginalised form of music shopping and how these marginalised or alternative purchase-driven histories are recuperated into broader notions of popular music histories and specifically the notion of canons. SLIDE To be more explicit, I want to talk about the collecting of second hand vinyl records and how this practice contributes to notions of quality – to the canon. David Hayes (2006) has suggested that vinyl records are situated in the public imagination historically in a mythical and arguably fictional ‘golden era’ an era that begins with Dylan and ends with Nirvana and it is the collecting of records at the earlier end of the spectrum – roughly speaking 1968 – 1972 – that I am focussing on here.

Record collectors, I would argue, occupy a liminal space: within the world of collecting, within the world of academic study and within popular music histories and cultures. They make up 13% of all of those who ‘collect’; although this includes those who also collect cds. Their collections are also significantly larger by number than other collectors (Pearce, 1998). But because the objects of their collections can, and often are, used and valued as media they **‘may, indeed, not fall into any useful collecting remit at all’** (Pearce, 1998 p. 32). As such record collecting has been marginalised within the academic discourse centred on *collecting* but has been of specific interest to a number of popular music scholars with, I suspect, more than a passing interest in vinyl itself.

Second hand record collecting then exists, I would argue, as a nostalgic practice and a practice that contributes not to the music industry directly, but deals with the path of older, sometimes forgotten releases SLIDE where **‘a whole informal economy has taken shape around this passage, an economy shaped by the trajectories through which certain**

**kinds of cultural commodities move as they seek to find a final resting place.'** (Straw, 2002 p. 153). Artists, writers and labels receive no cut from these sales but shop owners and collectors themselves profit from the selling and trading of the individual discs. As such, the cultural and social capital, or what Will Straw has called **'vernacular scholarship'** (Straw, 2000 p. 171) that record collectors possess and trade upon becomes important in the sense that one needs to know when one has found a rare and valued and hence potentially valuable heavy psych LP in the racks, bins and sales that record collectors haunt and trawl. The vinyl record collector then **'collect[s] facts as well as things. The facts are mostly trivia and the things, including [...] records, mostly junk, but that only proves he is a scholar'**. (Eisenberg, 1987 p. 18)

This scholarship, knowledge, cultural capital has been discussed in terms of how it operates socially where **'record collectors use their libraries as a basis for social interaction with other enthusiasts, finding common points of reference based on what is or isn't in a collection.'** (Hayes, 2006 p.62). This knowledge however, beyond its sociality, contributes to the informal and ultimately the formal economies of popular music through a variety of routes that ultimately contribute to notions of popular music canons.

The canons of popular music are not created by music scholars as such, although we do comment upon them; they are shaped and moulded through a combination of factors – music magazine polls, newspaper articles and lists, journalistic books and biographical texts but always mediated through the commercial world of the music industry and has over time produced a canonisation industry which **'points to a still central aspect of canon formation, namely the media through which historical knowledge is transmitted.'** (Kärjä, 2006 p. 17).

Those collectors who focus their attention on the late sixties and early seventies vary in their collecting practices and their own readings and interpretations of canons – in part due to their age, whether they were there at the time or not, and depending on the form of nostalgia that they 'suffer' from. Svetlana Boym has argued that there are, broadly speaking, two forms of nostalgia that sufferers may experience (and she resituates nostalgia in medical terms). By breaking the pseudo-Greek word down into its constituent parts she



suggests that whilst those who emphasise ‘nostos’ are engaged in restorative nostalgia and **‘propose to rebuild the lost home and patch up memory gaps’** (Boym, 2005 p. 41) I would argue that those collectors who experienced the late 1960s music culture at the time and are now revisiting it, in what appears to be the post cd economy, exhibit this strain of nostalgia. James, who works in London’s Music and Video Exchange described these sufferers of restorative nostalgia as **‘buying back part of their youth, they’re buying Yes albums with the plum labels, they’ve got a bit of money behind them, they’re buying - you know - a bit of their youth.’** The second category of nostalgia sufferers emphasise *algia* or reflective nostalgia – these nostalgics dwell in **‘longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance.’** (Boym, 2005 p. 41) I would argue that those collectors (myself included) who were not witness to the era operate more in terms of **‘cultural archaeology [and] the connoisseurship which furnishes historical depth [...] and through which canons and terms of judgement take shape.’** (Straw, 1997 pp. 6-10)

