

"I remember opening up my first vinyl and seeing the incredible artwork it had. There's nothing like it. You also get that true gritty sound on vinyl that really makes a rock record sound great, which CDs can never achieve."

Nikki Sixx (co-founder, bassist, and primary songwriter of the band Mötley Crüe)

Has the human experience between music and the listener
eroded or adapted over time?

Independent Inquiry

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Summary

The topic of this Independent Inquiry is centered on vinyl as iconic artwork and aims to explore the question of whether the use of music streaming services has caused the demise of album artwork between the 1950's and the present day. This aim must be achieved via the objective of secondary research of three different keywords that are related to the topic with a variety of sources that range from website articles and newspapers to journals, videos and imagery. Research will also include different artists, theorists, songwriters and factual research in relation to the topic.

Introduction

The aim of this Independent Inquiry is to investigate whether the human experience of listening to music has adapted or eroded through the 1950's to a contemporary setting. The essay will critically analyse three keywords that are significant to the way the music and artwork has been used within our cultural society. The three key areas that will be analysed are Sound and Image, Nostalgia and Technology. These keywords explore the use of vinyl artwork, other additionalities, artists and songwriters as well as theoretical research. Artists will include Boneface, Jonathan Barnbrook and Chris Belheimer, along with theorists Stuart Hall, John Berger, Roland Barthes and Andrew Feenberg who will support the theoretical research. The paper begins by exploring the role that sound and image has in music and highlights the importance of its potential use. In Chapter 1, the essay will critically examine the selected artists who have designed some of my personal favorite album covers includes Green Day: *American Idiot*, Queens Of The Stone Age: *...Like Clockwork* and the David Bowie: *Blackstar*. It then goes on to address the common issues and benefits of social media that has laid an impact on the music industry for artists in Chapter 2. For the purpose of this study, it will bring up a wide-ranging debate of whether social media and the advancements of streaming technology have improved our musical enjoyment and the listening experience. Finally, Chapter 3 reviews the nostalgia that is evoked by vinyl and uses artwork by Nirvana: *Nevermind*, Kendrick Lamar: *Damn* and an original pressing of Queens: *A Night at the Opera* to address how the sound and image used can conjure nostalgic thoughts to the listener. This goes further to explain how some album artwork material are worn and damaged intentionally.

Chapter 1: Sound and Image

To understand the role of Sound and Image in forming album artwork, this chapter aims to provide an understanding of the factors that correlate how the impact of sound and image that album artwork has on the listener. This will be further expanded in the Nostalgia chapter. However, one must first explore the history of Sound and Image and the vinyl artwork that together marries the visuals with the vinyl. Vinyl records up until 1954 were mainly hit-singles with vinyl covers that had a 'Universally plain' art style that often feature 'the name and picture of the singer' placed on front of the cover. The 12-by-12 " inch sleeve was commercialized all throughout the "teenage cult of the 1950's" which then became a "product of consumerism" (Hamilton, 1987, p.10). This occurred in a time where companies were beginning to acknowledge the importance of vinyl artwork to increase sales. This is due to how

"Modern jazz tended to be associated with abstract expressionism; avant-garde sounds with avant-garde imagery. The influence of key designers and photographers may be first discerned in these jazz covers; it is interesting to observe in some detail the different strands that begin to emerge"

(Hamilton, 1987, p.11)

Businesses in the music industry explored more inventive and creative ways to capitalize on the modern era of Jazz music. They looked to the record sleeve canvas as an opportunity to further broaden the appeal of the contemporary culture of modern jazz music towards teenagers and young adults. Artists were then given the "creative promise and marketing capability" to produce originaive artwork with visual styles that contrasted the sound of the record. Alex Steinweiss, who has been credited with the idea of 'Creating original artwork to sell records' (Miles, 2005, p.10) would use different techniques of adding 'all high colour,

fizzy graphics and angular images' to produce influential pieces of artwork that became appropriate for the genre of jazz music.



