SEE ME, FEEL ME, TOUCH ME, HEAL ME:

THE IMPORTANCE OF TANGIBLE MEDIA IN

MUSIC USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Despite being declared obsolete many times over the past 30 years, the popularity and consumption of vinyl records have come back from a nadir and maintained a slowly but steadily growing hold on consumers. After a digital music era that stripped music of most tactile functions, it is posited that the return of vinyl signals a remediation of the format, and newer consumers of vinyl are finding more purpose in music by utilizing a century-old medium. By interviewing owners and managers of different-sized record stores in the Western United States, the author finds basis for these assertions. This study applies uses and gratifications, medium, and remediation theories to analyze newer trends in the consumption of vinyl records and suggests that the addition of tangible packaging as well as the presence required to play and listen to vinyl may give more meaning to the listener and a return of the format.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Since I was a young child, rock music has been the soundtrack to my life. Some of my earliest memories involve music, whether it was cruising around in my father's car to the sounds of Steely Dan and Elton John, or at home with my mother, the sounds of Patsy Cline and Motown gracing the turntable. On weekends, my father would wake me with the smell of bacon and his booming stereo system, the turntable playing his favorites.

When I was eleven years old, I received a portable turntable, and began to raid my parents' record collection for new and interesting sounds. I distinctly remember the process of picking out an album, removing it from its sleeve, and placing it on the turntable. As the record would play, I would pore over the album sleeve, complete with artwork, liner notes, and other information.

I remember the first vinyl album I bought: At 10, I purchased The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* from a garage sale. I remember looking over all of the liner notes and the album artwork while the record spun on my tiny vintage record player.

Vinyl records began to disappear in the late 1980s, supplanted by compact discs. Even my vinyl record collection took a backseat to my decision to acquire music in the CD format. Older bands re-released their catalogs, sometimes having to reformat album sleeves with liner notes into the 4¾ x 4¾ inch booklet that accompanied the CD. Record companies began re-pressing albums in this new digital format, shrinking or removing

1

much of the data that was included with the album. By the mid-2000s, the rise of the home computer and digital music players saw the MP3 become the leading music format. As music has transitioned fully in the digital realm, with Apple's iTunes store passing its 17th year, the album cover and any physical manifestation of music has all but completely disappeared. The physical components of the musical experience have been abandoned.

While MP3s have some distinct advantages over prior formats, such as a more convenient size, transportability, and availability, key ingredients of what used to make up an album have gone missing. No longer is an album sold in a "package," but rather every track is available individually with very little accompanying information. It is my belief that the accompanying media helps give meaning to the music, and that by losing that media, the digital/MP3 music listening experience is lacking.

That first record I ever purchased, The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band*, was named by Rolling Stone magazine as the number one album of all time in *500 Greatest Albums of All Time* (Levy 9). While no doubt that distinction is primarily due to (or on account of) the music, if you were to ask anyone who grew up listening to the album, they can also tell you about the cover, a collage of famous, not-so-famous, and infamous people. They can tell you about the back cover, an image of the entire album's lyrics. They can tell you about the gatefold image, an almost life-size photo of The Beatles. And, if they obtained the album in its original form, they can tell you about the album insert, which was made up of small cardboard items you could cut out and pin to your wall. The experience of the artwork is only slightly less important than the musical content of the album.

As the world moves away from its consumption of more physical formats of

media, such as newspapers, much of our media is being obtained from online sources, and is also being stored intangibly in cloud-based storage systems. Some cite this move as a natural progression for numerous reasons, including availability, cost, and familiarity to a new generation that has grown up online. Some who oppose the move to a more ephemeral media often do so because they are indulging in nostalgia or suffer from a fear of change. However, some scholars have noted a difference in perception when physical media is involved (Golsteijn et al. 1-10; Shuker 65-66; Sterne 184-92; Yochim et al. 183-90). If we are to continue migrating our media to digital-only formats, it is important to note what we may be leaving behind by choosing such a route.

Despite the move to digital-only formats, another trend in music consumption is occurring, as more and more people are making the distinct choice to return to the physical format of vinyl records. SoundScan, a Nielsen rating system that tracks music sales, reported that more than 13 million vinyl albums were sold in 2017. Some speculate that number to be much higher, as Nielsen has a better record tracking big-box music stores than independent sellers, many of whom sell greater amounts of vinyl, both new and secondhand. To see such a substantial number of vinyl records being sold in what was a format that was considered dead 20 years prior is an intriguing and unexpected result.

The goal of this paper is to make a connection between the physical format of the vinyl record and the increased meaning that it gives to the experience of the listener. The study is based on interviews with three managers from independent record store owners in the Western United States. Though I found little research directly related to my topic, the study is informed by research about relevant aspects of physical media formats.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Vinyl records are a music technology that has remained relevant long past its expected expiration date and has experienced a resurgence in the U.S. in the last decade. Vinyl records are just what their name implies: sound, most often music, is recorded and pressed onto a vinyl surface so it can later be heard via a playing device. Records were first introduced in the early 1900s in conjunction with the gramophone, which took the technological breakthrough of Edison's phonogram and turned it into a functional device for listening to pre-recorded and mass-distributed music. When the invention was fundamentally changed from a voice-recorder promoted for business purposes to a music-player that could promote culture, the gramophone quickly increased in popularity and spawned a variety of technological advances and improvements. Ten-inch records made with shellac and played at 78 revolutions per minute were initially the leading format, but by the 1940s, the long-playing (LP) vinyl record was developed, a format still in use today (Osborne 10-26).

Music technology is a unique and rich area of study for numerous reasons. Currently, we are in the middle of another shift in technological advancements in music. In 2014, digital music streaming services showed that they were here to stay as they began making a sizable impact on American markets ("Insights"). Rather than purchasing digital songs or albums, an increasing number of consumers have instead turned to these streaming services. These online services, both ones that are free with commercials as well as paid services that have no commercials, do not result in any concrete ownership of music, but rather act much as traditional radio. With online streaming, listeners can

search for an artist or genre and be directed to a playlist compiled by the service where songs that fit the listener's perceived taste are played at random. If the listener searches by artist on the streaming website, both songs by that artist and songs by similar artists would play. If the listener chooses to search by genre, no matter how specific (hundreds of options are available), artists whose music fits in that genre would then populate the randomized playlist. The only control listeners typically have over streaming services is in providing initial search parameters, and then either entering an approval such as a "thumbs up" (or heart, or something similar) to approve of a song, or entering a "thumbs down" to skip the song and request that it not be played again on that playlist in order to cue further choices on the part of the underlying algorithm. Music streaming listeners can also pause, resume, or skip a song (without having to "thumbs down" the song) at any point, though commercials cannot be skipped on a free service.

Additionally, music technology is such a rich area of study because, despite new technological advances in music consumption, vinyl records have continued to be a viable and desired technology by music consumers. Despite the availability of free music through both legal streaming and illegal downloads, vinyl record sales have continued to be significant. And despite the fact that all other forms of purchased music are experiencing a decline, vinyl record sales have not only continued, but have been slowly and steadily on the rise for the past ten years (RIAA). These statistics do not refer simply to used or vintage records found in secondhand shops. In fact, vinyl record sales statistics often exclude a portion of used and vintage sales simply due to an inability to collect the full gamete of data. Vinyl sales statistics include new product from current artists who are pressing new vinyl records, as well as established record labels or artists who are re-

pressing their older music in order to meet the current demand for new vinyl records ("Insights"). The re-emergence of an old technology, while not completely unheard of, is uncommon. The reasons behind the re-emergence of an old technology are always complex and unique, making the reasons behind the re-emergence of vinyl a subject of great interest.

Social scientist James Lull posed two important questions on the uses and gratifications of music with regard to the various types of listening audiences. He asked, "What conditions and contexts encourage utilization of music rather than other media for the common array of audiences uses and their presumed gratifications?" and, "What are the special capabilities of music for uses that are not made of other media?" (142). Complex though these questions are, and broad though they may be within the realm of music as a whole, Lull's inquiries, paired with the theories and perspectives presented in the literature review, brought to the forefront an important fact: When there are so many technological options available to the average listener, there are particular needs which are being satisfied through the use of different types of music listening technology. The focus of this study is to determine why vinyl records have experienced a resurgence, which directly involves establishing what needs are being met by the medium of vinyl records and to what degree.

There has always been a collector portion of the vinyl record consumer population, but they are generally not contributing to the rise in vinyl record sales and popularity. These collectors range from individuals who own more than 100 vinyl LP records to those who own every single release on every single vinyl format by a particular artist (Shuker 65-72). Due to the unique and specific interests of collectors,

6

while some may pursue newer releases, especially when an older album is being re-released onto vinyl, many are primarily seeking out original records that have been previously released, whether used or never-played copies of those albums (Shuker 20, 47, 68). The second-hand statistics are much more difficult to calculate with any consistency, as used records are often found at garage sales, flea markets, and antiques stores, none of which are easily included in the music industry data collection on sales. Most brick-and-mortar music-specific stores have used vinyl sections, with the large amount of new re-pressings in the market beginning to take more and more space.

Vinyl record collectors are a unique subculture with a lot of interesting variances, and this will be further covered in the literature review. However, it is important to remember that collectors, for the most part, do not have a great amount of influence in the rise in vinyl record popularity.

Vinyl records are being bought, and thus revived, most enthusiastically not by collectors, but by the same portion of the population that makes most moves toward new fashions and technologies. It is young adults ranging from 18-29 years old that are powering the vinyl resurgence ("Insights"). While the odd collector might be among the young adult portion of the population, collectors are primarily outside of that age bracket, and often over 35 years old, according to studies on vinyl collectors as a specific subculture (Shuker 33-82). The enthusiasm of the young adult consumer in the vinyl market is further evidence that collectors are not solely to thank for vinyl's continued place in the market, and particularly vinyl's resurgence as a continuously produced form of media. The youth population is certainly the largest group driving recorded and researched vinyl sales whose data can be collected by Nielsen SoundScan for analysis of

the market ("Insights"). This rise in vinyl consumption means that there is some use and gratification for the music buyers and listeners of any age that are linked to the ownership of a vinyl record, and particularly some use and gratification that cannot be either wholly or at least not solely satisfied through any other type of music format purchase.

SIGNIFICANCE

This research addresses a gap in research of music media by using critical uses and gratifications theory to help answer questions about how and why this once-declared obsolete form of music technology has not only persisted on the fringes of music formats, but has actually broken back into the mainstream music culture and experienced a surprising resurgence in recent years. The research includes a discussion of how people create shared meanings with the culture of technologies that are supposedly obsolete or perceived to be inferior, and explores a phenomenological understanding of vinyl record purchasers and independent record store owners. The study discusses vinyl records as a type of music technology that was cutting edge, turned mainstream, turned subcultural, died and returned to the mainstream again. This research further examines themes of resurgence of this music technology, which dates back to the 1940s, and is actually rooted in the 1800s.

The research questions that guided this study are:

RQ1.) Why has vinyl experienced a resurgence?

RQ2.) What needs are people satisfying through interaction with vinyl records?

Research Question 1 is broadly geared toward the phenomenon of the vinyl record resurgence as a whole, while Research Question 2 is geared toward understanding why the consumer/listener subculture is interested in purchasing, owning, and listening to vinyl records, when they are not, generally speaking, doing so because of nostalgia nor participating in the subculture of record collectors. Since the focus of this study is on vinyl records as well as the act of finding and purchasing them, it is best to speak with experts who have been able to observe this resurgence from within the music consumption culture. I will interview independent record storeowners for their opinions and observations on the resurgence of vinyl and why people who generally have no nostalgia connection to vinyl or are not full-blown record collectors are drawn to vinyl as a music listening technology.

OVERVIEW

Following this introduction to the topic, its significance, and the questions I will answer through my analysis, Chapter Two presents the rich history of vinyl records, which spans more than 100 years. Chapter Three focuses on related literature and context, from the introduction of the gramophone to modern music sales statistics as well as a more detailed discussion of research questions. Chapter Four describes the methods used in the study. Chapters Five reports and analyzes results. Chapter Six discusses findings and summarizes the thesis and notes limitations. Chapter Seven notes significance, and points to future possibilities.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY & CONTEXT

THE OLD VINYL & THE "NEW" VINYL

This chapter discusses the history of vinyl as a music format and its current resurgence into mainstream music culture. The history and context of vinyl in society is an important place to start this exploration, as the resurgence of an old technology prompts the need to look back at that technology's origin in order to better understand why that old technology has persisted, and in the case of a resurgence, why it is increasing in popularity once again. An overview of the vinyl format's past helps to explain why vinyl records were once predicted to become extinct, as well as the likely reasons vinyl has been able to stay relevant in music listening culture. This chapter on history and context is divided into three sections:

1) The origins of the gramophone record

2) The golden age of vinyl

3) The digital revolution.

In exploring the relationship between the type of medium used to consume music and the experience of the music listeners, as well as the listeners' uses and gratifications for each format, focus is drawn to vinyl records due to their continued popularity despite the development and promotion of other technologies that could have made them obsolete. A review of relevant literature indicated theories on music listening have

changed with the changes in music technology. The discussion of historical context focuses on technologies used by the general public for listening to music rather than technologies developed for other aspects of music creation and/or distribution, such as music recording or music instrument technologies, in order to align with my overarching focus on the experience of music listeners when purchasing or using vinyl records.

The emphasis in this historical context is on the gramophone record, compact disc, and digital music file music technologies, and the ways in which these three technologies impact music listeners and their experiences with mediated sound. These three technologies were chosen and given focus because of the ways they each drastically changed the music market. Other technologies, such as the 8-track, had less impact on the experience of music listeners (Luyk 37).

Additionally, while the actual devices used to convert the data in these mediums into sound are important and discussed, the devices themselves are not treated as part of the *defining* changes in music listening, but rather as accessories of the music listening experience. The theoretical reasoning behind this choice of emphasis is that the focus of this study is on the material forms of music media that have changed the way music listeners interact with the music, as musical sound is tied to the object in which the music "lives," and not to the device used to play the object. The historical reasoning behind this choice is that, by and large, with the exception of a specifically defined portion of audiophiles (as will become apparent throughout this historical context, and especially in the following literature review), listeners become connected and associate emotions with the musical media object, not the device used to play it. There is one exception, as will be discussed in the Digital Revolution section of historical context, which is that there can

be a point when the playing device becomes more symbolic to listeners than the media object due to a shift in music technology. In this case, the shift occurs with the emergence of digital music files, or MP3s, and the digital music player becomes fused with the music (Luyk 15, 52, 77-80).

From the beginning of music recording and music listening technologies, it has been clear that the medium itself communicates a particular message to users and/or listeners. Sound recording devices originated in the latter half of the 1800s for use in the fields of medicine and business, mainly for use with dictation and not initially for recording music. It wasn't until the early twentieth century (roughly 1910-20) that existing sound recording technologies were first used for musical recording. (Sterne 190). Sterne showed that sound recording devices being used to record and listen to music most likely originated from medical technologies developed to listen to bodies, rather than simply arising directly from Edison and Berliner's slightly later inventions (56, 113).

THE GRAMOPHONE RECORD: AN ORIGIN STORY

The origins of the gramophone are widely accepted to begin with the phonogram. In 1877, Thomas Edison sang, "Mary has a little lamb" into his newest creation, the first working phonograph, and "playing it back to himself he [exclaimed] delight and fascination with hearing his own voice, as if by magic" (Luyk 62). This phonogram was a machine that allowed a person to record his or her own voice onto a tinfoil-coated cylinder and then play it back, albeit at a relatively low fidelity. Despite the fact that Edison recorded himself singing, he actually saw his phonograph invention as being most helpful in the field of business, as a type of memo/message recording device, and it was

widely referred to as a "talking machine" (Shuker 14). The origin of the gramophone lies with the phonogram, and yet the phonogram, while representing a huge technological advancement, never saw large-scale commercial success because of the way the it was designed and marketed. Edison did not see the commercial potential in his device for the recording and dissemination of music, so it fell to others to build on his work and provide the public a means to listen to mass-produced, pre-recorded music.

In 1887, United States inventor Emile Berliner patented the gramophone. Berliner modified Edison's invention, swapping the cylinders for flat discs, and changing the design of the machine to be for playback only, rather than including a recording component. The switch to a disc shape was a practical one, as Berliner sought to avoid the distortions caused by gravity when the stylus touched Edison's cylindrical record (Shuker 14-15). Additionally, Berliner invented a method for mass-producing his disc-shaped records by creating a negative and producing zinc copies from it, as outlined in his British patent, which was also granted in 1887 (Koenigsberg xxiv-xxv).

Developing a machine that the average user would feel both comfortable using and satisfied a need for quality and practicality took some major time and work, and it certainly wasn't going to be an initial hit. Berliner made technical improvements on Edison's Phonogram, particularly in the area of sound quality, but also in creating a more lasting media format (Shuker 14-15). Edison's phonograph was primarily meant for business memos and other such short-term professional recording needs. Berliner, however, sought to concretely record sound in a mass-produced manner for a hypothetically infinite number of playbacks. Where Edison saw the options for use of his invention as limited to whatever a single consumer needed to record for their own

purposes, Berliner saw that his invention could fulfill the expanded purpose of facilitating whatever could be recorded by anyone and then made available to the consumer, vastly opening up the possibilities for its use (Luyk 56-57).

Berliner saw more success than Edison due both to a superior product and better overall business savvy. As his invention was conceived with the intention of using it for high quality, long lasting music recordings, rather than mere temporary voice recordings, Berliner was filling a niche that consumers didn't even realize they had needed and, in doing so, opened up a whole new world of possibility for music and sound consumption (Shuker 14-15). Edison tried for years to improve his cylindrical design, but the disc continued to soar in popularity due to ease of use, ease of storage, and overall better marketing (Luyk 39-40). By 1896, Berliner had found the best material for records to be shellac, and Berliner's best year for record sales was 1898 when he sold 713,753 discs (Martland 20). Unfortunately for Berliner, his success was relatively short-lived. By the turn of the century, the names "Berliner" and "gramophone" had virtually disappeared in the United States, to be replaced by "Victor" and "the Victrola" (Martland 24-28).

