

Popular Music and Materiality: Memorabilia and Memory Traces

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The material objects of popular music have featured significantly in studies of popular music. In particular, there are established literatures on physical playback media (including the re-emergence of vinyl albums) and playback devices, from the Walkman to the iPod. Recently, as popular music scholars have begun to explore the everyday use of music and music technologies by casual listeners, music has increasingly been described as sound and as an ambient presence in our lives. Yet woven through these increasingly digital cultures are concrete manifestations of music listening and fandom. Drawing on the findings of a three-year Australian Research Council-funded project on popular music and cultural memory, this article considers the implications of such manifestations of materiality for the way we understand the significance of popular music, and its linking of the past and the present, in contemporary everyday life. Using fieldwork data collected in cities across Australia, the article considers how various aspects of popular music-related material culture became palpable objects for the writing of personal histories. In some instances, these material objects of participation were less foregrounded but still present. In these cases, materiality was resigned more to the past, but material cultures were actively digitized and distributed. This process was always ongoing and incomplete. This article examines and develops a central theme emerging from our research findings, namely that popular music objects acquire meanings that raise them above their everyday status via cultural means strongly influenced by the contextualizing effects of online technology.

Introduction

While some aspects of material culture and its everyday uses within musical life have received focused attention among popular music scholars, the broader landscape of popular music's material dimensions remains largely unmapped. Thus, for example, there is by now a plethora of work on physical playback media, notably vinyl albums (see Hayes; Bartmanski and Woodward) and mobile playback devices such as the iPod and the Sony Walkman (see Hosokawa; Bull). Indeed, as popular music scholars have begun to explore the everyday use of music and music technologies by casual listeners,

music has increasingly been described as sound and as an ambient presence in our lives (Back; Kassabian). Yet woven through these increasingly digital cultures are concrete manifestations of music listening and fandom. Ticket stubs, concert T-shirts, posters, autographed photographs and brochures, fanzines, badges, and sew-on patches are but a few examples of the material objects through which individuals articulate their identities as music fans with strong ties to and aesthetic investment in particular artists, genres, and scenes.

Drawing on the findings of a three-year project on popular music and cultural memory funded by the Australian Research Council,¹ this article considers the significance of such manifestations of materiality for the way in which we understand the significance of popular music, and its linking of the past and the present, in contemporary everyday life. Core to the article is a consideration of how various aspects of popular music-related material culture become palpable objects for the writing of personal histories in specific local contexts. In some locations and eras, these material objects of participation may be less foregrounded but are often still present. In some cases, materiality is resigned more to the past but material cultures are actively digitized and distributed. Indeed, as we will presently illustrate, this is a process that is always ongoing and incomplete. This article examines and develops a central theme emerging from our research findings, namely that popular music objects acquire meanings that raise them above their everyday status via cultural means strongly influenced by the contextualizing effects of online technology.

Material Culture

The focus on material culture in contemporary social and cultural theory is linked to changes in theoretical and empirical approaches to the broader study of society. Thus, researchers began to consider culture as a dynamic force in the production of everyday life rather than simply a byproduct of it. One aspect of the “cultural turn” (see Chaney, *The Cultural Turn*), as this approach came to be known, was an interest among researchers in the relationship between materiality and everyday life, materiality in this sense relating to objects, images, and texts produced by the cultural industries. Thus, theorists such as Giddens, Bauman, and Chaney argued that, through the cultural consumption of objects, images, and texts, individuals have gained a degree of agency in the lifestyle choices they make and the identities they construct. Giddens refers to this as a state of reflexive modernity, within which individuals, although still situated by structural constraints such as class, race, and gender, negotiate these through the appropriation and inscription of cultural resources in forms of conspicuous display. Since the late 1980s, a range of studies has sought to uncover and explain the intricate and sometimes intangible ways through which materiality informs the socio-cultural worlds of individuals living in the developed and, increasingly, the developing world (see Hodder).