Fig. 1: *Mr. Swing Harry Edison*
David Stone Martin



Fig. 2: *Kenny Burrell Blue Note 1543*
Andy Warhol



Fig. 3: *Ornette: Atlantic*
John Jagel



Fig. 4: *Horace Silver: Blowing The Blues Away*
Paula Donahue

After businesses realised the full potential of the record sleeve canvas, it became apparent that album cover artwork could convey the sound of the music through creative visuals and imagery. However, as time went on music became more complex with its sound and instruments and so did the artwork. Songwriters did not only convey their sound, they let their concept ideas and narrative themes influence the outcome of the sound and image. The narrative within the songs, concepts, themes, agendas, messages as well as its sound and style can determine the outcome of the album artwork. As Roland Barthes has said about the way a narrative is set up, “a narrative is never made up of anything other than functions: in differing degrees, every-thing in it signifies” (Elsevier, 2004, p.1). This suggests how the narrative functions within the artwork can parallel the songs narrative from the songwriter’s perspective, which further strengthens the musical experience for the listener. It also factors in the creativity behind the correlation of sound and image within the surroundings and characteristics of the songwriter, as it drives their creativity in other to produce a successful outcome. Schuster (2006) states “intelligence, intensive interest, knowledge, originality (ideas), creative instinct, non-conformity, courage, and persistence” are traits of creative thinking. This builds on the idea that creative thinking and innovation involves our personal experiences in life, this process can be used to express a songwriter’s thoughts and feelings through sound and imagery. While songwriters and musicians will produce the tracks, they hire artists to visualize their sound not just in the album artwork, but also through the lyric book, CD label and even the vinyl itself, as this all contributes to a visual representation of the record. Furthermore, the *Investment Theory* similarly suggests that “creativity requires a confluence of six distinct but interrelated resources: Intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation and environment” (Sternberg, 1999, p.11) which are qualities that are required of any artists to produce strong and original

work which can be applied to the music industry. For instance, songwriters Joshua Homme, Billie Joe Armstrong and the late David Bowie, hired experienced graphic designers and illustrators such as Chris Bilheimer who worked on *American Idiot*, Jonathan Barnbrook on *Blackstar* and Boneface who designed...*Like Clockwork*. These songwriters shared their ideas and personal experiences with artists, so that they could communicate the themes, personal thoughts and views through the artwork as well as the music. *"We think not only about how to present ourselves to others, but also log or record moments of our lives for ourselves to remember them in the future."* This statement from the book *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology* (Rettberg, 2014, p.11) poses a different view as to how songwriters use their music and album cover as a way of self-documenting through visual representation. In contrast, as to how we may express ourselves through canvas painting, drawing in a diary or how we appear in public, a record will normally contain songs that are self-reflections of ourselves. From the perspective of the listener, they would often listen to the album tracks, learn about the themes and hidden meanings that are layered within the record, and take inspiration from the songwriter's experiences. This form of original thought and innovative ideas is a result of "cultivating divergent thinking skills...deliberately exposing ourselves to new experiences" *PsychologyToday* (2019). As a result of this, it becomes an artistic method of expression by the confrontation of difficult thoughts and feelings.

"Every once in a while this process is difficult... I'm not trying to get to a spot, this is documenting the journey of moving forward, you know. It was a tough time and I thought I can run away from this or I can run into it"

(Joshua Homme, 2013)

After what was supposedly a knee operation that lead to a near death experience in 2011, lead singer of Queens of the Stone Age, Joshua Homme, lost his passion for making music after the incident that left him in a 'bed-ridden' state of 'recuperating' (Kerr, 2013) for four months.

...Like Clockwork takes on the themes of Joshua Homme's personal experience with his deep depression state after a near death experience. The sound style of the record is heavy and broken with a dark horror and atmospheric vibe that is accompanied via the guitars, bass and piano searing throughout the record. Liverpool artist Boneface was employed by Josh Homme for his twisted comic book visual style, to further strengthen the themes and messages that is found within the lyrical content, as well capturing the vibes on the record, creating this dark musical and visual outlet of Joshua Homme. Not only does *...Like Clockwork* have a strong visual style and reflection of Homme's experience, but the narrative goes further via the utilization of a music video. An animated 15-minute music video was created with the songs playing in a different order to the record, to create a narrative from the perspective of different characters that are fictional to Homme's experience. Homme describes Boneface's artwork and visual style as having a "similar world view...that I have" (Queens of the Stone Age, 2017) when describing his perspective of how he envisions his songs and brings up examples of Boneface's artwork. More importantly, he brings up the question "Can you draw what we sound like?" (Queens of the Stone Age, 2017). This cements the visual style that is associated with the musical style and Bonefaces 'world view' that Homme sees in his songs. As Dean Fertita (Queens of the Stone Age, 2017) states "it furthers the expression, it gets deeper".