Despite both the technology and the product being available, it took almost 20 years after Berliner patented his design before the gramophone could be manufactured in such a way that the majority of Americans could afford to own one (Fabrizio 20-23). Additionally, while manufacturing was being perfected, it took some time for the manufacturers and users of these early sound recording technologies to understand and fully utilize the new music technologies. In contrast to more recent forms of music listening technology, historical evidence shows that the gramophone medium was a far more difficult sell to both manufacturers and consumers. While with each progressive

14

advancement in music technology, the "sell" to consumers became easier and easier, the initial marketing to consumers of a hitherto unheard of device for a hitherto unnecessary purpose was quite difficult indeed (Luyk 55-56). Though ideally filling a consumer need, because the consumer was not previously familiar with the use of the product, more effort was required to convince them of the necessity of the product in their lives. This is much more difficult than simply persuading the public to choose a different brand or improved type of a technology that is already familiar and understood. Because the gramophone was an entirely new idea to consumers, it took extensive marketing/branding campaigns on the behalf of gramophone manufacturers to convince the general public to listen to music in this fashion (Luyk 55-56).

The gramophone is widely seen by historians as "defining modernity," as it "sharply changed the culture of music in the home and [turned] music into a 'thing,'" culturally speaking (Shuker 15). Prior to the gramophone, music was tied to a physical location, and to a specific performance, public or private, where someone was actively playing that music in real time. Instead, the gramophone promoted the "domestication of recorded sound," making the opportunity to experience music available to the listener rather than dependent on the person playing the music, and therefore freeing up the "repertoire available to the home listener," as well as separating "the experience of music from its physical location in place and time" (Shuker 15). As sound historian Pekka Gronow notes, the gramophone resulted in "the musician [becoming] immortal" (54).

THE GOLDEN AGE OF VINYL

Berliner's gramophone brought the disc-shaped record into the consumer culture

and thanks to both better marketing surrounding the gramophone disc and the ease of storage and use of flat discs, the cylinder format fell out of use completely. The flat, ten-inch wide disc-shaped record became the norm, and would continue to be for decades to come. The records came to be known as "78s," due to the number of full revolutions per minute (rpm's) they would make on a turntable. The high revolution of these records would usually yield three to four minutes of music per side (Luyk 58). In the 1900s, these records were produced on shellac but following a shortage of supplies during and after World War II, shellac began to be replaced with vinyl (Osborne 67). Initially the vinyl was thought of as just a wartime substitution; however, it was quickly realized that records made of vinyl had a considerably lower amount of playback noise than those made of shellac, so even when the shellac supply returned to pre-war levels, the introduction of the LP record made the cost of vinyl viable, and the material was adopted once and for all as the preferred material for pressing music records (Osborne 68).

Not only was sound quality a consideration, arguably even more important was the amount of music that could be placed on a record, enabling the industry to offer the consumer "more value for money." While the 10" 78rpm shellac disc emerged as the industry standard by the 1930s, experimentation and research continued. In the early post-war years, Columbia [Records] developed a long-playing [LP] hi-fidelity record using the newly-developed vinyl. In 1948 Columbia released its 12" 33⅓rpm LP. Refusing to establish a common industry standard, RCA [Records] responded by developing a 7" vinyl record, with a large hole in the middle, that played at 45rpm. After several years of competition

between the two speeds, the companies pooled their talents and agreed to produce

in both formats (Shuker 59).

In 1931, RCA Victor launched the first commercially available 12" vinyl long-playing

(LP) record (Osborne 90). An LP is a 12" record that allows for more songs on each side

than a 7" record due to increased size. Typically, each side of an LP can hold roughly 25

minutes of music, which generally translates to 4-6 pop songs. The first commercially

available LP was a commercial failure, due largely to the lack of affordable and reliable

equipment to both produce and play these records. Despite not being commercially

successful in the 1930s, these first 12" or LP discs, marketed as "Program Transcription"

discs and slid into plain paper sleeves, were made much in the same process and

production manner as LPs are still produced today (Osborne 45).

One very important difference in the production of records being sold in the first

half of the 20th century was the speed at which these records were played. A commercial

rivalry between RCA Victor and Columbia Records resulted in RCA Victor introducing

what was intended to be a competing vinyl format, the 7" / 45 rpm extended play (EP)

disc (Osborne 106-107, 155). The difference between a 7" single and a 7" EP is that an

EP can hold two to three songs per side, rather than only one. In theory, the appeal of the

EP was that it allowed for an extended amount of playing time (as the name implies),

while still staying with the same 7" disc size. For two years, between 1948 and 1950,

consumers were stuck in the middle of the "War of the Speeds." Rather than different

sized records uniformly adhering to speeds corresponding with those sizes, as is almost

universally the case today, record companies were attempting to take over the market

through the manufacture of discs using a unique a size and speed, each company having

their own format. Eventually the 12" / 33 ½ rpm long-playing (LP) record prevailed as the predominant form for full albums, while the 7" / 45 rpm EP and/or "single" ended up establishing a niche market for discs that generally held a single song on each side (Osborne 141). Finally, size and speed were standardized, and those standardizations have remained unchanged to this day.

While at first glance any particular vinyl record might appear much the same as any other, a variety of technological innovations were made to vinyl records in the next few decades following the 1950s. Music listeners became interested in the stereo sound achieved from high-quality reel-to-reel tapes in 1955, but they were far too expensive for the average consumer, so instead the stereo sound was brought to vinyl records (Osborne 96). Stereo LPs utilize two separated speakers in order to strategically spread the sounds of the instruments and vocals between the left and right speaker and create the auditory illusion of a soundstage in front of the listener. The stereo LP differs from the traditional monaural, or mono, records that only utilized playback through one speaker or would utilize all speakers equally. By the 1960s the stereo LP was so heavily preferred by consumers that mono records and playback equipment that did not have stereo capability were phased out by the music industry (Osborne 96).

There was a similar desire among listeners in the 1970s to achieve better sound quality. Four-channel reel-to-reel tapes offered the desired sound quality, but were too expensive for mass production, and so in 1972, the quadraphonic vinyl record was introduced (Miles 40). Quadrophonic records were similar to stereo records, except that instead of two separate channels of sound, there were four. Special equipment to decode the signal was necessary, however, which meant more money for the consumer. As

18

opposed to the move from mono to stereo, consumers were not prepared to make the change, and most production on quadraphonic records had stopped by 1975. During the 1970s there was also a cost-cutting move toward lighter, more flexible vinyl pressings, which often included recycling vinyl to cut manufacturing costs (Miles 27, 30). Producing varying thicknesses and recycling vinyl were both practices, which, unlike quadraphonic records, survived the 1970s.

While collectors of audio recordings had existed since Edison invented the phonograph, it was the late 1970s when the niche market of audiophile-focused record collectors really began to emerge. As the previous two decades had brought about a handful of broad changes to vinyl records, the 1970s was a goldmine for potential collectors interested in the audiophile aspect of recordings. In the 1970s, as well as the 1980s, this audiophile market was primarily focused on collecting a variety of unique vinyl finds. First, there was the collecting of "direct-to-disc" records, a recording technique that completely bypassed the use of magnetic tape, resulting in a "purer" transcription directly to the lacquer disc ("Audiophile"). These audiophile collectors also sought "half-speed mastered" and "original master" records, as well as "DBX-encoded" records, the latter of which were completely non-compatible with standard record playback preamplifiers due to the inclusion of a sophisticated DBX noise reduction encoding/decoding scheme that virtually eliminated feedback ("DBX"). While it remained a smaller, niche market, the subculture of audiophile-focused record collectors continued to grow with further advances in music technology. Interestingly, though audiophile-focused record collectors are still around today, as a general subculture they have become slowly but increasingly more focused on the devices used to play and

19

amplify the music source, rather than the music source itself (Luyk 63, 79, 131).

While radio disc jockeys, also called DJs, had existed since musical recordings could first be played on radio (rather than using a live band and in-studio cast), the term DJ in the mid-1970s also came to refer to someone who could not just play records but also manipulate those sound recordings. DJs developed the ability to read the patterns in two 12" singles so that they could perfectly blend and "beat match" them, wherein they would be altering the two discs' tempos so their speeds would coincide, and then combine the sounds from separately manipulated records (Osborne 19). Since Edison first unveiled his phonograph invention, he himself focused on the ability to manipulate the recording speed and direction, allowing for playing recordings both forwards and backwards. This idea of being able to manipulate the records continued throughout the growth and evolution of vinyl records, and finally rose to prominence as an actual musical art form (Osborne 19). In this way, vinyl records have the unique distinction of being a music format that influenced the music industry enough to promote and support the creation of an entirely new genre: hip-hop.

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

In late 1982, the release of the first compact disc (CD) began what was to be known as the digital revolution in music. The CD was considered an improvement on the long-playing (LP) record, finally surpassing it as the dominant medium in 1987, because it was considered as higher quality as well as being vastly more portable (Hayes 56). The developers at Philips and Sony, who had collaborated on the format, realized that they could successfully market the CD as a more flexible way for listeners to store and play

music, especially when compared to the vinyl record. The CD was the first sound recording medium to use a digital technology to store and reproduce musical sounds, and it eventually became the standard for music consumers, as the popularity of vinyl records and cassette tapes rapidly declined after its introduction (Hayes 56-57).

While cassettes, and not vinyl, was the primary music format at the time of CD introduction, they had not caught on even a third as quickly as CDs did, nor had their introduction resulted in a complete divergence from vinyl records (Shuker 60-61; Plasketes 111).

There was a hesitance in music listeners to embrace cassettes. Despite being commercially available since 1966, there was no reason to switch from vinyl records, especially given vinyl's superior sound quality to cassettes. Cassette players were made available in automobiles in the 1970s, which provided a reason to embrace the format by some, but it was not until the invention of the Sony Walkman in 1979 did the true portability of cassettes become a strong enough reason to embrace the format (Plasketes 112). Also, the general population was simply more primed to accept rapid technological advances at the time of the CD than they were at the time of the cassette (Plasketes 112). Since the technological advancement of CDs happened to come at a time when other technological advances, such as computers, VCRs, and Fax machines had already become a part of daily routine, CDs were almost immediately able to slide into that "daily use" group as well without much pushback (Plasketes 109, 111). Cassette tapes were released to an audience unready or unwilling to make a massive technological switch, whereas CDs were released to an audience that had been primed to more easily accept and switch to newer technologies.

CDs certainly had technological advancement on their side. CDs were touted as having unprecedented audio clarity, disc durability, and storage capability. An entire album could be found on a single side, with no need for flipping or rewinding to interrupt the listening experience. There was less worry about scratching or dropping. However, it was a third feature that really set CDs apart from vinyl: The simple capacity for increased storage and mobility made vinyl records seem excessively cumbersome to consumers in comparison (Plasketes 112).

Not only did cassettes and CDs travel better, but they were usable in cars as well, making them suddenly seem far superior to vinyl records. While cassette tapes were seen as a blow to vinyl's popularity, CDs were predicted by almost all to signal the death of the vinyl record. (Plasketes 110). The CD was later seen as the first step toward music listeners being led toward dependency on digital technological systems. These systems redefined the way that listeners interacted with their music (Hayes 61).

Rapidly climbing from its first introduction in 1982 to its peak at almost a billion units sold in the year 2000, CDs began a very natural segue into digital music, or MP3 recordings. This was due in large part to the ability to copy, or "rip," the music from CDs onto a computer. Once the music had been ripped off of a CD, it could be retained on the computer, put onto an MP3 player, or used to recreate, or "burn," another new CD, either as a direct duplicate of the original CD or as a new mix created by that individual. Music listeners were able to both reproduce entire albums of music quickly and easily, but they were also able to manipulate the songs and create mixes with any variety of music they desired.

Only 13 years after the peak in CD sales, they declined almost as rapidly as they

had risen, with CD sales down to below 200,000 units sold in 2013 ("Insights"), largely due to the increase in digital downloads. By downloading the music directly, listeners were able to de-clutter their shelves and cars and only "burn" to CD those albums or self-created mixes that they preferred, otherwise utilizing the benefits of creating playlists on MP3 players, most notably iPods (Hayes 51). The intangible nature of MP3s has both opened new doors for listeners and created a variety of difficulties for them as well. It has brought with it the problem of file-sharing, a practice wherein either friends or complete strangers make their MP3 files available to one another, creating the ability to download music absolutely free, which is illegal. However, research shows that consumers who admit to downloading music for free do not see it as stealing in any way, and they often cite the fact that it's just a "little file" on their computer as the reason it isn't the same as stealing a vinyl record from a store (Altschuller and Benbunan-Fich 49-55). Because the files are intangible, music listeners do not assign them the same value, monetarily and morally, as a physical CD or vinyl record.

Previously, it was the music format to which the listener was attached, as the music format contained the recorded sound, as well as any additional art and information. The digital revolution slowly brought the focus of consumers away from the format that contained the music and instead directed it toward the object providing the means of playing the music housed in the underlying format, which was now in the form of a digital file rather than a record, cassette, or CD. The switch to digital music resulted in a switch from listeners' interactions being with the literal music, in terms of a physical record, to their interactions being with a metaphorical object. Due to this switch, music listeners now connect physically with their digital music-mediating device, such as the

iPod, as a stand-in for the music format itself (Hayes 60-61).

SUMMARY

Pre-dating the vinyl record, music recordings came in cylinder and shellac disc forms. Following the vinyl record's introduction they came in multiple formats, the most popular being tape cassettes, compact discs, and eventually digital files such as the MP3. Despite the availability of all of these music listening options, the vinyl record stands alone in not only outliving its tenure as the peak format in music recording technology, but most importantly in actually reversing failing sales trends. In the U.S., vinyl, while no longer the primary source for music listening, has seen sales rise to 12% of sales of physical music formats in the first half of 2016. This is up from 9% in 2015 ("Insights"). In the UK, a similar resurgence has been noted. In 2016, vinyl sales were estimated to be at 3.2 million units for the year, a 53% from the prior year ("BPI"). Again, this trend shows that vinyl is not just surviving, but is thriving. The fact that vinyl records have experienced the same resurgence in the UK suggests that vinyl has a deeper appeal that transcends different cultures. Also, with more creative release strategies in digital formats and the rise of both free and paid-for digital streaming services, the digital purchasing of individual songs and albums is actually rapidly declining, down 21% altogether in the first half of 2016, as compared to 2015 ("Insights"). And while CDs still make up more of the total album sales than vinyl, their sales have dropped 12% while vinyl record sales have directly and proportionately increased 12%, suggesting a potential correlation in the broad choices being made in purchasing physical forms of music listening technology ("Insights"). Experts have credited independent music stores with aiding this vinyl

resurgence. Certainly these stores have seen the benefits of carrying vinyl records, but they cannot be fully responsible for such a sweeping change in the music market.

It is certainly true that the attention vinyl records receive is completely disproportionate to their actual market performance. And yet, alongside what is accepted as being a superior (digital) technology, vinyl somehow not only maintains its position, but also continues to gain further ground in the market. That is because it is the vinyl record, not the CD, or even the cassette tape, that provides a useful and effective alternate and complimentary counterpart to the digital download.

The question now is why, despite being a supposedly dead technology, vinyl records have survived and are slowly but surely continuing to thrive despite the other music listening options. All available options are similarly priced, and, with the immediate ease and availability provided through online ordering, all formats require similar effort to obtain. Brick-and-mortar music stores vary in which physical forms they favor, CDs or vinyl records, and different stores give different preferences to particular genres or types of records (new vs. used). In the following Literature Review, the question of why vinyl is maintaining and increasing its position as the preferred physical format is explored, and particularly the question of what vinyl provides consumers that other music forms do not.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW &

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

With historical context in mind, it is possible to see how vinyl records have traditionally fit into the larger music scene. The immense pace at which technological innovations have advanced has affected the ways people experience music. Each time communication is revised and/or retooled technologically on a massive scale, new experiences arise (Bolter and Grusin; Leung and Wei 309-311). This study investigates how music, particularly as embodied by vinyl records, is used to satisfy a variety of needs for listeners. This study explores how listeners interact with music both physically and emotionally, as well as with music as communication. A variety of theories help explain the relationship between communication and music, as well as the concepts that make up this relationship. This literature review focuses on the following recurring themes:

Music as communication

Uses and gratifications theory

Medium theory

Remediation theory

Within music as communication, this literature review addresses components of music as communication, including:

Lyrics and sound

Sound quality

Visual communications

Tactile function

Listening as the artist intended

Music in mass media

Within uses and gratifications theory, this literature review addresses the overall idea of the theory as it pertains to vinyl specifically, as well as the following broad, important aspects of uses and gratifications theory applied to the study of music including music and mood, and music and culture.

Within medium theory, this literature review addresses interacting with media (in terms of the medium itself), and "the medium as the message," which includes the work of Marshall McLuhan, Joshua Meyrowitz, and Paul Levinson.

Within remediation theory, this literature review addresses the return to vinyl as a popular medium in music, and the meaning given to the remediation by the consumer, which includes the work of Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin and Mark Deuze.

MUSIC AS COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

While it might be common sense that the expressive, subjective concept of music would be linked to the process of communication, establishing and defining a formal relationship is more complicated. It was Lull who was able to do just that, and in doing so defined the way in which the element of music has influenced generations of human society (10-34). Lull is able to pinpoint and explain the fact that music has the power to express emotions and communicate complex ideas.

The full experience of music, particularly music as communication, can be broken down into four parts: (1) the content being shared (in this case the music, typically a song or other music composition); (2) the individual or group doing the sharing (musician, band, production company); (3) the receiver (the audience or audiences); and (4) the media (meaning the physical item or technology, or basically however the content is transmitted to the receivers) (De La Rosa 8). Communication is an inescapable aspect of culture, even, arguably, the most fundamental building block of culture, both on a local and worldwide level. As the experience of music is an important aspect of communication, the communication achieved through the realm of music also plays an instrumental role in shaping social perspectives on a worldwide level (Stinchcombe 185-186).