An early foray into such processes of materiality is Miller’s *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Central to Miller’s argument in this study is that the meaning of

material objects cannot be gleaned purely from studying the objects themselves. Rather, material objects also have *cultural* meanings, the latter becoming clear only when objects are studied in the context of their everyday appropriation and use by individuals. In an approach that coheres well with the central tenets of the cultural turn, Miller rejects the contention of earlier mass cultural theorists (see, for example, MacDonald) that objects produced by capitalist industries serve to homogenize individuals into a uniform and uncritical mass. Indeed, for Miller a broadly opposite scenario is true. Thus, through their selective appropriation and reworking of consumer objects, individuals discover pathways to express themselves creatively. Objects bought in the consumer marketplace take on personal meaning and significance in such a way that their economic value is replaced by a personally inscribed aesthetic value.

Dant espouses a similar view of the significance of material culture for our understanding of the social world. According to Dant, while anthropologists have long understood the need to engage with the material as a means of interpreting the social and the cultural, sociologists remained “agnostic” in this respect for many years. However, from the point of view of Dant:

material culture provides evidence of the distinctive form of a society. It provides this evidence because it is an integral part of what that society is. . . . material culture ties us to others in our society providing a means of sharing values, activities and styles of life. (Dant 2)

As Dant’s observations illustrate, his interest in the materiality of social life stems from a desire to examine how the social and material interrelate in such a way that the one is always firmly a reflection of, rather than, a product of the other. Dant’s work is, in this respect, particularly instructive in that, through his understanding of material culture as a central element in the production of distinctive forms of social life, he offers important tools for an analysis of the ways that materiality connects with the aesthetic contours of popular music production, consumption, and, specifically to this article, memory and enshrinement in specific personal narratives concerning music. As noted above, an examination of how material objects enable individuals to form bonds with popular music over time and become imbricated in particular forms of music life is a core focus of our research.

A further study that adds important depth to our comprehension of material culture in the contemporary social world is Woodward’s *Understanding Material Culture*. Of particular importance is Woodward’s highly nuanced exploration of the competencies acquired and used by individuals in their physical and symbolic appropriation of material objects. Echoing Miller, Woodward observes how, due to the sheer range of material objects, images, and texts available to individuals, the fundamental impact of material culture on everyday life is not one of homogenization but rather plurality. Thus, according to Woodward, material culture plays a critical part in the empowerment of individuals—the power of choice has to be mastered in

such a way that individuals choose in a fashion that makes “cultural sense” both to themselves and to others. Key here, then, is the ability to discriminate among objects in such a way that objects chosen for consumption and social display signify particular things, in particular ways, to particular groups:

The trajectories and biographies of objects are not just related to their commodity status, but to more complex meanings and interpretations given to them by individuals, restricted taste communities (such as those who appreciate avant-garde, or fans of a particular pop group or television show) or larger social groups . . . in complex, differentiated, pluralistic societies inhabited by omnivorous, knowledgeable and flexible consumers, the rules or criteria for discriminating and classifying the worth of material culture are diffuse and variable. (Woodward 30)

In essence, there are clear similarities here between Woodward’s notion of “rules” and “criteria” as these determine the appropriation and re-inscription of material objects and what Chaney (*Lifestyles*) refers to as lifestyle “sites” and “strategies.” Thus, for Chaney, through their acquired competence in sifting through and claiming particular material objects, individuals cluster such objects together in ways that make sense to them and can be read in similar ways by others. In this way, new collectivities of shared taste or “lifestyle” groups are formed. According to Chaney, although these may occupy particular local spaces and reflect particular aspects of local culture—language, dialect, etc.—they are, nevertheless, different from the traditional ways of life once associated with such spaces.

Popular Music and Material Culture

Over the last ten years there has been an increasing focus on the material objects associated with popular music production, performance, and consumption. Bennett and Dawe’s edited *Guitar Cultures* marks an early contribution in this respect. Although not exclusively about popular music, or about the materiality of pop and rock music, chapters in the book, notably those by Waksman, Ryan and Peterson, and Bennett consider the iconic status of particular “vintage” makes of electric guitar and how these have become, to use Waksman’s words, “instruments of desire” among musicians, audiences, and collectors alike. A similar interpretation has been applied in the case of original recordings of pop and rock music pressed as vinyl discs. Once regarded by the majority of music consumers as merely the latest form of sound-carrying technology, over the last 20 years vinyl records have acquired aesthetic discourses of authenticity and coolness due to their sound, feel, and packaging. Thus, in a study of young people’s consumption of and response to vinyl, Hayes notes how his interviewees routinely refer to what they perceive to be the richer, more textured nature of recorded sound when reproduced using vinyl formats. Equally, these and other audiences for vinyl appear unperturbed by the scratch and crackle noises often evident on vinyl recordings; rather, such aspects of vinyl discs are considered integral to the listening pleasure they evoke. The artwork created for vinyl album covers is also something that lends to their perceived material value and appeal. Often critically