Fig. 5: *Bloodied Heroes*

Boneface



Fig. 6: Queens of the Stone Age: ...Like
Clockwork
Boneface

This goes deeper with one of the most iconic albums of the current century 'Green Day: *American Idiot*'. The opening track and hit single 'American Idiot' is not only an artistic statement against the politicians and media that tell people how and what to think, but also conveys the ideas and themes that act as a weapon for social change. The title track *American Idiot* also employs the aesthetic of the record to reflect the themes of 2004 modern day America, which draws inspiration from the presidency of George Bush and the Iraq War. The album released in 2004 features a simple but effective icon of a hand holding a heart grenade. This semiotic was notably inspired by a lyric in one of the records songs 'She's a Rebel' with the line "she's holding on my heart like a hand grenade". The symbol inspired by the lyric was then used to represent the American Government holding the heart and soul of the American people. The visual iconography that is married with the concept of approaching a sensitive political topic is the embodiment of an important practice within artwork that can sometimes become underestimated and dismissed. Stuart Hall's Representation Theory from his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and signifying Practices* (1997,p.5) emphasises the importance of these ideas and how these practices can further progress the evolution in the artwork, and the way it is transmitted and perceived. Hall states that

"Music is 'like a language' in so far as it uses musical notes to communicate feelings and ideas, even if these are very abstract, and do not refer in any obvious way to the 'real world'...The embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted is what we mean by 'the practices of representation'. Meaning must enter the domain of these practices, if it is to circulate effectively within a culture."*

(Hall, 1997,p.5)



Fig. 7: Green Day: American Idiot

Chris Bilheimer

David Bowie's final record *Blackstar* dives into the dark themes of death, mortality and the circumstances of his illness with liver cancer. The album explores these themes through different aspects, from the music to the appearance of the artwork. Graphic Designer Johnathan Barnbrook believes that design is a "culturally valid form of expression" (Barnbrook, 2007) that shapes how we perceive the world differently, and the artwork for *Blackstar* is no exception. He explains that the artwork reflects David Bowie "facing his own mortality" (Britton, 2016) and that the Blackstar symbol has a "finality, a darkness, a simplicity, which is a representation of the music" (Britton, 2016). This suggests that Bowie knew his own fate and the only way he would express this fate is through the reflection of his self in music. Barnbrook also further visually deepens the enigmatic themes of the record and explains how showing the vinyl through the star cut out included within the black sleeve, is a "physical thing that degrades, it get scratched as soon as it comes into being, that is a comment on mortality too," (BERMAN, 2019). The dispirit nature and eerie mood of the title track not only foreshadowed the style of the album but gave hints to the fans that "something is very wrong" (BERMAN, 2019) as there seems to be an 'acknowledgment of imminent death' (BERMAN, 2019) deep within the lyrical content of the song. The whole concept of acknowledging death and facing one's own mortality is married with the lyrical content, eerie sound and simple visual of the blackstar that strengthens the albums narratives themes in what was described by Tony Viscontias as a "parting gift" (Brady, 2016) to the fans.



Fig. 8: *David Bowie Blackstar*

Johnathan Barnbrook

Chapter 2: Technology

In this chapter where technological advancements are to be explored, there are two social technological theories come to mind, that is the Instrumental and Substantive theory by Andrew Feenberg which is discussed in his book *Transforming Technology*(2002, p.20).

“Instrumental theory offers the most widely accepted view of technology. It is based on the common sense idea that technologies are "tools" stand-ing ready to serve the purposes of their users...Substantive theory, best known through the writings of Jacques Ellul and Martin Heidegger, argues that technology constitutes a new cultural system that restructures the entire social world as an object of control. This system is characterized by an expansive dynamic that ultimately overtakes every pretechnological enclave and shapes the whole of social life.”

(Feenberg, 2002, p.20)

Both of these theories offer a contrasting view to the argument relevant to the question, which debates whether the listening experience has eroded or adapted overtime.

The Compact Disc (CD) made its first appearance on the BBC1 TV Show *Tomorrows World* (1981), where a high-quality and easily accessible listening experience was established compared to the conventional methods of vinyl at the time. This was due to the lack of “surface noise, since the laser reads only the numbers, not dust or grime on the disc’s laminated surface as nothing touches the disc, there is no wear” (Walsh, 1993).This became the selling point of the Compact Disc, as at the time companies were ambitious about the idea of playing high quality music with the convenience of carrying it in your pocket.