Music is a crucial and massively influential form of communication. Music possesses a unique ability to communicate due to the fact that, musicians' intentions aside, the audience, whether large groups or individuals, is constantly creating their own meaning through symbolic interactions, both intentionally and subconsciously, concretely and imaginatively (Lull). Essentially, communication through music happens whether the artists' intentions are either direct or indirect, through the literal meanings of the words and sounds, and the meanings assigned to the music by the listener, which are sometimes unique to the individual listener, sometimes unique to a subculture, and sometimes understood on a larger scale. Music has a distinct ability to provide meaning and illustrate ideas in a myriad of ways to a myriad of different people, giving it the power to influence socio-cultural behaviors, and making it a very important form of communication indeed.

LYRICS & SOUND

The two most easily identifiable components of a song are the lyrics and the sound. Lyrics are the words being sung (verbal), and sound consists of music and beat (nonverbal). While there is potentially a separate discussion to be had regarding purely instrumental music, the overwhelming majority of vinyl records involved in the continued relevance of vinyl albums as a newly produced medium (as opposed to used records) are records that consist of songs with lyrics. There is also consistent data showing that music with lyrics has always outsold, and continues to outsell, instrumental music, further emphasizing both the importance of lyrics to music consumers and for this study ("Insights").

The essence of music as a distinctively important form of communication is due to the fact that music automatically has an intrinsically embedded dual meaning because music expresses messages and ideas both verbally and nonverbally. In music, the verbal and nonverbal communications come together, which we recognize as songs, and both aspects add dimensions of communication and understanding for the listener. In understanding the importance of each aspect of music as a form of communication, it is crucial to understand verbal and nonverbal communication as separate concepts, even when these two aspects are blended together seamlessly in a song, and only then can their relation and importance to music as communication be fully understood.

First, it is important to ensure a common understanding of the term "communication." Communication is traditionally understood as being comprised of two main concepts: verbal communication (speech or singing) and nonverbal communication (gestures) (Esposito v-vii). The idea of verbal communication may appear as

29

straightforward, however, the concept of verbal communication as a whole is actually made up of many smaller pieces. Verbal communication includes not only audible words (or visual symbols), it further encompasses all aspects of a language (written or oral), used to facilitate the exchange of information between individuals or groups (De La Rosa 9). In the context of music, verbal communication includes the lyrics being sung, as well as any print material present that includes words and symbols, either at a live performance, included with a CD or vinyl album on the cover and/or liner, or visible on an iPod. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, relies on facial and body expressions, as well as all types of gestures, to create meaning. This communication could include movements, actions, or dances being used during a live performance, or photos on an album cover/liner, whether physical (CD/vinyl) or digital (MP3). Nonverbal communication in music also encompasses the experience of the sound, whether made by musical instruments or music technologies.

The combination of lyrics and sound create the multidimensional communication of music. There have been many debates and studies attempting to identify which portion of songs (the sound or the lyrics) were the most influential part to listeners, but a solid consensus has not been established solely due to the conflicting views of music listeners, as music listening is an inherently subjective activity. Some studies show listeners emphasize the importance of sounds over lyrics, while other studies show a greater power of words in influencing listeners, sometimes even in spite of what the listeners consciously recognize and state as the most important aspect of their experience (Lull).

Further speaking to the importance of music as a form of communication is the fact that the lyrics, and the messages and ideas being communicated therein, are far more

important to listeners than the sound. Studies throughout different time periods all show that, whether or not the listener is fully aware of the affect, lyrics overshadow the impact of sound, whether the study is looking at the particular sounds, rhythms, or notes used, or even just responses to the sound quality (Carey 150-163; Chesebro et al. 119-132; Harmon 61-84; Pichaske 1-245;). This is especially true when lyrics provide the listener with either personal meaning or social relevance. While sound, in and of itself, has distinct interactions with the human brain, including directly affecting mood, Western civilization has long emphasized literacy and print as more essential in shaping our experience of the world. Even prior to mass literacy, simple orality was a crucial part of being a contributing member of a civilized society. Therefore, in the end, it is the words (or, in this case, lyrics) that carry significantly more weight of meaning for the listener than the sound alone.

SOUND QUALITY

A large debate found within the larger discussion of vinyl records versus digital media concerns the attempt to compare the sound quality of different mediums and determine which form of media innately possesses superior sound quality. This debate generally focuses on the differences between vinyl records and pure MP3s, meaning MP3s that have been directly downloaded from a source, rather than ripped from a CD (an action that often results in an immediate decrease in sound quality). Often left out of this discussion are CDs, but they are still a very important and relevant format when discussing sound quality. Jesse Bockstedt et al.'s study suggests that, for the average listener, there is no perceptible difference between the sound of digital MP3s and

physical CDs. Of course, there are some audiophiles who claim a loss of sound quality when switching from digital files to CDs, but, as previously mentioned, they are the exception and not the rule, especially for this study, as the focus is on the way the "average listener" perceives different music technologies. The self-described average-listener almost always indicated that they saw no sound quality difference between CDs and MP3s (Bockstedt et al. 17, 25). Studies show that the reasoning for this is two-fold. One, the average listener, when played two different quality versions of any given song on the exact same amplification equipment would have difficulty picking out the objectively superior version, as long as one version was not obviously inferior to the other; e.g., the sound was muffled or the lyrics incomprehensible. This is true simply because the average human ear is not properly trained or inherently equipped to be able to note subtleties, some of which may even lie outside of the human ear's range of cognizant processing (Sterne 834). Two, even when the very same high quality version of a song is played on two different amplification systems, and even if one system is in any small way inferior to the other, the identically high quality song will be better amplified and processed on the superior equipment, causing the listener to incorrectly identify a higher and lower sound quality in the song when, in fact, the improvement in sound quality was due to the equipment being used and not the format. No matter the form of the music, sound quality becomes a difficult attribute to appreciate without controlled scientific testing conditions.

Sound includes the music, sound effects, playback noise, and other audible stimuli in a musical work. However, sound can also refer to the overall sound quality of the listening experience. Relatively few sources focused on sound quality as a defining factor

in music listening, which suggests a bit of a disconnect with whether or not sound quality matters in music listening to the average listener. Many scholars agree with Hayes' assessment in "'Take Those Old Records off the Shelf': Youth and Music Consumption in the Postmodern Age," where he suggests that visual and tactile elements are more important to listeners than sound quality, despite the statements of some his subjects to the contrary. While audiophiles and music collectors claim that vinyl records have a higher sound quality, the majority of Hayes' research does not deal with this claim, instead focusing on other aspects of vinyl's popularity among youth. Hayes conducted research with young record collectors, some of which stated that the sound quality is of the utmost importance to them and they have a desire to play vinyl records and the ritual it provides (Hayes 60-61). However Hayes' research with average record listeners shows that, unless the sound quality dips to a level where extremely poor audio makes it difficult to hear or understand the song, the focus of the listener is on the song as a whole experience, and particularly the lyrics.

 Despite the lack of conscious awareness on the part of the average listener at times, there is a "tactile form of embodiment" that comes from all, even digital, audio (Sterne 827). In "MP3s as Cultural Artifact," Sterne posits the idea that while the opportunity for tactile embodiment exists within all music formats, digital music is designed for distracted listening due largely to its lower audio quality, as well as its intangibility.

Sterne explains the process of creating an MP3, and that the compression a digital song is designed to get rid of the data for that portion of the sound that you would "not hear anyway," in order to compress the file to make it smaller and more manageable

(833). Therefore MP3s are created with the recognition that the human ear doesn't make perfect distinctions in sound recognition and, therefore, it is not necessary to reproduce music with the same high fidelity as can be found in the original recordings, on vinyl recordings, or even on an original CD. Sterne argues that lower quality audio, whether that lower quality is recognized as audible for the average listener or not, demonstrates MP3s being best suited for distracted listening, as higher quality audio demands the attention of the listener in a way that lower quality audio does not. High versus low audio fidelity issues are similar to the differences in visual and conscious attention a passer-by would give to graffiti on the street versus the attention that same passer-by would commit to an art installment by a famous artist.

In addition, the sound quality of vinyl should be specifically discussed. Outside of actual scientific studies on whether listeners can discern a difference in sound quality, it is more important to this study to note how music listeners interpret the quality of the audio on vinyl records, particularly as compared to other music formats. There are certain qualities that are frequently expressed as being part of the experience by those who listen to vinyl records, be they collectors or just average consumers. These qualities are particularly interesting, as they do not appear to have any basis in scientifically quantifiable sound quality. In a study of self-described record collectors, titled "'It Kind of Gives You That Vintage Feel': Vinyl Records and the Trope of Death," Yochim and Biddinger explain:

> Shifting opinions about records' qualities demonstrate the ways their meaning has been reworked. Specifically, contemporary fans value many qualities of records that consumers perceived as flaws less than 25 years ago. In 1979, for example, a

Rolling Stone reader complained about "the snap, crackle and pop of undulating

vinyl." By 2003, a record collector claimed, "I like the popping and crackling to

an extent . . . It gives you that vintage feel." This discursive shift regarding vinyl's

sound quality is just one example of the ways contemporary enthusiasts articulate

a broader sense that there is something special about vinyl… [Vinyl collectors]

are not simply romanticizing the past but are articulating an abstract relationship

between technology and humanity by grounding it in more concrete qualities.

Throughout both their history and in the contemporary moment, vinyl records

have been articulated with human characteristics, such as fallibility, warmth and

mortality, which, for record enthusiasts, imbue vinyl with authenticity. (183)

The record collectors interviewed for Yochim and Biddinger's study brought to light the

fact that vinyl sound quality is discussed by vinyl listeners as having unique qualities

which do not come up in discussion of any other music format's sound quality. While at

first it could be easily dismissed as simple nostalgia, it quickly became clear that, for the

general listening population as well, vinyl is imbued with a unique sound property. Van

Buskirk repeats the prevalent idea that vinyl sounds "warmer," and further that records

provide more of a connection between fans and the music. The assessment Van Buskirk

made of the connection music listeners feel with vinyl records is that it is due to the

unique sound qualities that they attribute to vinyl records. For these music listeners, this

is a reason that vinyl is a unique music listening technology (55-58). Additionally, in his

book, *Program or be Programmed: Ten Commands for a Digital Age*, Rushkoff explores

listeners' impressions of vinyl records by contrasting them with their impressions of CDs

and digital music (52-55). Rushkoff's comparative discussion notes that digital music is

reductive, as the very sound quality has literally been reduced (54-55). However, Rushkoff mainly argues his finding that the digital world is seen as unknowable and uncontrollable by many, while the sound of vinyl records is grounded in their physicality and thus seen as more relatable (a topic which will be touched on more thoroughly within the area of tactile function), but the unique argument being made is that listeners are connecting the sound quality to the tactile sensation of using a physical vinyl record as compared to the more ephemeral format of an MP3 (53).

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

While music as communication is primarily consumed in an auditory manner, the experiences of both watching live music and consuming or purchasing any form of recorded music are heavily affected by the visual aspects of that communication. A live performance involves theatricals, costumes, and audience interactions. A music video can be a recording or recreation of a live performance, pure visual storytelling, or contain other visual symbolism that may be paired with visuals of the artist set to the song. Purchasing a vinyl record, cassette tape, CD, and/or MP3 all commonly include purchasing artwork that goes along with the album/song. Such artwork can vary from the small thumbnail photo of an album cover that comes with an MP3 to vinyl records, which aside from the cover, may include to include additional visual inserts (posters, flyers, stickers, cards, etc.). Even modern music streaming services feature an image of the album cover during the time a song is playing, and, thus, the artwork that was specifically chosen by the artist and producer to represent that album, as opposed to solely displaying the title and artist as purely written communication.

It should be noted that, while examples of visual communication more relevant to live performances or music videos will be discussed later in this study, it is the visual communication provided by the album cover and liner, as well as the record label, which will take precedence. For the purposes of this study, live performances will not be a main focus, as they do not factor into a comparison between the experience of listening to music on vinyl records and other formats designed for music consumption. However, as covers and liners often include photographs or drawings depicting either humans or anthropomorphized animals/objects, the discussion of gestures, which applies most directly to the experience of live performances and/or music videos, can actually apply to vinyl records as well. The pictures and/or photos on an album cover/liner can convey a gesture or physicality just as easily as a live performance or music video.

In terms of the visual-auditory relationship, music listeners historically adapted to "a new "sensory environment with [the creation of] the gramophone" (Luyk 45). Prior to that time, the experience of listening to music was entirely auditory, without a visual component (Luyk 45). It should be noted that live performances where the intention is to watch the artists/musicians, whether experienced on a professional stage or within the home, is not part of this study. While, prior to the gramophone and subsequent technological advancements, lyrics were sometimes a component of listening to a song, there was quite often no visual component to accompany those lyrics, except occasionally a written title and artist. There would certainly not be a visual of all the lyrics to all the songs featured in a performance. In contrast to the experience of watching a musician perform live, which has been possible since music was first played in public, the addition of a physical album, and all that entails (such as album artwork), changed the way in

which listeners interacted with music.

Within the realm of visual communication, there is scholarship regarding the "visual possession" of music, i.e. the physical album and its packaging. The insight of graphic designers on the album artwork that they help to produce is providing a useful perspective on the visual art that continues to accompany the changing music media. Steven Heller, a graphic designer as well as visual arts scholar, has written two studies focusing on the subject of visual possession in commercial music: "Design Artwork for a Shrinking Album Cover" and "Music Design: Think Small," which is featured in his book *Pop: How Graphic Design Shapes Popular Culture*. The former examines the progressively shrinking album cover as media was transitioning from vinyl to digital from the perspective of a graphic designer. The importance of the visual component of an album is analyzed from the perspective of a creator who must continuously redesign this component in the face of changing media and technology. Heller also focuses on the history of the album cover as a cultural artifact with visual possession of growing importance:

> In the 1960s, the cardboard record jacket came into its own as a canvas for graphic artists, who used its ample dimensions to spin elaborate visual and conceptual fantasias. Album covers became generational touchstones, with iconic images like the "family portrait" of famous people rendered as cardboard cutouts and waxworks on the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, the Day-Glo colors and trippy starburst ornamentation on Cream's Disraeli Gears, and the extravagantly Gothic lettering on the Grateful Dead's Aoxomoxoa. (Heller).

With vinyl record albums gaining such cultural importance and becoming artistic

touchstones, it is clear that the visuals involved in any particular album have a unique and notable affect on the listener. While not every album cover will be a "touchstone" album cover, the degree of recognition they attain in the general culture, as well as the degree of influence on the world of art and design, demonstrates the broad importance of these covers.

Additionally, Heller addresses the impossibility of designing elaborate jackets to accompany MP3 albums in the same way as for previous larger media, specifically vinyl records, while recognizing that the need to create something simple and memorable to accompany music still exists. In the chapter "Music Design: Think Small," in his book *Pop: How Graphic Design Shapes Popular Culture*, Heller pivots to make a case for creating simplified yet aesthetically memorable designs for images that will accompany songs and albums, for the purpose of capturing consumers' attention while working within the confines of the small iTunes/iPod digital window (Heller 225-227). He suggests that there will always be a need for designers and "packaging, no matter the format, and no matter the size" (Heller 227). Heller's work ends up presenting another side to the debate on album artwork, as he is not particularly nostalgic for the prior album formats. Rather, Heller sees digital albums as a new and intriguing challenge facing his profession. Seeing the small "thumbnails" of album art for MP3s as an exciting challenge is certainly a viewpoint unique to graphic designers, particularly because current sales may point out that the average music listener does not share this opinion.

In contrast to Heller's move toward viewing MP3 art as an engaging challenge, in the article "Picture Worth a Thousand Songs?" Bryan Borzykowski sets out to prove the importance of the full-sized vinyl album cover. Borzykowski interviews graphic designer

Patrick Duffy, who asserts that people remain attached to artwork as part of an "emotional experience" in music. Borzykowski focuses on the visual experience of observing LP playback, as well as the act of viewing the notes and looking at the cover. He argues that loss of visual art is the broader issue that is at stake in the digital revolution, not sound quality or anything else to do with the literal music. To conclude, Borzykowski notes:

> What's really at stake, though, isn't brilliant designs or thought-provoking photos, it's the pastime of throwing on a record, carefully removing the booklet from the vinyl LP sleeves, and spending a half-hour reading about the producer, the songwriters, where the disc was made and even who the band thanked. … [Because] if music was just about the songs, would we have ever heard of George Martin, Van Dyke Parks or Steve Albini? And how successful would Pink Floyd have been if you couldn't get high and stare at that giant prism while "Breathe" played in the background? (Borzykowski)

There is an innate feeling among music listeners, as explained by Borzykowski, that the wholeness of a vinyl record, with the visual component there to complement the auditory experience, is more satisfying. This article demonstrates the importance of the visual aspect by presenting another designer arguing, along with his interviewees, for the visual material being not only relevant but also crucial to creating the full listening experience.

In addition to the aforementioned interviews, several qualitative studies of both self-described record collectors and average music listeners conclude that accompanying visual materials are central to vinyl's resurgent popularity in recent years. While "The Psychological Meaning of Personal Record Collections" is a qualitative study by David

40

C. Giles et al. that is focused on the motivations for collecting records, the conclusions can be applied to general music listening as well. In this study, visual features and materiality of vinyl were both given as reasons for collecting records. On the other hand, participants in Giles et al.'s study saw MP3s as "transient" and "more able to be corrupted or destroyed" (Giles et al. 436). Vinyl albums were seen as the "quintessential artifact" with their printed, tactile, and visual material. Giles et al. showed how material possessions overall are valued by vinyl collectors as visual representations of both personal and/or sentimental meanings and other aspects of personal identity (Giles et al. 432, 436-437, 442). At its most basic, the ownership of records was associated with high aesthetic pleasure, particularly pleasure in the ability to display one's collection of records. These collectors specifically identified with the visual created by the collection, both as a whole and as individual pieces for which they could connect and assign emotional value and memories.