revered as much as the music on the record itself, and subject to interpretations through niche publications, such as Errigo and Leaning's *The Illustrated History of the Rock Album Cover*, album cover artwork plays a critical role in bespeaking the aura of the vinyl LP (long-player) as a desirable material object. Thus, as Bartmanski and Woodward observe:

The obvious attraction of vinyl in this context is the large size of the photo on the LP record cover, about 500% larger than a CD cover, let alone the small accompanying images included in such applications as iTunes. The scaled-up visual and material dimensions of the vinyl package also lend themselves to references to record covers as artworks in their own right. (Bartmanski and Woodward 7)

In addition to the resurgence of vinyl as “new” product, part of an ever-growing circulation of re-produced popular music commodities from the 1950s through to the 1990s often referred to as the “retro market” (see Bennett, *Music*) “original” items, often highly prized by collectors, form the core business of numerous retail outlets, both physical and online. Ferrell, in examining the life of popular cultural objects, notes how they are locked into a process of what he refers to as “degradation and rehabilitation.” Indeed, this buoyant second-hand market for the material objects of popular music is arguably one key facet that brings into sharp relief an issue that is central to the critical concern of this article—how popular music objects acquire meanings that raise them above their mere status as “objects.” Thus, those who seek out “valued” objects from the vast array of artifacts on display in second-hand and charity shops, or at weekend markets, do so with a fully formed knowledge of *why* such artifacts have value—a knowledge that is linked to particular cultural codes of authenticity. Such codes may have global, or near global, currency, may be circumscribed by localized forms of inscription, or operate across both of these domains simultaneously.

The emerging trend towards the repositioning of popular music as cultural heritage (Bennett, “Heritage”; Leonard; Reitsamer) has also played a significant part in the aesthetic enshrinement of popular music objects. From the celebrated “Beatles tours” in Liverpool, UK, to the guided tours of Sun Studios and Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee, the cultural tourism afforded by popular music’s past is partly mobilized through the re-inscription of objects, images, and texts from merely moments of innovation and discovery in popular culture to milestones in the development of contemporary sociocultural history. Indeed, it is not merely in the developed world that such trends are seen. On the contrary, as examples such as the Bob Marley Museum in Kingston, Jamaica, serve to illustrate, the shift towards understanding popular music as cultural heritage and the material objects of pop, rock, reggae, and other genres as historical artifacts is an increasingly worldwide phenomenon.

Moreover, and as several writers have argued, the material relevance of popular music objects cannot be understood merely in terms of their link to the popular past. Instead, the value of many objects whose perceived cultural authenticity is often attributed to their associations with the popular past can also be situated in the here

and now. Borschke, for example, examines how the ongoing interest in vinyl records is importantly punctuated by their use in contemporary popular music production and performance. An illustrative case in point here, notes Borschke, is the practice of the contemporary dance music DJ. This is highly reliant on the physical features of vinyl recordings, their shape and texture allowing for them to be easily manipulated by hand in ways that allow the DJ to edit existing snippets of sound, overlay them with other sounds, and create new versions of songs in the process (see also Beadle). Similarly, Crowdy has observed that, while in many parts of the developed world the use of analogue sound recording equipment comprises aspects of artistic choice and aesthetic preference, in the developing world the discourses of authenticity that are attached to analogue studio technology, and the justification for its use, stem from circumstances of shortage and deficit. Nevertheless, in both contexts the medium of analogue recording takes on an aura and status in the present as a “purer” form of sound creation and reproduction than its digital counterpart.