Inventor of the CD, Kees Schouhamer Immink, suggested to companies that they “should put emphasis on the quality of sound and ease of handling” (Lynskey, 2019) as media would become digitized and less physical. The emphasis on the digitization of music caught the attention of the press, journalists, the music business and the public. Cox discusses the

changes in technology in 1981 and that “vinyl LP records are dead” (1981), this statement highlights the passionate views of many, who felt that previous recording methods of vinyl and tape had come to an end, and that technological advancements were the way forward for usability, convenience and listening quality.

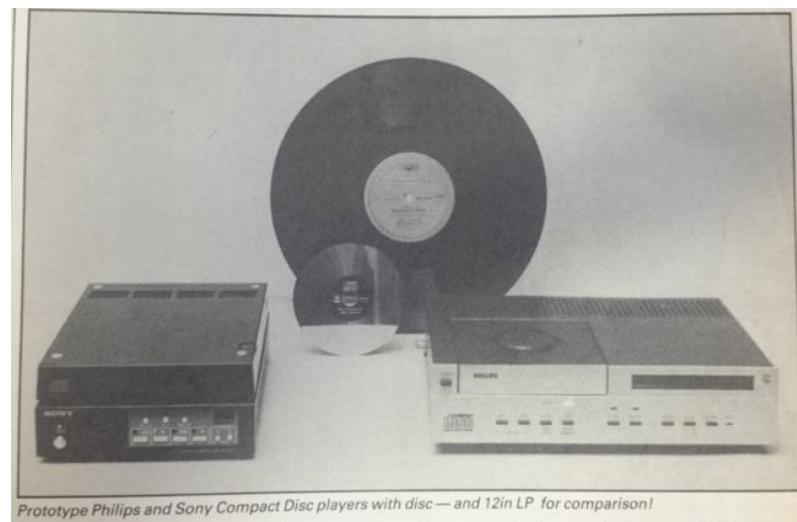


Fig. 9: Prototype Phillips and Sony Compact Disc players with disc - and 12in LP for Comparison
What Hi-Fi

In contrast, there were many people cautious of the improved technology and how music would become further miniturised with MP3 music able to be stored on the “size of a credit card” (Lynskey, 2019). The idea of streaming your favorite music on a hand-held device came true with the introduction of the MP3 player by Apple and online streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube. With the technological advancement in the ability to stream, it became easier to come across not just modern popular music, but also the ability to locate new and upcoming artists. Songwriters could use the popular music platform Soundcloud to share their ideas, EP’s, singles, and demos as well as the use of Instagram and Facebook to gather a following for their musical talents. British rock band Arctic Monkeys rose in popularity via the assistance of the 'word of Internet' (Brandle, 2006). According to an article published via the Guardian (Snapes, 2015) Arctic Monkeys rise to fame was through the distribution of ‘homemade demo CDs at shows’ (Snapes, 2015). Fans of the local Sheffield music scene would often have ‘burned copies to leave on buses, but more importantly, uploaded them to file sharing sites and set up a MySpace page’ (Snapes, 2015). Whereas there was the battle against online piracy, Arctic Monkeys used the concept of burning songs to CD to share at music shows and online to their advantage which made waves within the music industry. NME editor, Conor McNicholas recollects how this was the “first generation for whom the internet has always been there”(Gibson, 2005) and that there was this “instant fanbase” (Snapes, 2015). Brit Pop and Indie Rock band Circa Waves also made their debut via the use of Soundcloud. In an Interview with one of the band members Joe Falconer, he recalls *how* “Kieran wrote the demo for Young Chasers, recorded it and uploaded it to Soundcloud in one day” (Brandle, 2006).

The culmination of this evidence supports how technological advancements in streaming media both online and on the CD format, played a role in changing how music has become easily accessible via the online market for music streaming. This led to the rise in popularity of digital streaming. The services that are provided for the digital online market has now allowed the listener to access any song by any artists, along with the convenience of not having to search record stores for original media in its physical form. According to a report by *MarketLine*, the UK digital market for online music streaming, there was a significant increase in sales of '\$985.8m in 2018' in company with '\$841.2m in subscription services', which has now become well-known for being the 'Markets most lucrative in 2018' (MarketLine, 2019). The growth in popularity of subscription-based services supports how we have slowly adapted to the convenient methods of listening to music. The ability to easily stream digital media in high quality without the music skipping, freezing or showing distorted sounds seems to have enhanced the listening experience. However, the advancement in technology and its ability to stream digital media has brought some negative impacts to the music industry for both the listener and the artists.