David Hayes' study, outlined in "Take Those Old Records off the Shelf," suggests that vinyl's popularity is due to the physical (and thus visual) component of the albums. For the study, Hayes interviewed 23 self-described "serious music fans," eight of whom preferred vinyl to any other music format (Hayes 57-58). Overall, the appeal of viewing LP jackets, ownership of physical records, engagement in a listening experience, and the "quest" to find rare records were the motivations given for this fandom. The subjects referenced their interaction with the specific artwork associated with various records, and how the experience of looking at an album cover and liner notes while the record played gave the music a more "authentic" feeling, and even a sense of being closer mentally and/or emotionally to the artist, especially with artists from older decades (Hayes 58).

41

The combination of physical interactions (which will be delved into further in the next section), as well as visual interactions were the dominant factors in the subjects' preference for vinyl.

In addition, Hayes suggests that visual possession is more important than sound quality, despite the statements made by his subjects on the importance of vinyl's sound (Hayes 58). Based on their collective narratives, Hayes argues that a "sense of personal agency" is the major factor in vinyl's popularity with its fans, and that the perceived loss of this agency is the reason for a popular romanticism of older media, such as vinyl (Hayes 55, 67). Interestingly, when directly asked, the subjects in this study consistently argued that "audio fidelity" was the most important reason that they were attracted to vinyl. Alternately, the subjects would then consistently spend far more time discussing and dissecting the visual interaction of the listener with the records and how the visual interaction shapes their choice in preferring vinyl over other forms (Hayes 61). Hayes concludes that the physical handling of a music medium gives the consumer their feeling of control. He argues that vinyl fans are reacting against a perceived lack of agency in digital music. It is difficult to completely separate the visual from the tactile, as the physical handling of a record encompasses both aspects in an entwined manner.

In their study titled "It Kind of Gives you that Vintage Feel," Yochim and Biddinger discuss the importance collectors place on the tactile and visual components of an album. Yochim and Biddinger interviewed a series of record collectors who argued that the interactivity and individuality of vinyl's larger artwork gives it perceptible "warmth" (183, 190). The subjects of the study consistently discussed the appeal of the visual artwork. For the subjects, the size of the art was very important because, compared

to a MP3's thumbnail icon, the larger size gives the artwork a feeling of "individuality and humanity," and helps to "remove the feelings of mass-production" from the record (Yochim and Biddinger 192). Additionally, the artwork "introduced an appealing element of interactivity; the fact that there's something [related] to look at and often read while listening to the music," which makes the listener a more active participant in the music listening experience (Yochim and Biddinger 192). The sheer act of looking at the records gave participants the ability to imagine a "sociotemporal network," meaning the feeling of being linked to people of different eras through this physical object (Yochim and Biddinger 193). Conversely, the subjects viewed digital media, encompassing both CDs and MP3s, as a form of music that was sterile, inauthentic, and less human (Yochim and Biddinger 185-193). Overall, self-described record collectors were again shown to value tangible aspects of the medium and noted that they see the art-like qualities of vinyl as a reaction to the consumer culture that MP3s embody and represent.

Several studies also deal with the concept of visual possession in relation to CD sales, particularly as they compare to the sales of digital downloads. While CDs are very different than vinyl records in a myriad of ways, the conclusions arrived at when contrasting them with MP3s are applicable to the importance of visual possession as it pertains to vinyl records because it is a contrasting of the substantially physical and the intangible. For a frame of reference, at the time that Antony Bruno wrote "Digital Album Packaging to Improve in '08," CD sales were still outnumbering those of MP3s (Bruno). It should be noted that these market statistics do not include illegal downloads, but only legal purchases of MP3s. Still, Bruno concludes that it is the lack of accompanying material causing this imbalance. His research shows that among illegal downloads on

popular BitTorrent (file-sharing) sites, the overwhelming majority of full albums receiving the highest download "hits" also include a file made up of scans or photos of the CD booklet in addition to the music files (Bruno). This data clearly shows that listeners have an attachment to the information provided in CD booklets, which can be seen to imitate what vinyl album covers and liner notes do. As the vast majority of legally available digital music downloads do not include any of the additional material found in the CD booklet, a clear argument can be made for downloaders favoring instead a product that includes the booklet information. Additionally, in a small side-argument, Bruno suggests that the miniscule album artwork will evolve from "stamp-sized thumbnails" and will take on a new form entirely in order to better serve the visual needs of consumers, which are not currently being met by MP3 purchases (Bruno). While no precise prediction is made by Bruno, realizing the value of the booklet and/or album cover and the added information and artwork it provides to music listeners prompted the realization that for MP3s to survive they must start addressing this preference of listeners.

Mark Katz's *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* compares the tactile function and visual nature of CDs to MP3 downloads, a medium that lacks both. Written in 2004, there are moments when *Capturing Sound* is slightly dated in its treatment of the digital music marketplace, which is due to the immense amount of technological advancement in the past decade plus, and yet overall it remains relevant. Katz claims that CD collections' tangibility and visuality is a part of their charm and appeal, in part due to the consumers' affinity for material objects and the tendency to see accompanying materials as a positive addition to their purchase (186, 192). The argument is presented that at least part of the point of having a collection is to display it and create

"visual impact," which in turn is intended to represent a degree of expertise on the part of the owner of that collection (Katz 171). Katz argues that people prefer things that they can see daily and showcase in their homes, especially because of the ability to visually represent themselves and their individual tastes and expertise to anyone entering their home. The collector, in particular, will often state that they prefer a display because it represents a unique badge of honor that signifies the collector's specific knowledge of the subject of their collection (Katz 10-11).

Katz's work also deals with the copyright controversy of the early 2000s, analyzing the reasons people pay for downloads or buy CDs in an era of practically free music. His findings are that these reasons are permanence and physical interaction (Katz 185). While music listeners could freely download music in a variety of forms, those downloads feel less permanent to the consumer. Overall, Katz's findings are useful, although he admittedly places more value on why music listeners and collectors value a visual collection, and does not fully develop his claim that CDs' tangibility is an integral part of their popularity.

Kyle Bylin's article *The Barriers of Music Consumption* examines digital music's dematerialization and arguable fragmentation. Bylin addresses the idea of music becoming nothing more than files and labels, and what that means in terms of how music listeners connect with music. Much of digital music is divorced from its original packaging; only the name and the occasional attached thumbnail digital image/icon remain. Bylin aims to show the emotional importance of the visual aspects of vinyl records:

As the emotions that they experience in the presence of unique works of art, and

those that they feel while holding an iPod – that happens to contain art – shouldn't

be confused as if they are the same thing. Especially since one relates to the

"aura" of the music, and the other to a piece of technology. In the first scenario,

when those of previous generations encountered a physical collection, they pored

over it, investigated it, and held the works of art in their hands – works, which,

weren't of their own, but still provoked meaning and were intrinsically tied to

their own stories. (Bylin)

Bylin argues that the accompanying materials are manifestations of culture, but that an

iPod or MP3 player is only a "container for culture," as it lacks any visual, be they

images or words, meaning it also lacks that unique social connection. Furthermore, the

author suggests there is a generational divide between those born in the era of music as

"just files," and music fans of an earlier era who were used to connecting with media in a

more tactile fashion.

Additionally, Maria Styvén's "The Intangibility of Music in the Internet Age" is a

fascinating look at the intangibility of a consumable product as it relates to creating or

diminishing perceived value for the digital product. Styvén suggests that online music

vendors use visual cues to suggest a greater form of tangibility for their product in order

to have the music assume a greater value in the consumers' mind (53-68). The websites

of these online music vendors display images of album covers and artists in connection to

the songs. They often include some facts about the artist on the site, as well as a link to

access other available music by that artist. It is worth noting here that Styvén predicted

the rise of iTunes, and particularly its dominance over the digital music market. She

reasoned that a strong brand identity can compensate for perceived intangibility and

overcome consumers' general hesitation when it comes to buying music online. Styvén shows that the tangibility of vinyl records and being able to see them and all of the additional information they offer is what makes them superior to MP3s in the eyes of consumers (53-68).

The commodification of digital music is a concept that is overall only tangentially related to the importance of visual communication for vinyl records. However, several articles on this commodification are relevant: namely, John Corbett's "Free, Single, Disengaged" and Tony Gibbs' "Epilogue."

Corbett's "Free, Single, Disengaged: Listening Pleasure and the Popular Music Object" is a study of music objects and listening that focuses on an aural-visual interplay in musical media and how the lack of the visual component contributes to the commodification of music. Corbett largely bases his analysis on Laura Mulvey's feminist theory regarding erotic fetishization of visual objects and investigates the sensuality of records and CDs and their existence as visual objects (84-85). Corbett suggests that when there is a lack of a visual component to the musical object, whether in the form of a cover or graphic, there is an increase in the desire for the aural component, music, in a form of object fetishization (Corbett 84). He further argues that the artwork is an attempt to return a visual component to musical experiences that has been lacking since music became a recorded listening experience rather than a viewed performance (Corbett 86). Corbett's argument appears less valid when one considers the rise of digital music, which is music completely separate from accompanying visual components. However, his examination of an existing aural-visual interplay is worth considering.

Gibbs' "Epilogue: Recording Technology in the Twenty-First Century" suggests

that digital is music "de-reified," a twist on the Marxist term referring to the lack of object identity (331). Gibbs' overview of the transition to digital music with regard to the album as an art object is interesting, as he suggests that artwork adds a secondary artistic component to the music. Gibbs focuses on the composition of the art that goes into the album artwork, which is of course legitimizing it as art in and of itself. He also characterizes previous 12" album covers as spectacles of visual art (329).

In addition to the abovementioned sources, there are many others (*The Recording Angel* by Eisenberg; "Album Cover Design" by Grant; "What We Listen To When We Listen" by Hsu; "On the Reproduction of the Musical Economy" by Leyshon et al.; "Dodging Digital" by Martens; "Purchase or Pirate" by McCorkle et al.; "Music in Motion" by Mott; "Music CD Purchase Decisions" by North and Oishi) that briefly deal with the perceived importance of visual and physical components of music. As a driving idea, they all explicitly claim that vinyl's allure lies in these combined visual and physical components. It is also worth noting that these sources are strongly influenced by the existence of musical copyright and the legality of downloading, issues that dominated the discourse about music acquisition in the early 2000s.

TACTILE FUNCTION

Tactile function, the act of engaging with an album using all the senses, is quite often discussed in the same sources as visual possession, particularly as it relates to vinyl albums as a medium. As previously stated, it is impossible to entirely separate the visual and physical/tactile experiences of vinyl, as one can literally not exist without the other. The tactile function of music encompasses the search for a record and the process of

opening and examining that record, all of which happen long before playing that particular purchase, and often before ever hearing the entirety of the contents of the album's music. Relevant sources deal with both the tactile function of physical albums as well the tactile function, or lack thereof, of digital albums. The connection of digital objects to tactile function is complicated by the less-than tactile nature of digital media.

One of the more interesting sources relating to tactile function is a study conducted on the "culture of apathy" as it relates to music listening. In "Are Downloads Creating Apathy?" Charles Arthur reports on a study that involved 346 people reporting what music they were listening to at random points during the day over a two-week period. The article largely reports on and analyzes studies conducted by Dr. Adrian North at the University of Leicester. North concluded that people listen to downloaded music passively and that digital music has become a product consumed in achievement of other goals and "the degree of accessibility and choice has arguably led to a rather passive attitude towards music heard in everyday life" (Arthur). In his analysis of these results and their implications for music culture, Arthur identifies MP3s as nothing more than commodities and argues that the easy access to digital music has led to an apathetic and passive attitude towards music in general, particularly in the generation that has grown up with digital downloads as their primary means of music acquisition. North and Arthur's emphasis on the appreciation of music correlating to the difficulty involved in obtaining it is worth considering as it relates to the tactile function of music (Arthur). However, North's conclusion that music as background noise is apathetic listening by its very nature is overly simplistic. North correlates active listening with appreciation and passive listening with apathy on the part of the listener, and yet Arthur argues that his results

49

leave room to argue for a mood-contingent mode of listening (Arthur). In Arthur's

analysis of North's results, one could conclude that digital music is simply valued and

experienced differently, and is not necessarily lacking in value due solely to the different

listening experience. North and Arthur's disagreement on the nature of listening aside,

the use of the listening context of music to inform the music's value is an interesting

concept, and one that will continue to play a part in this study.

The issue of tactile function in records appears again in "Sharing and Listening to

Music" and *The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl*. Both authors argue for the power

and influence of records' tangibility, and juxtapose the importance of tangibility in music

and the images of the LP-based art. Barry Brown and Abigail Sellen's study, "Sharing

and Listening to Music," addresses the issue of tactile function by considering the

concept of tangibility in music practice. The Brown and Sellen study builds on 36

interviews and concludes that the average music listener values tangibility in music, and

that digital, intangible music is seen as "inferior" to physical media (Brown and Sellen

47). Brown and Sellen offer a strong examination of tactile function and music from the

perspective of why and how people listen to and share music, and how tangible music

informs listening and sharing music. Brown and Sellen simplify the difference:

> A key difference between computerised music files and physical music media is
>
> that they do not have a persistent physical presence which can be arranged to
>
> create an aesthetically pleasing display. Browsing through these on-line
>
> collections is also very different from browsing through physical collections with
>
> their accompanying artwork and sleevenotes. In addition, because they are not
>
> physically embodied, they are not as linked with social interactions. For example,

digital files are not as desirable as gifts. ... Our participants saw a collection of

digital files as inferior to a collection of tangible physical media. ... Digital music

files were viewed as untrustworthy, of lower quality, and unreliable. (47)

Brown and Sellen also argue that when MP3s are seen as a complementary addition to

vinyl records rather than a competition or replacement for physical media, these

negatives suddenly become positives. However, if a music listener has to determine in

which form they would prefer their music, without the physical, tangible object, "the

emotional attachment to objects which much of collecting depends upon is lost," and

music ceases to be consumed as it has previously been (Brown and Sellen 50). However,

the authors also argue that the tactile aspect of music must be recovered by technological

innovations. The article ends with predictions of consumer demand for inclusion of a

digital form of the visual representations of more tactile music collections, a demand that,

despite it now being over a decade since this study was published, has still to be fulfilled.

Trevor Schoonmaker's *The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl* addresses tactile

function with a very specific focus on vinyl records. This work is the title piece in a

collection of articles that accompanied a Duke University museum exhibit utilizing up-

cycled records in a pairing of art and academia. Schoonmaker suggests that the records'

appeal lies in an "ineffable quality" that is simultaneously more tangible and authentic

than other media. Ergo, the records' metaphoric power inspires visual artists

(Schoonmaker 14-17). Mark Katz, author of one of the articles in this collection, argues

that record collecting arises from a person's desire to possess things, "whether gaudy or

sublime," whether they simply catch their eye or represent a deeper meaning to the

collector (Schoonmaker 65).

In "Toward a More Cherishable Digital Object," Golsteijn et al. suggest that digital objects are viewed as less important (cherishable) than tangible objects. Participants in this study had difficulty seeing digital music as an object in any sense of the word, and instead they could only conceive of digital music (MP3s) as something intangible (Golsteijn et al. 3-10). The study involved focus groups where participants were asked to compare three physical and digital special objects, and to discuss their advantages and disadvantages. Without exception, Golsteijn et al. found that participants had drastically more difficulty finding digital objects that they cherished, whereas it was a far simpler task for the participants to find physical objects that they cherished (Golsteijn et al. 2). Tellingly, one participant suggested that the "evocative images" of physical albums are why people collect them (Golsteijn et al. 7). Also, Golsteijn's analysis of the issue of scarcity is worth noting. They posited that only physical albums can be affected by scarcity because a digital file can be copied innumerable times. This ability to reproduce the digital file with ease and in great number affects both perceived rareness and therefore perceived value. Golsteijn et al. conclude that digital music is intangible and thus less cherishable, with a lower perceived value overall (3-10). Additionally, this intangible nature of digital music makes it easier to effectively steal it, whether by downloading music illegally or even copying a CD to give to a friend, without feelings of remorse or wrongdoing.

"Collecting Music in the Digital Realm" by Tom McCourt is a short article on the tangibility and visuality of album collections versus digital collections. It offers a detailed comparison of playback as a tactile and visual interaction that also addresses the issue of effort expended in manipulating a vinyl record versus the greater ease of digital playback.

McCourt argues regarding perceived value:

> [It] continues to diminish, moving from the large physical/tactile experience of LPs, to the smaller CDs, less visually appealing, and hindered by plastic jewel cases, all the way to MP3s, with less perceived value because they cannot be held in your hands, and they are given value only when burned [onto] CDs. (249)

While certainly more complex than a simple correlation of size to perceived value, the size of an LP certainly affects the amount of visual real estate that can be used to provide artistic visuals or text to accompany the music. Added visuals and the physicality involved in looking through and exploring those visuals adds value for music listeners. McCourt concludes that digital music lacks "emotive contexts" supplied by the physicality of older media (McCourt 250).

In an alternate view, Jonathan Sterne's "MP3s as Cultural Artifact" argues that there is a "tactile form of embodiment" that comes from digital audio (Sterne 827). Specifically, Sterne examines how users view MP3s as objects (and talk about them as such), even though they are essentially files. He argues that MP3s are a form of artifact, not objects, but are merely treated as such by consumers. This connects to North's idea that apathy toward an object depends on its physicality or lack thereof (Arthur). Sterne concludes that digital music is designed for distracted listening by virtue of its intangibility and audio quality. He argues that consumers embody music by treating it as an object. This source is promising but Sterne does not completely support his thesis that embodiment is a requirement and result of digital music. The premise that the nonphysical media requires embodiment, while a fascinating idea, is not adequately supported by his data and therefore will not be further considered in this study.