Significantly, each of the above examples focuses on material, that is to say, *tangible*, examples of popular music heritage. However, as Bennett (“Popular Music”) has recently observed, it is increasingly evident that in conceptualizing popular music heritage, particularly in local contexts, *intangible* elements that form part of local cultural memory are equally important. Thus, Bennett’s work on Perth in Western Australia denotes the rich memory-scape, for example, of past performances, former venues, and aging local musicians through which the city’s popular music heritage is mapped and articulated by locals. A further study by Bennett and Rogers of local popular music heritage in Brisbane identifies a similar trend. In the following sections of this article we wish to further investigate this aspect of popular music heritage making in local contexts, illustrating along the way the myriad forms that popular music’s materiality assumes in everyday life, with some examples being far less tangible than others. Roberts has also commented on the problems inherent in defining the scope of popular music heritage in this sense due to the various performative “hauntological” dimensions of the latter.

Methodology

The empirical data on which this article draws were collected between January 2012 and December 2013 in the Australian cities of Perth, Adelaide, Canberra, Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants for the study. Overall, 91 individuals were interviewed, ranging in age from the late teens (18 and above) to seniors in their seventies and eighties. Of these individuals, 63 were men and 28 were women; the data specifically cited here are taken more evenly from male and female interviewees. The primary method used to generate the data was semi-structured one-to-one interviews. A standard interview schedule was used, although the questions were modified slightly to suit interviews with the different participant groups—musicians, archivists, and fans (with an awareness that these categories are not entirely distinct from one another). Following

completion of the interviews they were downloaded and transcribed. The research followed the Australian national code of ethics. All participants were briefed on the nature of the research and their part in it and were provided with written information on our project to read before agreeing to participate. Unless written permission to use their real names was provided to us, all the participants referred to in this article are identified using pseudonyms.

Materiality as a Lived Practice in Australian Music

The Great War ruptured the historical continuum, destroying the legacy of the past . . . Life in the decade and a half preceding 1914 has come to be viewed inevitably and unavoidably through the optic of the war that followed it. The past *as past* was preserved by the war that shattered it. By ushering in a future characterized by instability and uncertainty, it embalmed forever a past characterized by stability and certainty. (Dyer 7)

Contemporary manifestations of music materiality in popular culture are made in relation to, and remain fixed within, digital cultures. The partial transition to online distribution and desktop/mobile playback experienced in the mid-1990s is a fracturing event within music history, much as Dyer outlines in the quote above. The rapid uptake of the MP3 audio format, popularized by peer-to-peer file-sharing and portable MP3 players such as the Apple iPod, ushered in significant changes to some of music's largest institutions. Both the long-playing album, as a cultural product with a physical embodiment, and the recording industry as the manufacturing center of this core material product were diminished by the rapid uptake of the MP3 format and the cultural changes of which it proved so emblematic. Within a decade, popular music had been noticeably altered and media narratives surrounding the decline of the album and the recording industry remain widespread.

In the time since, music formats such as vinyl, cassette, and compact disc have become "physical," their materiality highlighted by the presence of an online culture that plays on (and plays up) music's newfound "thin air" cloud-based intangibility. In the minds of our respondents, music can now move freely, as data, thanks to online technologies that place far less emphasis on the physical realm. There are perceived options now: one can make decisions about one's interaction with recorded music's materiality. There is an element of mythology to this. Music playback, of course, remains tethered to material consumer devices;² the once highly fetishized iPod is now finding its utility taken over by mobile phones which replicate playback functionality, a further move into an everyday ambience. Elsewhere, a spate of recent publications on the neuroscience of listening (see Levitin; Sacks) highlights the bodily affects of music. Jointly, the rise of vinyl as the penultimate physical artifact and the increased popularity of the live concert/festival place the material front and center; these two products are valued precisely for their perceived inability to sustain digital transfer, as if this itself remains valuable. These are all new trends or reiterations; they are popular imaginings and re-imaginings of music that stem from the myth of music history as a

recently fractured continuum. Our attention—an ever more quantified commodity in this “new era”—still appears concentrated on music’s material qualities, as if this remains an essential part of the form’s cultural currency. While much of this section of the article focuses on the various stories our respondents told about this new setting, what the fracture of online digital music represents is more a redistribution of our desire for, and interactions with, music materialities than a totalizing diminution of our relationship with music’s physical embodiments and extensions.