Technology has brought the world closer via the accessibility of the Internet and Social Media applications such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. With the use of smart phones, it enables us to engage with the rest of the world and further bring us closer to collaborate with others. This is further supported by Kushlev, Proulx and Dunn (2017, p.68-74) who states that mobile applications are focused on the enabling of people to "connect with others through messaging and social media".

In contrast to evidence which presents the view that...an alternative perspective illustrates that technological innovation which is brought into society results in “social consequences” that restructures our lifestyle. As cited by Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx in their book *Does Technology Drive History?* (1998, p.201) they state that “[a]n invention, once introduced into society, is thus depicted as taking on a life of its own” (Smith and Marx, 1998, p.201), and in this case, Social Media has been argued to have disengaged us from the development of a human connection with others, due to how social media does not “resolve our feelings of social isolation” (Saxbe, 2018). The concept of how social media brings us closer but further disconnects people from the human experience and can be applied to how we interact and connect with music. Streaming technology has managed to revolutionise how different forms of media can be engaged with and used. It is how we choose to buy and listen to music that changes the way we perceive music as the industry has had to adapt to the rapid development in technology. This idea suggests how the invention of technology can change every aspect of how we interact and live in the world. As Mark Katz states in his book *Capturing Sound: how technology changed music* (2010, p.17), this posits “[t]he idea that tools, machines, and other artifacts of human invention have unavoidable, irresistible consequences for users and for society in general” (Katz, 2010, p.17). Furthermore, technology has brought more convenient methods of use compared to vinyl, however, it has had adverse ethical effects for artists and the economy in the music industry. Currently streaming has been criticized as for lacking a physical interpretation of the music, or rather ‘you only buy a license to view the content’ (Guinness, 2019) and that causes a personal disconnection with the listener to the music. It has also been argued that the ability to own the music is unnecessary and that “the “ownership” of digital files was always pretty illusory and underwhelming” (Beaumont-Thomas and Snapes, 2018).

Streaming has become unethical towards the smaller artists who seek earn a living from creating their own music. The royalties that artists earn have been notorious for their low rates for independent bands due to how many of 'the top 10% of artists dominate 99% of streams'(Beaumont-Thomas and Snapes, 2018), which makes it challenging for new and upcoming bands and musicians. The idea of using social media as a marketing tool to promote music has its adverse effects for the progression of songwriters and bands. Despite Arctic Monkeys' online success, it has brought more pressure for smaller and independent artists to develop different ways to market their music and have a social media influence, rather than focusing on the creativity of the music. Though social media platforms may be a tool for beneficial use, it can be a platform that not only de-motivates artists, but can also act as peer-pressure, lowering self confidence in their own creations when in comparison to other successful bands. This is further supported by Feargal Sharkey, who has had 'international success and a UK No 1 in 1995' (Hunt, 2019), in which he states that "Streaming is killing the ability for songwriters and artists to make a living and that may impact on their desire and capability to make music" (Hunt, 2019). This links back to the Substantive Theory where the impact of technology has restructured how artists possibly approach the music industry in order to make a living. Noel Gallagher summarises the argument in an interview with Studio Q(2015) where there is the older generation who will "own that record" and the current generation who "just want the tune...and if it's not on that phone it doesn't exist" (Studio Q, 2015). Not only does it support the argument of a lack of importance for artwork, it goes further to say that the idea of a concept album and the songs is devalued via the ease of access to online music streaming.

Building on the idea of how technology has impacted the album cover, this section of Chapter 2 highlights the issue of how technological advancements allowed artwork to become 'dismissive'. Compared to the physicality of owning the music, the artwork sells the album for some and creates more of a connection between the listener and the music itself. It seems that the importance of artwork has declined with the rise in CD and streaming technology. The CD does not put as much emphasis on the artwork, as the canvas was much smaller and limited for expansive visual detail. This is supported by Jon Tye from Lo Recordings UK, who states "[f]or me the CD was never a great format for visuals compared to Vinyl and I think with downloads/iPod etc, they are rapidly becoming obsolete" (Rivers, 2019). In contrast, Charlotte Rivers when in conversation with Matt Dixon of EMI Records UK ask how designers can adapt to the "digital times" and he argues that designers need to "keep pushing the boundaries...take into account what iPod/Zunes are capable of playing/doing" (Rivers, 2019). To put it simply, Matt Dixon puts emphasis on how designers can apply the audio rather than the physical aspect of visualising the sound. The evidence highlights how the focus on downloading or streaming hit-singles and popular songs weakens the whole concept idea for the album environment, therefore it dismisses the importance of album artwork and the visual content that come with it.