Sterne concluded that the intangibility of MP3s added to the idea that they are designed for "distracted listening." The overall issue of intangibility can affect the music listening experience because of how it affects the way listeners interact with digital files on both a basic and a more complex level. The issue of intangibility simply refers to the lack of physicality because MP3s are, as files on a computer or iPod, far less physical, touchable items than all previous forms of music listening technology. MP3s do not require physical interaction from the listener, so they do not require active physical engagement while listening. By stating this, Sterne is referring back to his conclusion that MP3s are designed for what he refers to as "distracted listening" (Sterne 836). Distracted listening is Sterne's term for the situation when music becomes more background noise than a focus. The real distinction here between MP3s, being designed for distracted listening, versus vinyl records, which are designed for interactive/active listening, is that physical interaction with MP3s is not required in order to maintain a steady flow of music to the listener, whereas physical interaction is crucial when listening to vinyl records. While the MP3 listener might reach a point where they desire a particular song or genre change, they are also able to allow the music to automatically continue without intervention until either they run out of music or they wish to end their listening session. A vinyl listener, on the other hand, is required to physically interact with the music format, at the very least at the end of each side of a record, in order to replay that side, flip the record, or change to a different album. According to Sterne, this means that the level of engagement demanded by each type of music technology determines the level of engagement required between the listener and the lyrics and sound embodied in the recording.

Sources discussed in the previous section on visual communication are also going to prove relevant to the issue of tactile function. This is due to the intertwined nature of the visual and tactile/tangible aspects of vinyl records. "It Kind of Gives you that Vintage Feel" discusses the importance of the tactile as well as the visual to album collectors. Some of the collectors interviewed specifically reference not only the experience of viewing the album covers and liners, but also the involved and interactive process of record playback, as well as their responses to the simple act of touching the records themselves.

Maria Styvén's "The Intangibility of Music in the Internet Age" discusses the average music listener's desire for tangibility. David Kushner notes, "Music fans are tactile beings and there's nothing more tactile than the actual CD. People need to physically connect with music" (qtd. in Styvén 56). The primary argument from Styvén is that it is in the nature of the music listener to desire physical interaction with the music they are listening to. However, Styvén also brings up a unique point about pricing with digital, intangible music versus pricing with CDs or LPs, or other more tangible formats.

Since costs are calculated for the labor and production of physical goods and digital music has no physical form and therefore lower production costs, consumers believe the cost of digital music files is too high when they can often buy a CD for the same price. The problem with maintaining equivalent pricing regardless of the music medium is that, "people will pay more for a CD or LP than they want to pay for a music file," a fact directly demonstrates the difference in value that consumers place on a format that is tangible versus one that is intangible when making a purchase (Styvén 59).

In "Take Those Old Records off the Shelf," David Hayes' "serious music fans"

speak about physical interaction as a dominant factor in their preference for vinyl. Hayes

suggests that it is more important than sound quality, despite the initial statements of the

subjects to the contrary. The "sense of personal agency," which is the major factor

identified in vinyl's popularity with Hayes' subjects, can be tied to tactile function

(Hayes 67). The sense of ownership vinyl records provided to the subjects of Hayes'

study was the deciding factor in vinyl records being their preferred music format, because

the physical space those records occupied gave the records purpose beyond that of less

tangible formats. Additionally, Hayes' subjects expressed the following:

> Physical participation was also cited as an important part of the listening
>
> experience. For many of these youth, the increased demands of carefully
>
> positioning the needle and flipping the record were seen as integral components to
>
> the enjoyment of music, practices not associated with the relative ease of the CD
>
> player and its multi-disc, random select options. (60)

This is an interesting study, particularly in light of Hayes' conclusion that agency is

linked to the physical handling of a music medium. His argument that vinyl fans are

reacting in response to a perceived lack of agency in digital music appears to be

supported by his study. This is a recurring theme, which is supported by many of my

sources that address the subject of tactile function.

The tactile function and visual nature of CDs, as compared to MP3 downloads, is

also explored in Mark Katz's *Capturing Sound*. Katz claims that CD collections have a

tangibility and visuality that is a part of their "charm" and appeal, in part because of

consumers' affinity for material things. In addition, Katz also deals with the copyright

issue of the early 2000s, and juxtaposes the reasons people pay for downloads or buy

CDs to the reasons people continue to purchase vinyl records in an era where free music, albeit often illegal, is easily accessible and readily available (Katz 164). Katz concludes that permanence and physical interaction are part of the appeal of vinyl records.

Kyle Bylin's *The Barriers of Music Consumption* examines digital music's dematerialization and fragmentation, focusing on the fact that much of digital music is divorced from its original physical packaging; often only the name and an occasional digital image remain. The article addresses the reality of music becoming nothing more than files and labels. The author argues that, while the accompanying materials are manifestations of culture, an iPod is only a container for that culture. Bylin suggests that there is a generational divide between those born in the era of music as "just files" and music fans of another era, particularly because once the album format as a complete physical package was fractured, individual songs became the focal point instead. This fracturing of the original album structure has resulted in individual songs being valued over an entire, cohesive album, and has removed music from the "package" in which the artist originally intended it to arrive to the listener.

Some sources also examine the concept of records as objects as that concept relates to the commodification of music applying the principles of the situationist work of Guy Debord. The sources that examine Debord, particularly as his theories relate to the tangibility of vinyl, include Philip Auslander's "Looking at Records" and Eliot Van Buskirk's "Vinyl Records Threaten the Future of CDs." Auslander refers to "the progressive dematerialization of the musical object" in the transition from shellac/vinyl to CDs to the ability to directly download music online (82), which he sees as such a fundamental change that it "constitutes a paradigm shift" (77). Auslander also discusses

the idea that music is being "hypercommodified" in such a way that "musical sound becomes a commodity in itself," which is a further exploration into the disappearance of the physical object as music is consumed as pure digital information instead of through a physical intermediary (82). Additionally, Auslander refers to Debord's theory that the process of commodification is, in fact, a "sensory conversion" because "recording subordinates music's existence as sound to its new existence as a visible object," which is when music can then become a commodity (79). Van Buskirk speaks of the physicality of records in terms of the physical connection that vinyl records provide between the fans and the artists (Van Buskirk 56). Van Buskirk takes Debord's theories a step further by moving beyond the commodification of physicality to what further content or meaning the physicality can provide to the consumer, and that is both a literal and symbolic connection that the music listener feels to the artist.

In addition, there are other numerous sources ("Organizing Digital Music for Use" by Cunningham et al.; "Unpacking Our Hard Drives" by Dibbell; *The Vinyl Countdown* by Elborough; "The iTunes Effect" by McCourt; "Turn Me On, Dead Media" by Smith) that, while not especially relevant to this project, do discuss the importance of the physical artifact within music consumption. The general conclusion is that physical aspects or accompaniments to music increase its value in the eyes of consumers. MP3s lack significant accompanying information and, at times, the textual data attached to the files can even be incorrect. It is also worth noting that the issue of illegal downloading appears throughout these sources, with several authors suggesting that the purely digital MP3s are seen as effectively valueless, and not worth paying for when they can be obtained for free.

When reviewing the relevant literature on the tangibility of vinyl, there is a mention of an additional subculture, distinct from vinyl collectors and audiophiles, that is relevant to this discussion. This is the DJ (disc jockey) community. Within studies regarding the tangibility of vinyl records, the DJ community appears in large part because the traditional image of the DJ involves extensive physical interaction with vinyl discs, ranging from the common interactive actions of flipping the records and placing the needle on the disc to the more advanced and DJ-specific actions of performing segues and manipulating the records, often in the form of "scratching" (the sound made by a record when it is moved back and forth on the turntable while the needle is down) and sampling. "The Residual Soul Sonic Force of the 12-Inch Dance Single" by Hillegonda Rietveld is an examination of vinyl's popularity within the DJ community, due largely to a greater "hands on" aspect inherent in vinyl records. However, while interesting, vinyl interaction within the DJ community is not particularly relevant to this study.

The tangibility of music in relation to vinyl records is impossible to avoid within any book, article, or study that focuses on vinyl records and the culture surrounding them. The physicality of vinyl records is so intrinsic to the format that whenever music listeners/consumers discuss vinyl records, it is inevitable that they will discuss their physicality. The tangibility of vinyl records is also briefly addressed in the following sources: Richard Peterson and John Ryan's "The Disembodied Muse: Music in the Internet Age." argues that the history of music is one of progressive disembodiment, losing the need for a performer or a "body" at all (223-235). Digital music is the culmination of this disembodiment process. Eric Rothenbuhler and John Peters' "Defining Phonography" considers the relationship of analog music to physical

manifestations, i.e. grooves on a record, and compares that physicality to the data-based nature of digital music (252-256). In "Digital Media and Dematerialization," Nick Hogg and Tim Jackson argue a view of music as becoming progressively more intangible. However, the music is not being completely dematerialized, in part due to continued use of playback hardware. Therefore, the physical iPod substitutes for the physical format of albums (127-143).

LISTENING AS THE ARTIST INTENDED

Listening to an album as a whole work of musical art, as originally intended by the artist, is a concept that has diminished in the world of digital music. The fact that this aspect of music listening has largely been forgotten is best indicated by the lack of research or studies on the topic; however some related scholarship exists.

The introduction of digital downloads and streaming services has caused a change in the way music is listened to. Bylin posits that digital music consumption has caused individual songs to become the focus for consumers, moving away from the concept of an album as a connected piece of art. The issue of artist control in particular appears often in literature focusing on the shift toward fractured album listening. Tom McCourt's "The iTunes Effect" suggests that albums require listening to be done on the creator's terms versus the listener's. In *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and the Urban Experience,* Michael Bull suggests that listeners' desire for uninterrupted use and a controlled listening experience are the defining characteristics of iPod use. Bull's research indicates that users prefer the control listeners exercise when creating and using playlists, particularly as opposed to a perceived lack of control when having to listen to an album as a whole (148-

151). This is also the case for other countries as well. "Contesting the Digital Economy and Culture: Digital Technology," a study of Korean music consumers, also focuses on the fragmentation of digital music. The study of Korean music consumers, interestingly, concludes that this change is for the better in terms of everyday listening.

> Once music is "dematerialized" from the physical entity of records and decentered from the "tyranny" of television media, musical experience becomes increasingly fragmented and dispersed across different media and networks, but more enriched within different leisure and everyday contexts. (Lee 495)

While Lee's conclusion was that everyday listening should be valued over artistic integrity, these studies all suggest that the rise in digital music means that the listener, rather than the artist, has become the manager of the listening experience in creating customized playlists in place of traditional albums. An important question to examine is whether this shift in interaction with musical content has more of a negative impact on music listeners or if it can be seen as a positive change in music consumption.

"On the Reproduction of the Musical Economy after the Internet" includes an intriguing note on a father and a son's music listening habits: as a youth, the father would listen to the whole album, playing it while reading liner notes and examining the cover; the latter listens by "flicking" through tracks while engaging with other media (Leyshon et al., 184). The father's experience is more a process of engaging with the music, while the son's is a more distracted experience. "Distracted experience" is a term that frequently appears in studies that examines the effect of the change to MP3 in the culture of music listening. This profile highlights the changing attitudes toward music listening as a practice.

While discussing the importance of listening as the artist intended, an argument is made for the inclusion of the single or individual song, and the ways in which that music fits into modern music culture. Brown and Sellen's "Sharing and Listening to Music" defined the breakdown of the album as a failing of the digital age. Brown and Sellen pay particular attention to the entire "lifecycle" of how listeners/consumers use music, and how the MP3 does not replace the physical formats but rather acts as a complementary option to allow user organization of single songs, which lack the natural organization of an album (Brown and Sellen 40, 48-50). Anita Elberse's marketing study "Bye-Bye Bundles: The Unbundling of Music in Digital Channels" follows the fragmentization of albums and emphasis on single tracks within the era of digital music and the effect it has on the music industry. As music is now primarily sold as individual tracks instead of albums containing a dozen or more songs, the previous business model of selling whole albums appears to be functionally obsolete in the digital era. Elberse analyzes the record industry's reaction to the changing market and suggests that consumers' interest in buying singles increases with digital availability (107-121).

McCorkle et al.'s "Purchase or Pirate: A Model of Consumer Intellectual Property Theft," a study focusing mostly on copyright issues, also addresses the demand for preferred songs, unbundled from an album. This has caused the industry to rethink its production. McCorkle et al. also address the change in music album expectations of younger listeners, specifically the increased desire for solely purchasing preferred songs from an album, arguably in large part because digital music makes it more possible than ever before (McCorkle et al. 73-84). Furthermore, Mark Katz's *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* also discusses listening as the artist intended. Katz

predicted the rise of the "singles listening" now made popular by downloading songs piece by piece (168).

MUSIC IN MASS MEDIA

The oldest historical medium through which music was transmitted was live performance, which is still used and is still popular today. However, this format is very limited in reaching listeners. In order to reach mass audiences in the modern age, artists must record and distribute their music. While there has been a rise in self-releasing music among artists thanks to the ease of independent music production and mechanisms for release available through today's technology and Internet capabilities, most artists still are, at least at some point in their careers, going to have to work within the established music industry in order to gain enough notoriety to become sufficiently popular to reach these larger audiences. In addition, for music, radio play continues to be the standard way to reach the masses and be a part of the mass media. While there has been an advent of new ways to consume music in the digital age, such as online streaming services, they are still reflective of the way radio operates as a form of mass media.

Generally speaking, in order for an artist to be described as part of the mass music/entertainment industry machine, that artist must procure a recording contract with an established label or producer. While all music created in cooperation with the music industry is essentially commercialized, the most commercialized is music intended for airplay on radio, television, and now even digital media (meaning everything from general website/Internet use for commercial purposes to social media outlets such as YouTube), in order to promote sales, whether of the music or other products. As

previously stated, being the most consistent and influential form of mass media for music, radio (including streaming services) is the main focus for artists attempting to reach a broader audience. The process through which music is commercialized highlights the importance of electronic media as a partner in connecting music and artists to listeners and audiences, particularly in that broad, vast sense (Knopper 229-252).

The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) produced a model that showed how the music industry operates as a whole, and which broadly represents the system of media as well (Ryan and Peterson 173-201). An item of cultural significance (in this case, a song) is chosen and exposed through the media. The cultural item then gains popularity, causing a chain reaction of further exposure and further gains in popularity, until that cultural item hits a point of diminishing returns, at which point its popularity decreases, causing a decrease in exposure. It has been noted that cultural items in the music industry system usually have a rise in popularity followed by a decrease in popularity, with very little to no stagnation of popularity in the middle. Additionally, it has been suggested that the music industry, specifically as it relates to commercial radio, has the power to affect the behaviors and attitudes of audiences utilizing this popularity cycle (Ryan and Peterson 173-201). The cycle of popularity in music is most often directly related to commercial radio choices aligning with the mass audience's taste in popular music. It appears that the audience is even aware of these effects, as individuals who are described as "mass culture listeners" have reported the radio to be the main source feeding their interest in music (Fathi and Heath 706-708).

The effect of radio on listeners and their music habits is unsurprising, as most radio stations gather market information on local levels in order to identify the pertinent

64

habits and patterns of their targeted audiences. The goal of radio stations is, of course, to increase demand and consumption of their respective radio stations (and thereby attract sponsors), and they do this by playing to the collective favorite "hits" within that station's specific genre. Record promoters often visit radio stations to bring promotional items for giveaways to the listening audience. They do this in exchange for airplay for their artists and airtime to discuss sales, tours, and other offers. With the rise of digital media in the past few decades, radio stations have embraced the Internet medium and expanded their transmissions, in turn further increasing their exposure and influence (Rothenbuhler 202-232).

USES & GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

INTRODUCTION

Uses and gratifications theory examines the expectations mass media and other sources of content are held to, specifically the gratifications obtained from the content, and understanding the expectations placed on the use of that content by the consumer/user, or in this case the listener. (Katz et al. 21-22). In the digital age, consumers are able to determine not only what type of media they consume, but also the format in which they consume their chosen content (Ruggiero 17). With a myriad of music formats and platforms to choose from, music consumers/listeners now have more choice than ever before. Uses and gratifications theory helps to assess why users choose their preferred type of media consumption. Particularly, a focus on uses and gratifications can serve to indicate why users have been increasingly and continuously preferring vinyl records, especially in cases where the music consumer prefers vinyl records over all other

music formats.

Uses and gratifications theory has had to become a continuously reinvented communication theory due to the constant acceleration of technological innovations that have influenced communication and the ways of communication for decades. The accelerated rate of these technological innovations results in new media being constantly promoted, particularly in terms of consumers being encouraged to access that media on the very newest electronic device or Internet streaming platform. As new ways of communication are introduced on a massive scale, corresponding new uses and gratifications are adopted by different audiences and subculture groups, and the old ways of communication, rather than falling out of use, have interestingly and increasingly become adopted by different audiences who are then aligning these technologies with their own new uses and gratifications (Leung and Wei 308-318). Essentially, with uses and gratifications, it is important to distinguish the difference between a vinyl collector who is well versed in vinyl culture and a young adult who is discovering vinyl culture and is, thus, experiencing and developing a preference for vinyl records for the first time.

MUSIC & MOOD

Science has clearly shown that music can shape the ways in which we perceive our environment, whether that is the world at large or small events in our daily life. In "The Neuroscience of Music, Mindset, and Motivation," Christopher Bergland discusses a variety of experiments that have all demonstrated the effect of music on the human brain, and particularly the areas of the brain that regulate and influence emotions and moods. In fact, the smaller building blocks of music, such as pitch and rhythm, tend to

66

sync up with the listener's emotions when making a music selection. This is why there are times when we as humans seek out a particular artist or overall feel/style of music based on our moods and feelings. This effect on mood can be caused by something as simple as the key a song is in, and that simple part can greatly affect the listener's interpretation of the song as a whole as well as the way the song can measurably impact the listener's brain. For example, music in a "major key" is perceived as communicating happy content, whereas music in a "minor key" is perceived as communicating feelings of sadness. It is not that we have simply come to associate these types of music with these types of feelings, but rather that the music affirmatively interacts with human brains and our brains then inform our psyche to interpret the type of message that is being communicated (Bergland). Rather than humans assigning meaning to the music, the music has intrinsic elements that tell our brain's basic building blocks how to feel about the music.