What follows is a set of narratives surrounding fracture, transition, and excess. Through two case studies, each recurring in our interview data often, we aim to chart two examples of how music and materiality are grounded in subjective contexts. Chiefly, our findings reveal the nonlinearity of the physical-to-digital transition. The relationship our respondents maintain with music’s physical materials is a shifting one that is not at all times reliant on, or occurring concurrently with, technological innovation. Instead, these stories of music *things* are implicated in the rhetorics of digital technology and a new sense of music culture’s expanding limits.

Narratives of Playback Media and Maturity

The current generation of teenaged music listeners is the first to grow up in an era in which the transmission-based utility of physical records is an opt-in proposition. Physical media such as vinyl and compact discs, as well as the recently reappraised analogue cassette, remain alluring to niche listenerships, but these are unnecessary extensions to playback. They are not required. In terms of reproducing sound, these items are fetishized excesses, trading almost entirely on cultural and aesthetic value. Here, Will Straw’s positioning of the “material extensions” of music as almost all of what that we consider “music” (231) refracts in curious ways. The physical playback media of old hereby go far beyond extending music into the physical and concrete (its semi-retired utilitarian purpose). Physical playback media now purposefully extend playback into the realm of history, nostalgia, and memory recall. The presence of these material items in the lives of our respondents deliberately harks back to ideals and experiences—moments of listening, first-hand or retold—from the past, and their ongoing value remains in direct relation to what they can salvage from an era before online digital transfer.

Many of our respondents first learned and experienced physical playback media through the family home. Everyone interviewed was aged 18 and over, skewing data collection towards those with some memory of compact disc as the dominant music medium. As such, we discovered many narratives of transition from and through earlier playback media. Sven’s story of his changing phases of playback proved common:

Sven: For my fourth birthday my parents gave me the *Best of Blondie* on vinyl and it’s still in regular rotation but from vinyl to CD and now to iTunes files.

The family household lingers in anecdotes like Sven's. Physical playback media are gifted and loaned and emphasized by parents and siblings in particular. The memories of playback media's importance, value, and/or centrality are loaded with images of loved ones enjoying music and its currency within families and households. It is, for almost all respondents, a product loaded with images of youth. As a signifier of youth and its family contexts, physical media were said to be both retained and discarded as respondents matured. Like Sven in the example above, the music/texts employed (songs, albums, artists) remain unaltered but the music/text's material extension proved far less resilient. In short, music's material extensions contextualized development and life story for the majority of our respondents. They were something to mark time with and shed as one aged.

This conflation of physical playback media and maturity was also seen to incorporate elements of music's subsequent digitization and online distribution. There is, in the data, a sense of evolving towards immateriality in music, and this process mirrors a reported sense of increased social mobility and independence. This story took a variety of paths for different respondents. A younger respondent called Rebecca provided a clear example:

Rebecca: I used to use CDs a lot more before I had my own computer and so it was CDs in my little old player. I still remember getting my first CD player when I was about nine; it was the coolest thing, yeah, so it has changed, I guess, [with the] Internet and having my own computer.

The move from compact disc to MP3 accompanies the shift to a computer of one's own and the myriad potentialities of the Internet. A similar story was supplied by another respondent, Jane, who made a more literal connection: the compact disc was an artifact of schooling and did not attract a great deal of sentiment:

Interviewer: Do you keep stuff, in your house? Do you have music stuff, like records and CDs, and do you keep flyers or memorabilia, or, I don't know, ticket stumps or—

Jane: No.

Interviewer: No?

Jane: No, I am completely . . . I don't have any sentiment with that. I've stopped getting CDs. I stopped buying them probably somewhere in high school. The only CDs, physical CDs, that I have are generally for music that I had when I was younger.

A broader, longer narrative was relayed by Peter wherein the rise and fall of various physical media can be related back to this process of maturation and development:

Peter: I used to have a Walkman kind of thing, I guess, to play tapes on. That became just ridiculous because the music degrades so quickly. So I bought CDs to replace the ones I really did love over time and then my CD collection . . . I tried to give all that away, probably still got a couple of hundred at work sitting on shelves, just

because there's shelf space there. But I really don't buy that many CDs anymore. It's a dying art for me, unless there's a particular reason to have itAt home, I play through my computer onto an all-in-one speaker thing. But they're all MP3s playing through.