But either way, **‘the nostalgic had an amazing capacity for remembering [...] sounds, smells, the minutiae and trivia of the lost paradise that those who remained home never noticed.’** (Boym, 2005 p. 4) - but these practices are not solely based upon the collecting of those artists who have already been canonised through their commercial successes in fact many of the collectors I have spoken to have omitted The Beatles from their own collections, histories and canons but **‘even when deliberately avoiding traditional canonised objects of study, a historian is defining (although through negation, as it were) the canon. Furthermore, the ‘non-canonic’ objects introduced in this way may very well become canonic in their own right.’** (Kärjä, 2006 p. 5) The canon however, does play a part in this economy - The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd et al prove to be useful artists that many collectors buy and sell to generate income for other purchases. One collector that I spoke to had, over the course of a couple of weeks, bought two copies of The Beatles’ White Album – one a battered copy but still with a pristine poster included, the other a mono pressing but missing the poster. From his initial outlay of eleven pounds, these two charity shop finds became one ‘near mint’ mono copy of the record and it sold on Ebay for six hundred pounds. This money was immediately spent on rare and obscure records from around the same era as The White Album but by artists who were not **‘given due credit at the time’** (Cox, 2008 p. 24) The culture is more focussed on those artists, and to an extent labels, who did not achieve any

level of commercial success at the time and have slipped through the cracks of music history, or been obliterated by the post punk mantra that prog is a four letter word. The irony is that although **‘the collector of marginalia, hunting for obscure recordings doubles as an act of resistance against the music industry’s maintenance of a constructed popular music narrative.’** (Hayes, 2006 p. 64) collecting marginalised recordings has become an industry in itself where it has shifted from **‘practices of connoisseurship and systematic consumption’** (Straw, 1997 p. 5) to practices of connoisseurship and systematic *production*.

I want to talk a little now about how this shift has manifested itself

Since 1992 Record Collector magazine SLIDE has published a bi-annual book ‘The Rare Records Price Guide’ that claims to list every record released in the UK that is worth more than five pounds. This ‘bible’ is used in conjunction with other texts – in North America, Goldmine operates as a guide for US pressings, and of course there are specialist books on genres and labels such as SLIDE Tapestry of Delights, SLIDE and Fuzz, Acid and Flowers and Vertigo Swirl to create a relationship between knowledge and the object as Susan Pearce suggests **‘objects are seen as one of several ways of narrating the past’** (1994c p. 21) and conversely the past is one of several ways of narrating objects.

The internet has internationalised record collecting and the website popsike.com [slide] operates as an organic price guide, showing completed Ebay listings of albums for the last five years and updating with every new sale.

This internationalisation of knowledge complicates notions of the canon through which **‘democratising, computerising and consumerising pressures, the maps and statuses of knowledge are being re-drawn and re-described’** (Jenkins, 1991 p.60) . As such, to the collector of this period the maps of status can be written or imagined to include Japan’s Flower Travellin’ Band, South Africa’s Suck, Italy’s Flea, Switzerland’s Toad among others into their own collections and ideas of canon and may ultimately impact on their nostalgia.

These albums have all been reissued in recent years. These vinyl reissues have not come from the original record companies that released, marketed and ultimately, lost money on

them in the first place, but through a growing cluster of collector/historians who have made the transition from consumption to production. These small pressings usually in editions between 500 and 1,000 become collectible in their own right but also contribute directly to the traditional music industry through mechanical copyrights and publishing placing the collector/historian in a contradictory position of both resisting and serving the mainstream. The reissue also highlights the difference between kinds of collectors and nostalgias. In restorative nostalgia, only the original first pressing (and a UK one if available) will suffice, but to the reflective nostalgic who has no hope of returning to the lost home they represent **‘a bricolage highly independent of history, for in some cases it requires, in fact, the ignoring of history, in order to strengthen the existence of the canon through the imagined past.’** (Kärjä, 2006 p. 10). But is the collectibility that both raises the profile of the record and then when it is unaffordable to the ‘fan’ or music enthusiast, reissues become profitable to this cottage industry. However, these small pressings sometimes increase the price and demand for the originals rather than deplete their mystique and economic value. The 1970s band May Blitz SLIDE for instance issued two collectible records, both of which are highly sought after, not least because they were issued on the very collectible SLIDE Vertigo label. Tracing the trajectory across the Rare Records Price Guide the ‘book’ price has increased from £30 in 2002, £40 in 2006, £60 in 2008 and £75 in 2010. However, the last one to sell on Ebay went for £920 in April of this year around the time that the new ‘Back from the grave’ section of Classic Rock magazine featured it as a ‘lost classic’. On the mail order website Forced Exposure the write up of the album suggests that **‘Original copies of this album (the band's 1970 eponymous debut) sell for outrageously high sums, which makes this reissue an even more welcome addition to the Akarma catalog.’** (Anonymous, 2009) The vinyl reissue was released in 2003 when the book price was perhaps only twice the price of a reissue.