Much research has also been done regarding using music to enhance and improve the mental states of those who suffer from anxiety or depression. One example comes from researchers in The Netherlands, who found that certain songs fit neurological constructs, and would affect the listener in a specific way. By having the subjects listen to Bill Withers' "Lovely Day" and other songs that fit the neurological constructs for being a "happy" song, it was able to elicit cheerful emotions, and promote "self-fulfilling" thoughts for listeners (Bergland).

Because Withers' song is one that Ferguson and Sheldon also conducted studies on, and found that the effects of music were both involuntary and voluntary (27-31). When participants were told they could improve their mood by listening to upbeat music,

those who not only listened to the music but also focused their mindset on improving

their mood found greater growth in happiness levels than other participants who focused

solely on listening to the music (Ferguson and Sheldon 25-32). Beyond the realization

that music that is perceived as happy is able to elicit a positive mood and/or emotional

response, it is recognized that the listener is further able to evoke that happy neurological

reaction by making a conscious effort to seek out music that promotes a happy mood.

Music as a tool that communicates mood and/or emotion and the power it holds is

just beginning to be researched and understood fully. So far, all results point to music and

mood being inexorably linked. It has been clear for years to therapists that music can be

an effective mechanism to reduce anxiety, pain, stress, and even the symptoms of

depression (Davis et al.). It should also be noted that other factors, such as culture, social

context, and personal viewpoints can cause certain songs and even certain music genres

to be perceived in different and unique ways (Bergland), making it a challenge to

objectively determine a truly universally uplifting song. However, the building blocks of

music and songs that determine whether the music is interpreted neurologically as being

inherently happy or sad remain the same at their core regardless of outside influences.

MUSIC & YOUTH CULTURE

While music has the power to connect people through the common thread of

neurologically recognized emotion, it also has the power to divide people into

subcultures. The best known of these subculture groups is youth. In Western society,

music is an important element of youth identity and symbolism. Since the early 1950s,

when music could first be bought and consumed on a large scale, youth culture has driven

a significant portion of the marketing and manufacturing of recorded music. While there was initially a time when sound recordings were considered an untested innovation, as soon as they became accepted into the culture, music recordings took on a life of their own and created their own unique culture. Youth culture, being the first to embrace technological advances and changes to tradition, embraced the new technology of sound recordings, and has continued to be at the forefront of music consumption ever since.

Music has been very important to youth culture, particularly throughout the past century of easily obtainable music recordings. Music has the unique ability to create subcultures and generation gaps by developing distinctive traditions, all of which can set people apart or draw them together in a modern tribalism based on their musical tastes and interests. Youth culture, as a whole, finds this aspect of music culture appealing, as young people are often searching for a separate or individual identity and ways to communicate that identity. In fact, youth culture has been the single most important demographic to music communication studies. Young people, as the most active users of whatever form the newest music listening technology takes, are more prone to new media exposure than other age groups. This makes youth culture the most likely to accelerate the population of a particular music format or technology and the information it conveys (Chaffee et al. 323).

Young people are by far the most drawn to popular music. It is likely that the lyrical content and sound of popular music often reflects power struggles with perceived authority figures and the overall emotions and concerns relevant to youth culture. Whether these conflicts are introspective in nature or are outwardly portrayed, young people see music as a way to express all of these emotions, from wanting to oppose

authority to wanting to achieve the acceptance of their peers, or even to simply gain perspectives on life that are outside of what is taught or allowed by their parents, teachers, and bosses (Hebdige).

Music has two distinct effects on youth, and those are: (1) it aids in their formation of identity, as they attempt to transition to adult life while maintaining their interest in music; and (2) it aids in a broader formation of meaning in the content they consume. Therefore, it is unsurprising that students place great value on social rituals and media which connect them to their peers and reinforce their particular youth culture (Clarke 551-564).

MEDIUM THEORY

INTRODUCTION

Credited to Marshall McLuhan, medium theory can be summed up in his famous tagline, "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 7). While often misunderstood as discounting the content of media, medium theory, at its core, is the belief that the way in which media is presented will change the way in which individuals perceive that content and/or how the general public interacts with that content. Hypothetically, this theory could be employed to present particular content using particular media in order to ensure that the content has the desired effect on the consumers of that media. However, in this case, medium theory is useful to help determine why people interact with the medium of vinyl records differently than other music formats available to listeners.

As previously stated, the most common misconception with medium theory is that it discounts the content too extremely. Certainly, there is no such thing as medium

70

without content, as a television with no programs would be incapable of influencing anyone as a medium. Rather than discounting the content, McLuhan and his medium theory exposed the effects of the medium on which media is received by the consumer, an effect which is hidden in plain sight because media consumers are usually too focused on the content of media to see the power of the underlying medium. By separating the content from the medium, McLuhan was able to turn those mediums into objects of study, and to create one of the most substantiated and enduring communication theories. Using medium theory, the difference between reading the news in the newspaper and watching it on TV, for example, and the benefits and drawbacks of each can be extracted and analyzed.

THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

Marshall McLuhan's work, especially his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, is the foundation upon which much media theory was initially built. Written in 1959 as a high school media curriculum for the U.S. National Association of Educational Broadcasters, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* was years ahead of its time, even in using the term "media," because, as an early reviewer noted, it was "not in the average teacher's vocabulary and would need to be explained clearly" (Meyrowitz 13). McLuhan is the founder of medium theory, a variety of methods used to examine how all the different forms of human communication are assigned meaning. McLuhan theorizes that "the medium is the message," or, in other words, the message, and particularly any meaning or emotional content assigned to that message, is determined by the type of media used to deliver the content, even more so than the

content of that media itself. McLuhan goes on to explain "the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan 9).

Throughout the book, McLuhan makes it clear that each new medium or technological advancement, while bringing about change, also continues to emphasize the already existing media characteristics and contents. McLuhan uses a railway system as an example. He explains:

> The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure. This happened whether the railway functioned in a tropical or a northern environment, and is quite independent of the freight or content of the railway medium. (McLuhan 10)

Regardless of environment, freight or passengers, McLuhan theorized that because it "accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions," each new advancement would emphasize what had already existed.

Additionally, Joshua Meyrowitz, Professor of Communications at the University of New Hampshire, spoke to the enduring nature of McLuhan's medium theory. In his article, "Morphing McLuhan: Medium Theory for a New Millennium," Meyrowitz explored how McLuhan's theories work in today's digital age, perhaps even better than they did at the time he first conceived of them.

Meyrowitz argues that McLuhan's *Understanding Media* gave us the current

understanding and conception of "media" and the "information age." While hindsight

tells us that McLuhan was wrong about the end being in sight for baseball, cities, and the

automobile, Meyrowitz notes that, based on all the predictions that turned out to be

accurate, McLuhan still proves correct overall about media. He writes:

> In *Understanding Media* McLuhan correctly saw that advances in technologies
>
> would lead executives to do work once done by servants and secretaries, that it
>
> was becoming impossible to isolate minorities and youth from the larger culture,
>
> that the boundaries between disciplines would begin to disappear with a focus on
>
> the "interrelation in knowledge," that computers would allow rapid translation
>
> from one language to another, and that there would be an unprecedented sense of
>
> "involvement" across old boundaries within and across nations (discussed
>
> throughout his work). (Meyrowitz 10)

Meyrowitz solidifies our understanding of the predictions in McLuhan's media theory,

and proceeds to prove the accuracy of McLuhan's message by looking back at historic

examples and on to the present.

The most famous of McLuhan's aphorisms, "the medium is the message," was

misunderstood by many conventional scholars. Most notably, communication scholar

Wilbur Schramm concluded that the medium could not "be the message," as he argued

that it made no logical sense. Schramm instead maintained traditionalist thought when he

refuted McLuhan, stating that the medium is the medium and the message is the message,

and citing the example of the American reaction to the news of President John F.

Kennedy's assassination, which was regarded with equivalent horror regardless of how it

was communicated (Meyrowitz 13). Meyrowitz counters with the argument that, while it

was true that the assassination was regarded with similar horror no matter the medium, Schramm missed the McLuhanesque point. Meyrowitz explains that McLuhan's medium theory makes the point that the nationwide mourning was so powerful because of preexisting media-induced feelings of intimacy with JFK and his family (Meyrowitz 13). The biggest support for this interpretation is an example Meyrowitz gives from the earliest point in the JFK presidency during the presidential election debates. Meyrowitz argues the accuracy of McLuhan's medium theory because of those "famous debates with Richard Nixon, where the same content was perceived quite differently by those who heard the debates on radio (where Nixon sounded more authoritative) and those who watched them on TV (where Kennedy looked more appealing)" (Meyrowitz 13). This was the first election in which debates between candidates were televised, and the medium of television became an incredibly important asset to the "JFK message."

Meyrowitz ends his refutation of Schramm by stating that McLuhan's message is demonstrated in the new medium of the Internet. While other communications theorists may have their own points to add, or counterpoints to present, Meyrowitz provides the anecdote that Marshall McLuhan's "hits" on google.com are of a far greater number as compared to those of, say, Wilbur Schramm. An unfair standard with which to judge, perhaps, but, as Meyrowitz notes, this is yet another case where the medium is in fact the message.

In Paul Levinson's *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium*, he discusses McLuhan's ideas regarding the impact of media, but he also presents arguments for the utilization of McLuhan's ideas as a way to make sense of the advent of the digital age. Diving into McLuhan's medium theory, Levinson pays particular attention to

McLuhan's notion of the "rear-view mirror" effect. As a piece of his medium theory, McLuhan had addressed what he called the "rear-view mirror," which was, broadly, the tendency to walk into the future with eyes that become fixed on the past. Levinson defines the "rear-view mirror" effect as "a conceptual nostalgia" (Levinson 167). The "rear-view mirror" is evident in continued attachment to the appearances of the old so much so that they are used to represent the new. New technology references the design of the old and acoustic, even when it is no longer necessary. This fondness for the past is evident, if even more superficially, in the relatively new societal fondness for disguising new technologies as old ones, the newest example of which include MP3-compatable speakers designed to resemble 1960s guitar amps or 1930s wireless radios, or even designed to resemble gramophones (Levinson 160). The notion of the "rear-view mirror" also means that older media, which gains more critical and analytical focus after its era rather than during, can become the content for newer media. Levinson suggests that this happens to such a degree that the fresh focus causes older media to become "more visible to the point of being mistaken for the newer media" (174). In a very succinct summation, Levinson explains this through the example of the shift in the way we experience stories from reading novels to watching movies to the ability to record TV:

> McLuhan's early work in literary theory showed him that the narrative structure of the novel jumped into the public awareness after motion pictures adopted that structure as its content. By the 1960s, television would have the same effect on cinema, as universities created film schools to examine what was now available as content at all hours of the day in everyone's home. And in the decade after McLuhan's death, the VCR transformed the very structure and organization of the

television into content for the first time, directing the attention of its viewers to the relationship of commercials and programming (commercials could be "fast-forwarded" on the VCR), the subtleties of program timing (the taping could end several minutes before the end of the program, because the rest was taken up by commercials), and other aspects of television uncritically accepted when they were beyond viewer control. (Levinson 5)

At each step along the way, the existence of a newer or different medium provided a unique lens with which to gaze upon the immediately previous media. For example, it is because of its use in movies that an ingrained awareness of "The hero's journey" story structure was gleaned from literature. It is because of the introduction of television in every home that motion pictures have been dissected in this same way. It is because of the ability for anyone to record what is on television that commercials and their effect on television scheduling and programming were brought into focus. Moving past even the full scope of Levinson, the pervasiveness of online television content, both in whole and in clips, is bringing about a more critical look at television programming and a different way to view television series, as they are so easily viewable seamlessly in their entirety.

Levinson has truly brought McLuhan into the digital age by showing how effective McLuhan's medium theory remains today, breaking it apart into its simplest forms, and exploring the aspects of the theory to which less attention is often paid to than the flashy, sometimes controversial, tagline of "the medium is the message."

REMEDIATION THEORY

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have created a theory directly relating to

new media. In their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Bolter and Grusin set forth the idea of remediation theory, which in its most simple terms, states that media continuously refashions itself in different forms. Furthermore, this refashioning is not unidirectional: old media can remediate new media in the same fashion (Deuze 66). This builds on McLuhan's theory, in which he stated, "The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the "content" of any medium is always another medium" (McLuhan 8). Once the new media has refashioned itself from an old form of media, the process begins again as the old media refashions itself to answer the challenge of the new media (Bolter and Grusin 15).

BRICOLAGE IN REMEDIATION THEORY

Mark Deuze expands on the idea of remediation with what he calls "Bricolage." Deuze posits that beyond media continuously reforming itself, the individual consumer has a hand in the reformation by assembling or disassembling as they see fit. He claims this reconstitution is expressed as:

1. Active agents in the process of meaning-making (we become participants).

2. We adopt but at the same time modify, manipulate, and thus reform consensual ways of understanding reality (we engage in remediation).

3. We reflexively assemble our own particular versions of such reality (we are bricoleurs) (Deuze 66).

This bricolage, combined with remediation, will give the individual consumer greater involvement in media, and that consumer will give, modify and reform meaning and understanding of media, and construct their own version of said media (Deuze 66).

SUMMARY

LITERATURE

There are numerous studies that show music as a communication tool, and a review of the literature shows overwhelming evidence that accompanying tactile material also aids in communication. Luyk, Heller, Borzykowski, Katz and others point to the packaging that supplements the vinyl format, and the additional communication it provides to the listener. Hayes even goes so far as to state that the packaging, in fact, is more than the sound quality of the music. The inclusion of artwork adds additional information and interaction that digital music does not.

Styvén, Corbett, Bylin and others note the lack of tangibility in digital music, and how the lack of a visual component makes the music more commodified and therefore more disposable. Bylin specifically notes that since digital music is nothing more than files and labels, the music is dissociated from any original packaging it may have once had in earlier formats. Yochim and Biddinger also note that the larger size of vinyl artwork over other formats with tangible packaging had more individuality and humanity.

Arthur, Brown and Sellen, Schoonmaker, Golsteijn, and others speak to the tactile

function of physical media, and the apathy of the listener when listening to digital music. Again, it is argued that having nothing to touch or in one's hands commodifies digital music, giving it less meaning, and that listeners often find intangible music inferior to its physical counterparts, due to numerous reasons including sound quality, both real and perceived, as well scarcity of a physical item compared to infinitely duplicable nature of digital music. Hayes points to a sense of agency and ownership, and that value that gives a physical item meaning.

Sound quality is of importance to listeners as well, whether real or imagined. Some such as Bockstedt et al. note that most listeners cannot discern the difference between formats when put side-by-side. Sterne posits that digital music is in fact designed for distracted listening due to lower audio quality, but again, most wouldn't know the difference anyway. Yochim and Biddinger as well as Van Buskirk believe that the "quality" of vinyl isn't just sound fidelity, but also the pops and crackles and the idea that vinyl sounds "warmer."

Authors such as Bylin, Bull and McCourt, and others look at the listening of music, and the control the listener has in various formats. Bull finds that listeners desire more control over their music, something digital music devices are able to give. However, McCourt believes the artist should somehow have more influence in the listening process. Leyshon's case study of a father and son who listen to the vinyl and digital format respectively finds the vinyl listening to be more an experience. Ultimately with digital music, more control falls upon the listener, for good or for bad.

Marshall McLuhan's groundbreaking work in the field of media and his mantra certainly lends itself to the concept of vinyl records and how the format of vinyl carries as much weight as the sound contained on the record. Joshua Meyrowitz' scholarship 35 years later only stands to reaffirm McLuhan's theories, and grounds them in an age of technology that McLuhan could not fully predict. Finally, Paul Levinson thoroughly grounds McLuhan in the digital age and points at old media becoming new again.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin also build on McLuhan's theory, but more thoroughly delve into the deconstruction and reformation of media. Bolter and Grusin see media as "one hand washing the other," that is, a cyclical stream where new media is built from old media, the old media informs itself from the new media, and yet again, it reconstructs itself. Mark Deuze agrees with Bolter and Grusin, but highlights the fact that individual consumers of media act as active agents of reconstruction, and their individual versions of reality lend to the reformation of the new media.

The foregoing research into already-conducted studies and established theories and methodologies has emphasized, more than anything else, the importance to music listeners of a listening experience which envelops and makes use of all their senses. To the average listener, a music experience that lacks visual or tactile elements would be lacking in very important aspects of their enjoyment of the music. In the next section, I look to conduct my own study, to consist of interviews with record store owners, whom I consider to be the experts in this field, on why they believe vinyl has experienced a resurgence in recent years.

SYNOPSIS

Despite the ease of use, availability and low cost of digital music, it would seem that some are returning to vinyl. Scholarship on the subject overwhelmingly places the resurgence to the physical properties of vinyl, both in sound and packaging, as well as a tactility favored by the users. As per Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is the message," and that message is being heard loud and clear by the listener. Bolton and Grusin's ideas of remediation are also abound in literature, as the vinyl format, once considered outdated and no longer viable, has returned as a tool against the digital commodification of music. This adaptation and fulfillment expressed by vinyl listeners also suggest uses and gratification theory plays a role in the resurgence.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

INTRODUCTION

This section discusses how I used my methods to answer the previously outlined research questions:

RQ1.) Why has vinyl experienced a resurgence?

RQ2.) What needs are people satisfying through interaction with vinyl records?

The above questions were examined through the lens of the three methods of analysis noted in the last chapter:

1. Uses and gratifications theory

2. Medium theory

3. Remediation theory

GATHERED DATA - INTERVIEWS

In addition to the historical analysis and literature review discussed in Chapters Two and Three, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews of record store managers (McCracken 9-66). Potential participants were identified through an online search of independently owned vinyl record establishments. These establishments were located in the Western United States as outlined by the United States Census Bureau ("Census Regions"). Potential participants were contacted by me using information found

in the online database Google and invited to participate in a semi-structured interview, conducted in person, through video conferencing or by telephone. I used a phone recruitment script approved by UO's Research Compliance Services when I called prospective participants. I had no inclusion or exclusion criteria based on gender, race, or ethnicity. Participants were chosen at random by sorting the listed by location and size and then selected at random. However, two selection criteria were implemented for final choosing of the three participants:

1) Participants were located in major Western U.S. cities at least 700 miles from one another.