Chapter 3: Nostalgia

In contrast to the evidence which presents the view of how social media shifts from a forced interaction into social isolation, an alternative perspective illustrates that there is a natural interchange that comes with streaming the music. Though it may seem that streaming technology has overtaken the digital market of music, there has been a rise in interest for the physical format of music by vinyl enthusiasts, collectors or those who are interested in the 'retro gimmick'. Nostalgia as a term is a powerful and triggering emotion that leaves a person feeling homesick, with heavy reflection of a time period. Alternatively, it is described by Howland in the book *Revolutionary Nostalgia* (Cervellon and Brown, 2018, p.16) as

"It is one of the most astonishingly powerful of all the emotions, and also one of the most remarkably delicate. The smell of a pine forest, a picture of an old church, or the sound of a piano in an adjoining room may bring back recollections so profoundly moving that they even make a man forget for the moment where he is."

(Cervellon and Brown, 2018, p.16)

The idea of how objects or sounds can trigger nostalgic thoughts and happy memories parallels with certain songs, album or even the album cover itself. The evidence in Chapter 1 'Sound and Image' has proposed that artists who use album artwork to its full advantage are capable of developing a "relationship of the music and the musician to the image" (Draper, 2009). Furthermore, it brings the active listener closer to the concepts, themes and messages of the album, therefore becoming present in the moment and in the music itself. Not only do the songs evoke these nostalgic thoughts, but the appearance and feel of the album cover itself can trigger memories of a time when the listener felt happy and present in the moment from their first experience with the record.

The sentimental and ownership value of the physical media factors in a psychological role that is often a result of nostalgic thoughts and memories. This is further supported by nostalgia as being the “third most frequently endorsed emotional descriptor during music-evoked autobiographical memories” (Barrett et al., 2010, p.390-403). The sentimental value to the physicality of the records, especially vinyl, goes further with the construction material used for cardboard double vinyl sleeves during the 1960’s. Consequently in 1973 the packaging material was in low supply, and as a result it “made prices rocket...Record companies were forced to cut back on packaging” (Hamilton, 1979, p.14). Furthermore, this adds to the idea that nostalgic thoughts not only come from the music, but for some the artwork and packaging material used during its time period, which increases the sentimental and possibly monetary value due to limited availability.



Fig. 10: *Cardboard Double Sleeve Material*

According to the BBC, the rise in vinyl popularity reached a '25 year high' in 2016 with '3.2 million records sold' (Savage, 2016). This recent trend seems to have reached the modern youth demographic of young vinyl enthusiasts. In an article by David Hayes, he interviews a 15years old teenager Kyle, who describes the sound of vinyl as "crisp... It sounds like you're actually with (the musicians) when they're playing it" (Hayes, 2006). DeSorrells, who was employed at the retail store Urban Outfitters, says "I see a lot of people in their early 20s coming in and wanting to figure out what it is all about" (Fairchild, 2013). The popping sounds, the process to listen to the vinyl and its album cover size could be seen as a retro gimmick for the youth market. This goes further as the appearance of vinyl can often have a 'pre-aged' identity to sell the product to the modern youth target demographic, as suggested by Cervellon and Brown.

"From a marketing perspective, perhaps the most significant thing about Mad Men's wheel scene is not its multiple layers of nostalgia – though that's fascinating in itself – but the fact that it focuses on an object, a product, a piece of equipment...exemplifies the essence of retro branding, where new-to-the-world, state-of-the-art products and services are sold with the aid of an olde-tyme message, or narrative, or styling, or packaging, or logotype, or slogan, or mascot (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003). Or, as with today's ripped, torn, faded...the physical product itself is artfully pre-aged."

(Cervellon and Brown, 2018, p.10).

The idea of objects that are artistically pre-aged to give a retro finish to the product feeds into the nostalgia that people have for object that is the vinyl. The popping distorted sounds and the finish that gives the artwork a vintage look and feel, acts as a reminder of the time period where vinyl was mainly prominent as well as becomes a tool for selling the product due its vintage style. In some instances, the shape and form of the vinyl canvas is enough to fulfill a nostalgic experience. For instance, these albums covers of famous artists were

designed by Patso Dimitrov, who gave the album covers a vintage appearance to make it seem like they're from a different time period.