I would like to give another example where, I would argue, record collecting practice and ‘vernacular scholarship’ have impacted upon notions of the canon and altered music history.

Firstly the case of American band [SLIDE] Pentagram who formed in 1971 and still continue to this day. Their lack of commercial success is too long a story to tell here, but their story is one where eventually their first album was released in 1985 and subsequently

they have been canonised within the heavy metal scene, not through this first album but through the mass archive of demos and studio sessions made in the 1970s and released on vinyl in the 1990s. As such they are described as one of the most influential bands in the formation of heavy metal and ranked alongside Black Sabbath in this ‘alternative’ canon. The issuing of the material from 1971-1974 has effectively re-inscribed Pentagram back into their own history as well as rock history through the physicality of vinyl. As Susan Pearce suggests **‘material objects are as much a part of the weave of our lives as our bodies are.’** (1994b p.1)

The second example is poignant and touching. Collector, Musician and Label owner Lee Dorrian – who features in August’s Record Collector – is the archetypal collector/historian. Through his collecting of records, trivia and history he repeatedly came across the name of a band in magazine articles, adverts and tour news but could not find any trace of recorded output. The Possessed were contemporaries of Led Zeppelin on the gig circuit of the midlands. They recorded one album in the early seventies but it was never mixed mastered or released. Tragically half the band were killed in a car accident on the way back from a gig in 1976. The recording, like many records that were released at the time simply continued **‘to exist in a timeless and valueless limbo where, at some point it has the chance to be discovered’** (Thompson in Straw, 2002 p. 153)

With the co-operation of the remaining members and the families of the deceased the [SLIDE] album was mixed and mastered and released on vinyl in 2006 on Lee’s label ‘Rise Above Relics’ and widely reviewed in canon influencing publications as Classic Rock and Mojo and entered a wider discourse through a feature on BBC television.

These examples represent a record collecting inspired shift the shift from consumption to production and back to consumption again and have **‘given the investment in the obscure and the margin a heroic edge, and made of it the very foundation of rock politics.’** (Straw, 1997 p. 11)

This is not just the preserve of rock collectors, in soul and punk **‘some have made a profession of their hobby.** (Lynskey, 2006) nor is the judgement of which recordings need to be preserved, collected and archived outside of commercial concerns. As early as 1905

**‘The Trustees [of the British Museum] would decide which of the recordings ‘are worthy of being preserved in [the] institution.’** (Day, 2000 p.237)

One contemporary model of canons suggests that there is a **‘alternative canon, a mainstream canon, and a prescribed canon’** (Kärjä, 2006 p. 3) where alternative canon’s are somewhat genre specific or at least represent **‘tension between the centre and the margins’** (Kärjä, 2006 p. 13) the centre, in this model, represents the mainstream canon which is predominantly ‘rock’ orientated and focussed on ideas of ‘authenticity’ and narrated as such. The prescribed canon deals with a variety of political elements from state intervention and the banning of particular songs to the creation of manufactured acts with fictional histories and the guaranteed success that comes with large scale music industry marketing.

Because the collectors I have discussed today form only part of a much larger group of collectors with differing tastes, histories, knowledges and nostalgias all of whom are operating with such socially meaningful objects and music, their individual and small group practices are collectively re-inscribing fluid notions of history. This contrasts with the notion in traditional collecting literatures that suggest the act of collecting is **‘trying to lift objects away from the web of social relationships, to deny process and freeze time’** (Pearce, 1994a p. 201)

I would argue that record collectors operate within the canonical tension between centres and margins and are constantly and consistently questioning the prescribed canon. For the nostalgic record collector choices and judgements are not made through traditional routes of marketing and airplay of new releases but are **‘working to bring a highly chaotic period in musical history under control, into manageable knowledge.’** (Straw, 2000 p. 171)

Dorian Lynskey has suggested that in record collecting ‘the borders of obscurity are constantly redrawn’. (Lynskey, 2006) this on a micro level of record collecting ultimately ends with the borders of canonisation being drawn.

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