2) Participants came from different size classifications of record stores, based on square footage. Those classifications were noted as *Small, Medium,* and *Large*.

The participants were:

Dario Miranda, 39, Hispanic male – Stinkweeds (1,000 sq. ft.) Phoenix, AZ

Terry Currier, 62, white male – Music Millennium (5,500 sq. ft.) Portland, OR

Paul Epstein, 59, white male – Twist & Shout (11,000 sq. ft.) Denver, CO

I followed the same basic IRB-approved interview process for all interviewees, who confirmed consent and were all asked the same questions from a script. I utilized semi-structured interviews so that participants would be comfortable with the line of questioning, while also allowing the freedom to discuss connecting ideas. Thanks to the open-ended structure of the questions, I was also able to add further, probing questions as the participants brought up new ideas that I wanted to explore. Data were gathered through audio-recorded phone interviews. I conducted interviews by phone at a time convenient to the participant. Each interview lasted no more than 120 minutes. Audio

recordings were transcribed within a week of the interview date. The transcribed

interviews yielded data directly from record store owners and managers, and these

interviews serve as documentation of the discourse surrounding the phenomenon of the

vinyl record resurgence/revival.

DATA ANALYSIS

To analyze the data, I utilized Corbin and Strauss' open coding process as

outlined in their book *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for

Developing Grounded Theory*. The technique of open coding breaks the data collected

apart in order to aid in considering all possible meanings of the data so that the researcher

can more easily examine, compare, conceptualize, and categorize the data (Corbin and

Strauss 220-238). In addition to providing methods for analyzing and gaining

understanding, in order to create meaningful data from the interviews, Corbin and Strauss

also emphasize the importance of open-ended interviewing, allowing freedom in the

process for changes to the planned line of questioning.

I also based the coding process on the *Coding Manual for Qualitative

Researchers* by Johnny Saldaña, who frequently also cites Corbin and Strauss' work in

coding. I began with an initial pre-coding of the interviews (Saldaña 16-17), applying an

amalgamation of several coding styles. Initial coding was aptly titled *Initial Coding*, also

known by Corbin and Strauss and others who utilize grounded theory as *Open Coding*

(Saldaña 86-91). As explained by Corbin and Strauss, "Initial Coding is breaking down

qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for

similarities and differences (qtd. in Saldaña 86). As Saldaña notes, "Coding is a cyclical

act" (8), so after initial coding, I reviewed and re-coded contrasting data (Saldaña 18-19). I found that a combination of three codes was the most practical and useful for my study. I primarily utilized *Descriptive Coding* (Saldaña 76-79), which "summarizes the primary topic of an excerpt" (Saldaña 3). However, I often found that single sentences contained numerous subjects to be decoded and encoded, so I also utilized *Simultaneous Coding* (Saldaña 17, 62, 71, 145), which "applies two or more codes to a single datum" (Saldaña 5). Finally as my codes broke into two basic categories, one regarding physical product and another regarding actions, I found a review of *Process Coding* to be useful, as it codes only gerunds and notes only action. In my second and third coding cycles, I was able to further refine my codes, as well as simplify them for ease of use and to achieve more properly defined categories.

In choosing the amount of the data to be coded, I followed Saldaña's belief in "knowing and feeling what is important in data record and what is not, and thus code what rises to the surface – 'relevant text' as Auerbach and Silverstein label it" (15). Furthermore, Saldaña also notes that "Postmodern perspectives on ethnographic texts consider all documentation and reports partial and incomplete anyway, so the argument for maintaining and coding a full or reduced data corpus seems moot" (15). However, though there were some items that were not necessarily in line with my study, I did choose to code some data that came up enough times to warrant a code. I felt that this data might prove useful later when looking at future research.

Coded data were separated into three primary categories: physical properties, action and future research. Therefore, only the first two categories were analyzed for reporting in this current study. In the two categories there were 15 primary codes, with

two codes that also received subcodes for added clarification.

Table 1 – Categories & Codes

Category A - ENGAGEMENT (Action)

1	PRESENCE (Required focus for presentation of music)
2	LISTENING (to music)
3	TOUCHING (of physical property)
4	MAINTAINENCE (of physical property)
5	SEEKING (of music)
6	SHARING (Communication about music)
7	INFLUENCE (of others regarding music)
8	TRENDS

Category B - PHYSICAL PROPERTIES (Items)

9	FORMAT (Vinyl)
10	EQUIPMENT (for playing music)
11	COLLECTION (of vinyl, Ownership)
12	PACKAGING (Vinyl Record)
	a) VINYL (Disc)
	b) ART (Cover, etc.)
	c) WORDS (Liner Notes, etc.)
	d) INSERTS (Inner Sleeve, Stickers, etc.)
13	SOUND FIDELITY (of music)
14	RECORD STORE (Brick-and-mortar location)
	a) RSD (Record Store Day)
	b) SALES (of music)
15	DIGITAL MUSIC (Any format that is digital)

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

By analyzing the interview data through coding and examining the finalized data,
I found several emerging themes and ideas that overlapped and echoed between and
among the different interview participants. The first was *Engagement with Music*, an idea
that a more intense engagement with the vinyl format gave it more meaning than other
formats. This included not just listening to the music, but using up to four of the five
senses in enjoying the format, including *touching* both the vinyl format as well as the
equipment playing it, *seeing* the packaging accompanying said vinyl, and even at times,
the *smell* of vinyl and packaging. But also, it required presence of self and a focus upon
the format. This led directly into a second theme in *Physicality of Format*. Because
tangible items were a part of this format, music listeners had the ability to hold, touch and
store material that accompanied their music. This also gave more meaning to the music.
These first two themes shared one specific correlation, in that both relied on the idea of
tactility and tangibility. The format's items that were not the music itself proved to be of
great importance to experiencing the music. Interestingly enough, a third unexpected
trend emerged that stood counter to popular opinion, and that was regarding *Sound
Fidelity*. Many people attribute part of vinyl's longevity and resurgence to the idea that
"it sounds better." While sound itself is partially due to listener opinion as well as
dynamics of the vinyl record that do yield a more "natural" tone (Sreedhar 1-3), and
therefore do in fact make vinyl sound "better," interviews and field notes yielded a

second opinion on the matter as well.

ENGAGEMENT

Participants made broad statements regarding the importance of the act of listening to vinyl records. Terry Currier of Music Millennium (Portland, OR) notes:

> I think it overall is an experience because it just is an experience. There is a lot of interaction that a listener has to do to experience that vinyl . . . Because it is an experience. It is a great experience. Unless you've sat down and actually had a vinyl experience it is hard to explain to somebody how great it actually is. . . . When you are really having a vinyl experience you become one with the record, the turntable and stereo system. You are having this relationship with your record and it's when you have a great record there is nothing better.

The other two participants shared this sentiment as well. Paul Epstein of Twist & Shout Records (Denver, CO) says, "[There is a] desire to reconnect with something physical, social, something you could share with others. It's trying to reconnect with something meaningful and have some ownership." Dario Miranda of Stinkweeds (Phoenix, AZ) says, "If you think about how involved it is to listen to a record . . . It gets me off my ass, it gets me moving, it gets me physically engaged with the music experience. Whereas listening to music through any sort of digital medium doesn't do that."

Of course, this phenomenon must be explained further. To simply note "vinyl is better" is a tired trope, one often devoid of evidence to back up such a statement. To ask *why* the format has more meaning, it is imperative to delve further into engagement.

One recurring theme emerged when looking into engagement with the music. It

was the necessity of *Presence*, that is, a requirement not just to be in the room listening to vinyl, but the need to be present in order to help the music operate. Factors contributing to this theme included literal presence, as well as touching playing equipment and the vinyl itself, song sequencing, and seeking within a record collection. Regarding presence, Dario notes:

[The format] encourages you to be present. The nature of it; you can't just listen to it in passing. . . . The process involved in listening to a record sets you up for the experience of listening to the music rather than just having it on in the background. This comes from the fact that records, at least in my house, take up a considerable part of a room . . . The record player, the speakers, they are things that are there; I see them every day. They are a little older and take a little effort to maintain. In fact, I have learned a bit about making some of the repairs at home, cleaning the receivers, maintaining the record player, all of those things equal prescience. I care for these things and it has been delivered back to me in a way that I wouldn't get from going on Spotify and making a playlist, or having someone else make a playlist, or an algorithm make a playlist. The vinyl collection is very much mine, I put a lot of effort into it and therefore can be proud of it. . . . I choose which album I want to listen to. I pull that record out and walk the 10 feet to my record player, I take out my brush and my cleaning solution. I clean off that record and make sure there is no dust on the needle. I carefully put the record on the player; I carefully put the needle on the record; I turn on my receiver. Sometimes they pop a little fussy and I fiddle with them to make sure I am not getting any crackling noises. I turn it up, I choose the volume

that I like, maybe even choose to do a little "EQ-ing" in there. I didn't even get

into the part where I have to sit down and have to listen to it. The listening

experience, yeah. That's just the part that puts the album on, it's not even the

listening part of it. So after doing all of that – I often equate it to cooking a meal.

You could go to a restaurant and get a really good meal and you are going to

enjoy that meal but if you took the time to cook that meal, and maybe not even get

it quite right, you're going enjoy that meal so much more than if you were at that

restaurant and I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that you've invested

energy into that meal. I know it's the same thing with vinyl. You're cooking up a

listening experience.

The other subjects also shared the same experiences with the necessity and importance of

being present, and also noted why other formats did not pass the same requirements. Paul

notes:

For me it is the social and physical act of taking the record out, putting it on the

turntable, and listening to it that just adds so much more meaning than streaming,

which to me is just a spigot full on. They say you don't miss your water until your

well runs dry, well the opposite is true too, you don't appreciate your water when

it's everywhere and that's what streaming is. It is just spigot full-on with no

curation, no understanding, no nothing. It is just there with no context to the art

and no meaning to the art and a lot of it.

Terry also agrees.

You're sitting on a couch; you're going to have to turn the record over in 20

minutes; I think the human attention span is shorter than what a lot of people

90

think and when we went to CDs everyone realized, "Oh, we can put 75 minutes of music on these" so a lot of those songs that used to end up on the cutting floor because they had to make a 40-minute album and they had 60 minutes of material, they took the best songs and formatted them into a nice sounding album. . . . People don't have a 60-minute attention span and usually a 60-minute album is not going to be totally as captivating from beginning to end to keep a person there. So what happened in the CD era is that people would start listening to their CDs then they'd get up, go to the restroom, go to refrigerator or answer the telephone and they missed out on the whole experience of listening to the album. The [vinyl] record album is a perfect format for people to listen to because you can listen to it in 15-20 minute section.

It is also the experience of actually seeking for that record and interacting with in a way that digital music does not require. As noted above, the act of "flipping the record" again requires interaction with the format. Terry adds:

I kind of look at vinyl being treated more like art than CDs or cassettes or especially digital music. People would pick up the album and take the record out of the jacket and those who really cared about it would go to great lengths to take the record out, carefully put it on the turntable, make sure the needle was in the right place. They really cared about keeping that album in good order so that they could play it again and get that same experience over and over. When we went to CDs we lost that and it became more of a product than a piece of art.

In addition to the presence required for listening to vinyl, there is also more artist input to how the consumer listens to the artists' music and sees the artists' vision. One of these is

track sequence. As previously noted, digital music has become more of a pick-and-choose market where people can (and often do) buy single tracks from an artist, foregoing perhaps a greater vision from the artist. While there is some track selection with vinyl, since the tracks are in a fixed order they will either be heard as the artist intended, or the listener is required to have more interaction with the vinyl. As Dario notes:

> I know there are a lot of bands that consider the fact that the record needs to be flipped over at some point. I've heard from people that it is common practice to put the first song for Side B as a ballad so that when you flip it the first song to come on is a ballad. . . . When you listen to a record there is going to be an intermission. When you come back from that intermission where do you want to put the listener? You have that power now because you have created something where they have to stop and walk away from the thing you are presenting to them and they have to come back to it. So, thinking about that first song on Side B, what do you want to convey to that listener? I am willing to bet that [the artists] want me to listen to a record; they don't want me to listen to a streaming download or a CD.

Terry also agrees. He says:

> When an artist made an album in the first vinyl era, and it really has carried over to today, there was a lot of thought process into the sequencing of the songs, what songs when into Side 1 and Side 2, what is the lead song on Side 1 and Side 2, what was the last song on the record. "How are you going to end this thing?" It was an experience and adventure. . . . When we got into the digital era, a lot of

92

people started listening to the individual songs and got away from listening to the

full album and luckily a lot of those people who went to the digital side . . . they

are all going back to their house and sitting in front of their stereo and listening to

that music and they are listening in a sequence that the artist intended it to be.

They are sharing the album cover and looking at the art. When they go from Side

1 to Side 2 they are talking about what they just heard. They have to touch it and

flip it. The beauty of an album is that it is no more than 20 minute a side so the

perfect album is 40 minutes or less.

Finally, there were ideas regarding record collections, and the process of record selection.

Dario says:

I'm sitting next to my phone and computer and I can easily type in "Miles Davis"

and an album title and hit play on YouTube, on a number of [devices], or the

other option is that I can get up and walk the 15 feet to my jazz collection in my

records and go through and instead of thinking that I want to hear a particular

song, I would be going through and looking at all of my Jazz records, finding

Miles Davis and seeing what I wanted to hear or maybe I see a record next to that

which I want to hear more, or maybe there's a different artist I want to hear more.

Maybe that initial thought of "I want to listen to Miles Davis;" maybe there was

more to that than just listening to Miles Davis, something about that sound that I

wanted and maybe that exists more in another album. So now I've been given a

choice. I'm sitting there looking at my records, I then choose which album I want

to listen to. . . . I care for these things and it has been delivered back to me in a

way that I wouldn't get from going on Spotify and making a playlist, or having

93

someone else make a playlist, or an algorithm make a playlist. The vinyl

collection is very much mine, I put a lot of effort into it and therefore can be

proud of it. . . . that record occupies space. It is something that you take the time

to organize and catalogue. If you are listening to iTunes or Spotify or Pandora,

Alexa or one of those programs it's as simple as pushing a button. It's as simple

as saying "Play this," and that's typically how that experience goes.

Paul adds: "It's cultural validation; having a collection of anything is cultural validation.

How you show you are a person of taste."

PHYSICALITY OF THE VINYL FORMAT

While "presence" can just mean being in the room and listening to the music, it is

an elevated presence that is required for vinyl. However, the engagement discussed by

the subjects goes beyond the tactile sensation of just finding records, putting the needle

down and flipping records and sitting on the couch: while these tactile sensations add

meaning to the experience, there is also a wealth of information in individual record

packaging that the vinyl is housed in. It is these items, explain the subjects, that give

additional meaning to the vinyl experience. When discussing the overall packaging of

vinyl, Terry says:

It is by far the best format of music that was ever invented. I love the album

covers. I love the packaging. There was a lot of very innovative packaging put

into 12"x12" vinyl. Especially in the old days when there were larger budgets to

work with larger artists. I love the sound of vinyl. Vinyl just has this warm sound.

I mean it's just the closest thing you can get to live music and get that pure sound.

I love the size of it. . . . Part of the vinyl experience is the actual music itself and

the way it comes across and how it feels. But part of it is that album cover was

really important to the experience. I kind of looked at vinyl being treated more

like art than CDs or cassettes or especially digital music.

Paul agreed, noting:

"The value of books, and records, and communication, and face-to-face contact is

gigantic. It is the core of what humanity is and records are the physical

manifestation of music; that is the best. . . . The sound, the large format of the art,

the fact that it is a physical talisman as opposed to the idea of something. I

actually think [the vinyl packaging is] bigger than the content now."

Dario also confirmed the importance of packaging. He says:

With the individual experience of listening to one individual record means you

have more of an experience with the music, it's not just about sound waves

moving air, you're more likely to sit down with a record look at the cover, read

the liner notes, that cover… I don't think it's so much how it's packaged but

rather that it *is* packaged. It is a tangible thing. . . . there definitely are albums that

are packaged pretty elaborately and maybe the price of that record goes up a little

bit because of that packaging. And you do see people getting excited about special

packaging and include colored vinyl in that as well. I would say that is part of the

packaging. These are things people do get excited about.

The two primary items of importance of packaging to the interviewees were the art

(album cover and any accompanying art within, as well as items inserted in the album

sleeve) and written information (liner notes, credits, and any other written information). It

was noted that art especially was of more initial importance, as it was what someone would first see when looking at an album. Paul notes:

>You know it is a bigger thing than just what do I like about records, it is what do I like about the physical reality of art? I have always said it is not the idea of the Mona Lisa, it is actually being in the Louvre and looking at it, then you get – it's going to the Met and looking at [Claude Monet's] Water Lilies, it is actually sitting there with the book in your hands reading it.
>
>One of my favorite employees and I used to have a saying we'd say to each other you *can* tell a book by its cover. You can. Think of the *White Album*, think of *Who's Next*, think of *Blonde on Blonde*, think of *Nevermind*, by Nirvana, think of *London Calling*. These are so iconic, so meaningful – the artwork, the package the way the whole thing is. It is absolutely integral into the meaning of the whole thing. . . . There is something about that is desirable and inflames the imagination.

Terry also agrees, and looked at his first year in record collecting:

>I was a senior in high school and I got out at noon so I could work 40 hours a week and every dime I made went to music. I bought 665 albums that first year and I'd say about half of those were bought without actually hearing the record; it was from reading those album covers. . . . [They] are a piece of art. You can just walk through a record store and just look at the walls and just look at the album covers and you're going to have a great time. Some are silly, some are incredibly inventive.