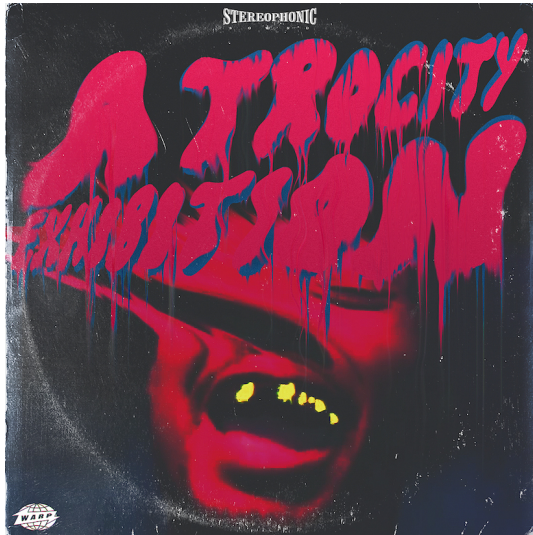


Fig. 11: *Atrocity Exhibition*

Patso Dimitrov

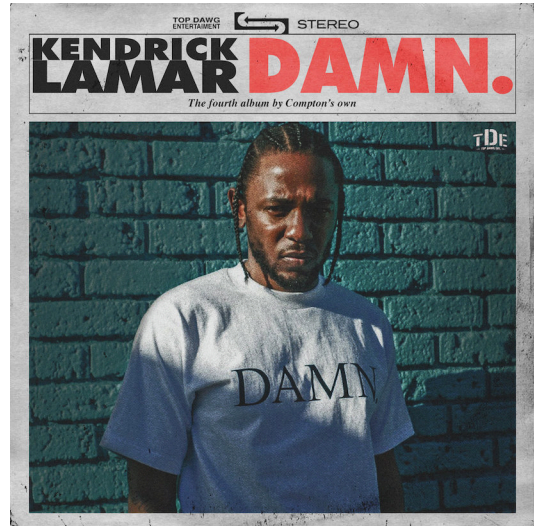


Fig. 12: *Kendrick Lamar*

Patso Dimitrov

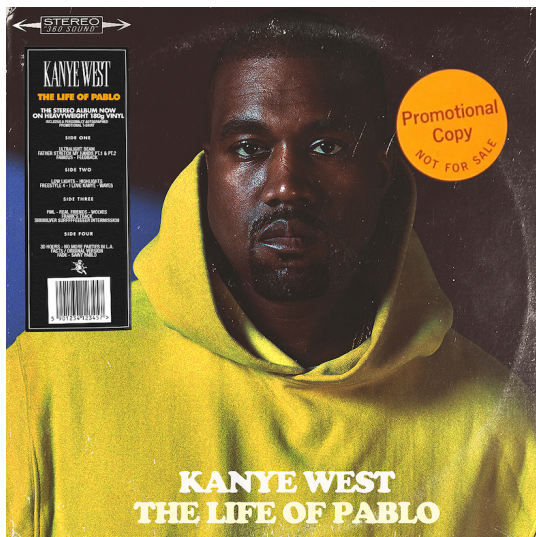


Fig. 13: *Kanye West*

Patso Dimitrov



Fig. 14: *Rihanna*

Patso Dimitrov

Fred Davis (1979) cites in an article *Nostalgia and Perceptions of Artwork* (2016) that “... art thrives on nostalgia and that, simultaneously, it does much to shape the form and provide the substance of our nostalgic experience ...” which supports an idea that the historical appearance of the vinyl itself, in addition the idea of ‘owning the music’, goes further to saying that the listener also owns a piece of history of the time the album was released. The idea of owning a piece of music from a historical time may offer the value of a sentimental attachment for self-satisfaction. However, one may argue that the retro appearances of the vinyl are only “*representations...not real in themselves*” (Mirzoeff, 2009, p.35). Though this is true to some extent, to counteract this argument and exemplify this idea, this 1975 original pressing of Queen: *A Night at the Opera* portrays a historical appearance that is a representational of its time period and that some may find to be nostalgic. It’s sounds are distorted with a real aged finish and rough card feel to the vinyl sleeve. In contrast to how fig 8 portrays the time period of vinyl via the use of photo manipulation technology within software applications, it does not mean to suggest that the artwork is fake, rather a form of artwork is capable of ‘*representing that reality*’ (Mirzoeff, 2009, p.35), and in this instance, it portrays a realistic representation of how vinyl actually sounded and appeared during the time period of its release.