The storage space alluded to here—particularly control of it—is key. Note, too, the exchange of currencies within Peter's story. While his love of music remains central and motivating, the material extension of its mediated transfer changes and dissolves: it (1) degrades and is replaced, (2) is exchanged for financial currency, (3) is digitized, (4) is given away. The story of “outgrowing” the music of one's youth is archetypal. Yet the acquiring and dispensing of physical playback media proved a far more pragmatic, almost purposefully brutal practice.

A broader theme can be further mapped over this. The fracturing event of digital transfer plays a large part in these stories; it created, on a large scale, an unwanted excess of the material that our respondents attached to discarded visions of the past and self, and to broader ideas of waste and byproduct. Through our research interviews, we noted that this continues as an ongoing process. While respondents spoke of “getting rid” of physical media, other material extensions remained visible. Yet even these newer devices and media were degrading. Playback media's evolution continues to advance towards immateriality with the iPod and the MP3 file giving way to smart phones and file-streaming. The material extensions of music are being retracted further and further as music is subsumed into the ambient technology of everyday life, yet the story of how our respondents attached and detach value in this process is analogous throughout.

Narratives of Ticket Stubs and Excess

One of the ongoing shifts created by the fracturing of recent music history is the re-emergence of live performance as one of music's core products. In a tangible sense, measured by both popularity and revenue, live performance has prospered from the digital era; it now accounts for as much as a third of global revenue returned to the music industries (Rogers). As such, it was not surprising to find that when our respondents were queried about memorabilia and collections, the archiving and display of ticket stubs proved a recurring theme. Over half of the people we spoke with retained these items. They were by far the most popular item collected.

Ticket stubs were kept as souvenirs of the live experience. In *On Longing*, Susan Stewart (1993) describes the souvenir in very particular terms. She writes:

The souvenir distinguishes experiences. We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative. (Stewart 135)

For Stewart, souvenirs present the collector with both a metonymic piece of an experience and a prompt to re-enter the narrative or memory of that experience. The

ticket stubs described in our study proved to be a prime example of this. The way our respondents discussed their collections returned, time and again, to the overarching sense of excess implied in Stewart's concept. This is an excess or surplus of memory, signification, and importance that can be seen to operate in one of two ways. The first, and most immediate, example includes that metonymic attachment: the ticket stub as an essential "part" of the concert. This is an associated attachment and inflation of its utility value. The stubs themselves were often torn or folded or partially discarded. Their value, in the present, is acknowledged as a minuscule part of a whole. This can be seen in the following exchange with respondent Gemma:

Interviewer: Do you have much music memorabilia or do you keep stuff?

Gemma: Do I have music memorabiliaOh my God. I have so much crap. I keep all of my ticket stubs from old concerts, like really, really yellowing and faded that you can't even see who played anymore.

Once used to gain access to a concert, the value of a ticket stub (especially a faded one) operates almost entirely on memory and it highlights the interchange between the material of the object and the affective experience of the concert. At the height of its concrete exchange value and utility, a ticket is a means to access a desired experience and a receipt of payment. After the fact, the stub is a piece of cardboard providing scant detail of the event; artist line-ups, price, date, and venue details scan as important information but are cursory in comparison to the affective details of the experience itself. Still, the details printed on concert tickets provide the basis of our second aspect of surplus value and affect: ticket stubs can act as records, as a convenient and efficient means of cataloging and displaying/recalling memory.

The respondents who retained their stubs usually did something with them. Tickets were not collected and discarded like physical playback media, for example; instead they were collated together and organized and drawn on as an archive. In this regard, respondents discussed a number of repositories and uses for their ticket stubs. Note the word choice in respondent Ben's description of his collection:

Ben: Probably the most *documentation* I have is—I used to collect set lists when I was a teenager as well. But the most *documentation* I have now is this little box of ticket stubs.

This documentation is often displayed:

Interviewer: (Do you collect) show flyers or posters or . . . ?