However, it appears that even greater narrative and knowledge comes from written information contained within the album, most often in liner notes, something that most

digital versions of music lack. And while CDs do contain liner notes, there was

frustration at the size of the format. Terry says:

> You'd be walking through the store and you'd see a great album cover and you'd
>
> pick it up and you'd look at it and you'd flip it over if there were credits on the
>
> back you'd be looking at those kinds of things. . . . People would buy records,
>
> they would go home they would sit on their couch and listen to their stereo a lot
>
> of the time they would be listening to Side 1 and digest everything on the album
>
> cover looking at all the credits. . . . I knew all this information from all these
>
> album covers I had examined and read.
>
> When it got to the CD era the type tended to be a little smaller and you didn't take
>
> the time all the time to investigate what was going on with that and what it was all
>
> about. . . . You'd get to page six and you're rubbing your eyes because they type
>
> was so small and you never finished it.

Paul agrees, noting, "You can go deeper with lyric sheets, stickers. For me, at my

advanced age, even with my glasses and strong light, I cannot read CD liner notes so

vinyl is just better for me because I can actually read the liner notes."

However, it may be a narrative from Dario that is most telling. He speaks about a specific

experience with a recent album.

> I want to speak about one specific instance I had with the liner notes of a record.
>
> Mt. Eerie . . . put an album out last year called *A Crow Looked at Me*. I've been
>
> listening to his music for years . . . recently his wife had passed away from cancer
>
> and that left him without a wife and with a child who was maybe 1-2 years [old].
>
> So he wrote an album that was a response to that and it wasn't your typical

97

death/heartbreak album. It was almost not reflective in that way and the songs are just devastating and the reason they're so devastating is because he wrote them in a way that was him forming his grief. . . . So, I sat down to listen to that album and I knew I was putting myself in a situation where I might not come out of it feeling so great. I prepared myself for it. I sat down with the liner notes and I wanted to pay respect to that album because I knew the story behind it. That listening experience – I didn't put that album on at work, I didn't put that album on when I was driving somewhere; I didn't put it on while I was doing anything else. I decided that I was going to sit down and listen to this album.

I sat down and I took out the liner notes and he had the lyrics in the liner notes before every song – and this was something I wouldn't have gotten if I hadn't sat down with the liner notes – before every song, for the first song before the lyrics it said 'One Week' and then the next song maybe said 'Two Weeks' or 'Three Weeks' and the next was 'One Month' and as the songs go on there are these notes at the top of these songs. I honestly don't know if that was when he wrote the song or if it is about a week after his wife passed away. But what that created for me is as I was listening to it I understood that there was a progression happening in that music. I understood that he – the first line on that album [read], 'When real death is at your door all poetry is dumb.' Okay, that idea is setting up this album. I'm going to listen to this album that is music and seemingly poetry because they are songs, but he is now telling me that poetry is dumb so you are going into it with the idea that this is something different. But having that progression of months passing you notice that the songs gradually start to bring

back that poetry, the song structure even starts to make a little more sense to how we typically listen to music. That was something that a liner note did. If I had that album on digital download I probably would have skipped over songs. I hate to say that, but honestly probably would have just been like I don't know what is going on with this, let's see what the next song is like. Not in a way [like], 'I don't like this, I'm going to skip through it,' but just that immediacy we have with digital music where it is so easy for us to just skip past it. I try not to do that but it makes it hard for us to invest in an album. So, like I said with that album I made the choice to invest in that album. If I had decided to do that and then went on YouTube to listen to it I may have just skipped past some songs. That's the other thing. In the liner notes he talks about how he recorded the album. He recorded it in her room and a lot of it was recorded with her guitars – he used her guitars to record it and it is heavy. So heavy. Just the way – I love it because I'm not a romantic person, I'm not a spiritual person, so the way he approaches it is that he will be talking about how he will be walking through a field and he will see a bird and he'll think, "Is that you?" and he'd realized, that "No, it's just a bird." The way he saw death when she was gone, the house is filled with death. He would see used tissues that she had used and having to throw those things away and things like that. It's super heavy. And so much of the experience was from things he said in the liner notes. There are things he explains in there that I wouldn't have gotten had I not read those. Those photos too, and I think she actually took some of those photos."

SOUND FIDELITY

A final important note, though to a lesser degree, regards sound fidelity. All subjects noted that vinyl had a better sound. Terry says:

> So if an album gives you 12" of sound on vinyl, it probably gives you 10" of sound on CD and a little bit of the highs and little bit of the lows got cut off because it was compressed and then you went to MP3s and you're probably getting about 1" of music because it is so compressed and you lose all the warmth that you felt on the vinyl. . . . Even with pops and skips they were discovering that vinyl sounded better than digital music.

Paul also agrees, noting, "There is a very subtle and real sound quality difference. I am not making this up. There are countless scientists, audiologists, musicians, people who understand this field who can give you reasons."

However, it is possible that despite vinyl's superior sound quality to currently existing formats, it is likely that the quality is not being utilized. Dario points this out:

> That is debated whether or not vinyl sounds better. You have people who get into the technical aspects of vinyl and how you listen to it and then you have other people who on a simple level like to hear crackles and it's more of an experience. Saying that it sounds better, it is a very subjective thing. Where I think that answer is coming from for a lot of people . . . [it's] the physical experience of listening to a record; I strongly believe that is doing something with our brains. It's making more things fire off in our brains telling you that you are about to listen to music so when someone says it sounds better I often take to that to mean they are having a better experience with music than it actually sounding better

with vinyl. I'll tell you this, a lot of time people who say "sounds better" are

listening to records on lower quality systems like the newer record players that

have speakers built in. They are not great record players but they are still saying it

sounds better. For me, that says they are having a better experience.

Paul also agrees, noting that the drop in sound fidelity is specifically due to the rise of

new inexpensive turntables being produced to meet vinyl listeners' demands and/or

budget.

There is a company called Crosley [Record Players], they have single-handedly

been responsible for both resurgence and destruction of sound. They, by getting

their piece of shit out there in every crappy store, they've put this thing back into

everybody's mind and they make them look great. Downside: they're a piece of

shit that you'd be better off whistling through a cone in a tissue. They absolutely

are an unbearable sound; it's far worse than streaming or anything anywhere.

Finally, there is yet again talk about the tangibility of vinyl records, and the possible

greater meanings that comes from the format and culture. Terry says:

People gravitate to records because of emotions a lot. You have a sad moment or

a breakup, somebody dies, there is joy in their life, something good happens today

and they put on something that has high energy and they are bouncing around in

the living. It is one of the greatest things in the world.

Paul notes:

I just recently read an interview with Neil Young where he talks about streaming

on his website and at one point the interviewer said, "But vinyl is the best, right?"

and he said without any hesitation said, "Yes, vinyl is the best." In addition, Satan

himself, Steve Jobs, told Neil Young, "At home I listen to records."

Ownership is an illusion, it's not a thing. It's not an idea it's a thing. This whole

gig economy is blurring those lines to some extent, and not for the better. As

someone who owns a business, a house, a stereo, I like owning things way better

than having to share them. If everything [digital] disappeared – how broken

would you be? I don't own any MP3s but to me it seems like, "Who gives a

fuck?" I could get that again, but how many people do you think got laid because

they shared MP3s? . . . I've talked to thousands of people who have had this

experience. I don't think anybody has swapped MP3s and then bodily fluids.

And finally, Dario speaks to the idea that vinyl is just a passing fad:

We do get a lot of people who say that vinyl is just a trend and they're writing it

off as just a trend. You know what else is just a trend? Jeans. Sushi is a trend.

These are things that yes, they started out as a trend, but if something has

substance it sticks around. Just writing something off as a trend – you are not

considering the effect that most of what we enjoy and has staying power started

off as a trend.

SUMMARY

All three participants were in agreement with one another in most subjects

regarding the reason for the resurgence of vinyl. All participants noted a lack of

engagement with the digital format, and therefore to them, a loss in experience. Presence

was another theme that was continuously brought up – seeking, selection and interaction

with the record and playing equipment were all tactile pieces deemed important to the experience. Packaging, especially artwork and liner notes and credits, played an especially important part in satisfaction through the format. Having interaction with these thing *while* listening to the record played a very important in the meaning of vinyl, according to the participants. Finally, while sound fidelity was mentioned as being an important aspect, it was also recognized that many listeners of vinyl who are not audiophiles may not be taking full advantage of that feature.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION

The results of the interview data analysis suggest support for Uses and Gratification, Medium, and Remediation theories Interpreting the results through the theoretical lenses further enlightens findings.

PRESENCE – USES & GRATIFICATION THEORY

It is particularly useful to look at the ideas of "engagement" and "presence" with the vinyl format through the lens of Uses and Gratifications theory. This theory shows what people choose do with media and also highlights what and *how* the consumer takes in media. The interviews strongly suggest that the increased engagement of using and experiencing the vinyl format is more meaningful than other music formats. Since interaction with vinyl must occur at least every twenty minutes or so on average (where to restart the record, flip it, or choose a different one), this is an increase over interaction with the digital format, where, as interviews indicated, a "Play" button could be pressed, and then walked away from for an infinite amount of time. By choosing to interact frequently with a physical medium, consumers are having more interaction more frequently, which is likely to generate a more intense and therefore meaningful experience. This was reflected in the interviews:

"The process involved in listening to a record sets you up for the experience of listening to the music rather than just having it on in the background." (Dario)

"There is a lot of interaction that a listener has to do to experience that vinyl . . . Because it is an experience." (Terry)

"It gets me off my ass, it gets me moving, it gets me physically engaged with the music experience." (Dario)

This can also result in being literally present for more of the music, even if only briefly returning to restart music. As opposed to the "Set it and forget it" or a "spigot full-on" as one interviewee noted in digital music, vinyl also requires tactile interaction. The process of flipping the record or at the very least, resetting the needle, requires an amount of effort normally not seen in digital music. Noted the interviewees:

"The [vinyl] record album is a perfect format for people to listen to because you can listen to it in 15-20 minute section." (Terry)

"For me it is the social and physical act of taking the record out, putting it on the turntable, and listening to it that just adds so much more meaning than streaming." (Paul)

In addition to the simple act of flipping the record, there is further interaction by going through the process of music selection through one's collection, as well as selecting music that may accompany or alter one's mood. This is even more additional gratification for the vinyl listener.

"I'm sitting there looking at my records, I then choose which album I want to listen to. . . . it has been delivered back to me in a way that I wouldn't get from going on Spotify." (Dario)

By having control over the medium instead of the other way around, the listener has power of his or her consumption, and is able to have an active role in the integration

105

of their media, gratifying the listener's needs. In addition, the listener is refashioning the media format to fit his or her needs, and remediating an older format to fit and adhere to gain something that is missing from newer formats. In these ways, the listener is active in making his or her own meaning.

PHYSICALITY OF THE FORMAT - THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

The interaction with the music is important, but it is the physical manifestation that is a very important part of the vinyl format. Put simply, as previously outlined by Marshall McLuhan, "The medium is the message." Sound fidelity aside, the musical patterns and lyrics are the same across formats; however for some, vinyl has been chosen to deliver the message of music because they believe vinyl has more substance than other formats, either in content, size or both. It is the art and written information that accompanies vinyl that gives a greater meaning to the music itself.

"[The vinyl packaging is] bigger than the content now." (Paul)

". . . they would go home they would sit on their couch and listen to their stereo a lot of the time they would be listening to Side 1 and digest everything on the album cover looking at all the credits." (Terry)

". . . so much of the experience [is] from things . . . said in the liner notes." (Dario)

"It is not the idea of the Mona Lisa, it is actually being in the Louvre and looking at it . . . it is actually sitting there with the book in your hands reading it . . . It is absolutely integral into the meaning of the whole thing." (Paul)

McLuhan noted that the "content" of any medium is always another medium (8),

106

and in the case of vinyl, this is certainly true. Bolter and Grusin's remediation theory suggests that a once dead medium has remediated to in response to digital music. As consumers remediated the format, the art and written information once standard to music returned to fill a gap. This remediation is also supported by Mark Deuze's Bricolage theory, which adds to remediation theory by also noting that the consumer has been a part of the reformation of media, and also reform how reality is understood, and therefore the consumer is actively engaging in the remediation.

SOUND FIDELITY

It is worth mentioning sound fidelity not because the experience of listening to considered better (which it is), but rather because that *despite* the superior quality sound, many are not actually utilizing it. Therefore, this may mean that the experience and content outlined above is more important than previously thought. Scholars agree with this as well, noting that while the actual sound quality is likely lost on most, the "sound" most listeners are actually speaking of are in fact the imperfections, and the act of handling the thing making the sound is a greater part of the experience.

> [It's] the physical experience of listening to a record I strongly believe that is doing something with our brains. It's making more things fire off in our brains telling you that you are about to listen to music so when someone says it sounds better I often take to that to mean they are having a better experience with music than it actually sounding better with vinyl. (Dario)

In this way, while the sound *does* matter, it matters in a more intangible way that most listeners may realize.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Although this study offers rich insight into the resurgence and popularity of vinyl, results should be considered exploratory due to the small number of participants and to their gender (male), race (only white and Hispanic) and geographical location (Western United States). In addition, the study primarily focused on popular rock music, and not other formats where experiences and meaning may differ for users.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

FOCUS OF STUDY

I originally approached my topic because as a music fan and early adopter in the vinyl resurgence, I wondered if others returned to vinyl for the same reasons I did: that because once upon a time for me, music was an experience and not just a box with a button that spit out music that wasn't necessarily chosen or curated by me. When vinyl gave way to CDs, which has since given way to digital/online music, a slowly shrinking but still important part of music – the art and written information – has almost completely disappeared, as did the requirement to be present in order to play it. I believed these things were important, which led me to my research questions:

RQ1.) Why has vinyl experienced a resurgence?

RQ2.) What needs are people satisfying through interaction with vinyl records?

My research of the literature about vinyl and interviews with vinyl store managers strongly suggests that vinyl has experienced a resurgence because listeners' musical needs are not being met by current popular media platforms. While digital music is more compact, easier to interface with, and has almost unlimited options, that only applies to *the music*. Everything else – the packaging, the seeking, the time-consuming playing process – is gone. People are finding meaning by having interactions with vinyl records, as well as the places where vinyl records are sold. This segues into my second research question. People are satisfying their listening needs in a more thorough and meaningful

way through their interaction with vinyl. Of course they may not realize this, but the three theories addressed in this study support that conclusion Uses and gratifications theory is simple, but elegant in its explanation of the vinyl happening. While vinyl was once the primary format for listening, it was replaced by smaller, sleeker formats. But recently, it has been re-discovered and adopted by both new listeners who had not been familiar with the format, as well as those who were once familiar with the format, but had long since abandoned their turntables. This happening satisfied new needs and/or reignited past experiences with music. This idea runs parallel to Bolter and Grusin's remediation theory, which suggests that despite a newer format being the primary way users listen, old media has remediated into something new that challenges the current media. And since the users have had a hand in this reformation, they are creating "Bricolage," as added to Bolter and Grusin's thoughts by Deuze.

Of the two primary differences between vinyl and digital music, the first is packaging. This is where McLuhan's "the medium is the message" theory rings true. Since the vinyl medium itself is physical, it is the actual record and packaging and to a lesser extent, the record store that gives vinyl music its meaning. The message of vinyl music itself also is different, in part because of the packaging and playing device, and in part because of the way the music is perceived and heard.

The second difference and reason that vinyl has come back is due to the tactile nature of the medium. Through interviews and interactions, I heard and witnessed the behavior of the vinyl listener. They seek for their music, and select it from a finite amount of records. They study the record, perhaps flipping to the backside of the album and studying it, or in the case of used records, pulling the record from the sleeve to

examine it. Once purchased, they take it home, where they clean it, put it on their turntable, turn their stereo on, and listen to it, and come back every 20 minutes if they want to continue to listen to music. Should they choose another record, they must select something else, and the process begins all over again. Some may listen alone, intently studying the liner notes and the cover, trying to digest every note. Others may simply walk away, and perhaps the music fades into the background, much like digital music can. As interviews showed, while vinyl does in fact *sound better*, no one except audiophiles are taking advantage of those properties. Therefore, the music itself is almost identical between vinyl and digital. *However*, the difference is that whereas with digital music a single button can be pushed and one can walk away for a possible infinite amount of time, vinyl does not operate in the same way. It requires your attention, even if only once every 20 minutes. Even if you are a casual listener, you have to continue to attend to the vinyl. Add to this the space required for vinyl and its listening components and the higher price of vinyl versus digital music, and it becomes difficult to imagine why one would go through all of this just to get the same experience.

By interacting with the vinyl format – though the physicality of the record itself, its enveloping album and the mechanisms of the playing device – listeners have found their experiences enriched. That, in turn, has led to consumer demand and a resurgence of vinyl. With vinyl, while the music is essentially the same as other formats, the opportunity to interact with it, the surrounding media giving more information, and yes, even the imperfect sound give experience, and therefore give meaning.

It is difficult to know if and how long the vinyl format will persist – remediation theory suggests that eventually, something will replace it. But for the moment, vinyl

exists because it is, at this current time in this current climate of digitization, a connection to more than just a song, but to the information, art and spirit that surrounds the experience of music, and people find importance in that – they find importance in making experience.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This topic is rich and can be researched in many ways. As the vinyl format has only recently returned in such force, scholarship about its remediated appeal is limited. The first pieces to comment on the return of vinyl were often in popular culture.

In addition to the importance of presence and packaging of the vinyl format, studies should investigate other aspects of vinyl culture, including but not limited to sound fidelity, marketing of vinyl, the "return" of the record store, the return of vinyl in popular culture, and the role that record playing equipment has in the experience of vinyl.

Other studies might look at other influences, such as economic and socio-cultural trends, the digital and/or Millennial generations, and nostalgia.

Also, while there are survey and sales group set to monitor the popularity and sales of the vinyl format, the secondary (used) market both in physical locations as well as online, as well as sellers who do not subscribe to these services, may partially obscure the true popularity of vinyl.

The richest research may come from taking a deeply phenomenological approach, participating with and observing vinyl devotees through ethnography, or a strictly scientific approach, using fMRI to study brain response to vinyl in comparison with other music formats.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

This study contributes to a better understanding of the current popularity of vinyl. It also contributes to communication theory by offering qualitative data supporting uses and gratifications, medium, and remediation theories. My hope is that this study will stimulate further research about human interaction with music formats, and a full scope of understanding of the various ways the format affects humans.

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