Fig. 15: A Night At The Opera
Queen

Furthermore, the idea of how the historical appearance of the vinyl can be perceived as an iconic piece of artwork, is expanded by how its visual appearance became of greater appeal and status than the music itself. Artwork by The Beatles, Pink Floyd, Tame Impala, Nirvana for example, contain some of the most immediately iconic visuals, more recognisable than the actual music itself, which makes it nostalgic to some people who may not have even heard the songs before. This is supported by John Berger's theory in his book *Ways of Seeing* (2008, p.10), in which he states that...

"images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented: it then showed how something or somebody had once looked – and thus by implication how the subject once had been seen by other people"

(Berger, 2008 p.10).



Fig. 16: Nirvana: *Nevermind*
Kirk Weddle



Fig. 17: Tame Impala: *Currents*
Robert Beatty



Fig. 18: Pink Floyd: *The Dark Side Of The Moon*
Storm Thorgerson



Fig. 19: The Beatles: *Abbey Road*
Iain MacMillan

In addition to John Bergers representation theory, nostalgia that is set off from within the appearance of vinyl artwork can further engage the active listener, yet not only does this change how music is perceived, the process that comes with owning vinyl affects how they treat the physical media. The method of “listening to vinyl simply requires more of the listener...you have to physically pull the record out of its sleeve, gently place it on the turntable, and gingerly rest the needle on the groove” (Marty Music, 2019). This physical process uniting both object and listener facilitates and culminates through the experience of ‘owning the music’ via vinyl. Its physicality, sound and listening process restructures how we may perceive music differently compared to the convenient methods of CD and streaming that are explained within Chapter 2. The nostalgia that the older generation has for vinyl encourages and intrigues young adults like myself to experiment with the vinyl experience. Going to the record store and buying the actual record, experiencing the physical process and listening to the music, is what that brings us closer to the artist, further appreciating its sound, lyrics, themes and ideas. Appreciation at this level of detail turns it into the most fulfilling experience which is what makes vinyl become the epitome of nostalgia.

Conclusion

During this final analysis of my investigation, the statement on whether the human experience between the music and the listener eroded or adapted over time has proven to be a divisive argument that offers different perspectives. Within Chapter 1 of 'Sound and Image', it explores the history of the vinyl canvas and informs us of the importance of album artwork and visually representing what is contained within the object in a creative and symbolic style, as supported by Stuart Hall's representation theory. While Chapter 1 sets up the importance of album artwork, Chapter 2 of 'Technology' shows the arguments of how technology has led to music into becoming much more convenient and easier to access but has had its negative consequences on the listening experience. These arguments are supported from the perspective of the Instrument and Substantive Theory which places the arguments into the context of streaming technology and vinyl. The argument explores the benefits of streaming services and how it has become easier for artists to share their music online with the presence of social media. However, in a similar way to artwork and graphic design, there is a clutter of different music that makes it difficult for smaller artists to be noticed. It also brings up the issue of social media peer pressure that is put on artists and how it may lower their self-confidence in their own music, similar to graphic design artwork. It highlights an issue from chapter 1 that refers to how artwork has become dismissed by artists and the consumer due to technological advancements with the CD and Streaming. This leads into Chapter 3's 'Nostalgia' that explores how the human experience resurged with vinyl through young teens and adult. It shows how vinyl became an example of consumerism it retro culture and links back to sound and image to show how artwork in music can often 'outlast what it represented'.

It provides context as to how vinyl is 'artfully pre-aged' to evoke an emotional reaction and for some it sparks an interest in using vinyl to fulfil the human experience of listening to music.

The culmination of evidence within all three of these chapters proves that the human experience of listening to music has both adapted and eroded over time. We adapted to the new technologies of CD and streaming and as the Instrumental Theory suggests, it has restructured our needs and priorities in what we look for in music. We wanted free music that can be easily accessed as we naturally have an attention span so short, that we often find ourselves skipping over songs as we do not know what we actually want from music. However, the evidence in Nostalgia proves that we are adapting to the old methods of vinyl and appreciating the artworks and little secret message that come with it. For it is the active listeners who look further into music, who then becomes nostalgic for the joy and happiness they felt within the moment. This nostalgia that is felt is passed onto future generations, as it has been for us within this retro culture that forms the current zeitgeist of my generation.

- Viva La Vinyl!

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