Zadie: I used to, I used to have a big collection of ticket stubs that I kept I'd have them on the wall and I'd have to take them down and put them up again (when I moved).

Similarly:

Chris: Ah, I keep posters, and ticket stubs, and put the ticket stubs in the record, like for that tour, or whatever the album was at that time.

When asked to explain their collections, some respondents told the detailed stories of the concert experiences they attached to the tickets. These anecdotes often revealed layers of experience and meaning that stretched far beyond performance of live music. One respondent, Tilly, told a particularly vivid story, showing just how much surplus signification was hinted at by a single concert stub:

Tilly: I had it for years, it was the first concert I went to, which is Pearl Jam. I had that up in a frame and it was on my wall. That was when I was 14, I think, and that was the coolest thing ever. I got knocked out in the mosh and woke up in an ambulance, it was the most insane story ever and then I woke up in the ambulance and I can vaguely remember it happening, I know that I woke up and I remember going “This is my favorite song, I’ve got to get back in there” and they’re like, “No, no, you might have a concussion.”

This type of anecdote was routinely drawn into data collection through ticket stubs. The researchers asked about early shows and gig attendance but there is a richness of detail to the stories told when they were reiterated *through* a material item. By focusing our attention on memory and the means by which it is recalled, we have successfully found occasions and examples that speak to the immense effectiveness of the material as a means to access some of music’s core attributes, namely affective experience and the memory traces that enable listeners to narrate these experiences to others.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the materiality in popular music and the significance of this for the ways in which popular music is remembered and celebrated in everyday terms by individual listeners and groups of fans. In an era increasingly imbued with a sense of digital immateriality, cultural researchers have remained alert to the potency of our ongoing affective relationships with music’s physical extensions. Within the history of this scholarship, previous researchers have mapped out the ways by which music listeners have used a range of items in their everyday lives as a means of interfacing with what remains an intangible communicative medium. In essence, though, much of the focus in existing work has been on tangible aspects of music and remembering. This article has aimed to advance such research, charting out how music listeners work to access and signpost their memories. As we have illustrated in this article, the longer-term relationships people maintain with music’s material extensions (physical playback, archives of ticket stubs) reveal both the changing nature of these engagements and their adaptive processes. Since the widespread uptake of online digital technologies, music listeners can now make accounts of materiality that span decades and numerous physical manifestations of playback. Among our interviewees, there was a reported tendency to align materiality with narratives of youth and aging, to signpost a life by cycles of engagement with music’s physical extensions. Ticket stubs provided a more nuanced example wherein listeners could draw immense value—and prompt vivid memories—with material items

devoid of financial or tangible utility. In both instances, memory creation and recall were far more intertwined with the social utility that these items provoke and encourage. As recent research on popular music fandom and aging illustrates (see, Bennett, *Music*; Bennett and Hodkinson), the extent to which popular music's past is now framed and (re)articulated through cultural memory indicates that further research will need to take more extensive account of this in working to uncover the importance of popular music as an aspect of contemporary cultural heritage. Thus, rather than focusing predominantly on tangible objects of popular music history as these are represented in official and semi-official settings such as museums and archives, researchers will also need to pay close attention to the more intangible and often locally nuanced ways in which popular music is experienced by individuals as bound up with both the present and the past.

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- [1] The broader project is called "Popular Music and Cultural Memory: Localised Popular Music Histories and Their Significance for National Music Industries" and was funded under the Australian Research Council's (ARC) Discovery Project scheme for three years (2010–12, DP1092910). Chief Investigators on the project were Andy Bennett (Griffith University), Shane Homan (Monash University), Sarah Baker (Griffith University), and Peter Doyle (Macquarie University), with Research Fellow Alison Huber (Griffith University) and Research Associate Ian Rogers (Griffith University).
- [2] The history of music's digitization reaches much further back than the mid-'90s. The compact disc was introduced to Western consumer markets in 1983 and was little more than a physical container of digital code. The concept of consumers having access to replicable master recordings of music begins with the CD and, culturally, the type of file sharing discussed here begins with the CD-ROM. This is a prehistory of online piracy debates seldom highlighted by the recording industry.

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