Resounding Pasts

Resounding Pasts:
Essays in Literature, Popular Music and Cultural Memory

Edited by

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NOTES ON A COLLECTION

Much of the research in cultural and historical memory studies undertaken after the Holocaust, and specifically in the last fifteen years, has revolved around a set of questions designed to help us identify the various political, cultural, social, and even psychological pressures that influence the way certain aspects of our past and present moments have been remembered and continue to be commemorated for posterity. Dominick LaCapra, for example, examines the relationship between trauma, memory, and history in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*[1] and asks to what extent literary and cultural "texts" offer survivors and witnesses of traumatic events opportunities to mourn, work through, or come to terms with a difficult past. In addition, Pierre Nora introduces his three-volume inquiry *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*[2] with reflections on the potential differences between history and memory, and how specific places—including buildings, monuments, geographic locales, literary artifacts, symbols, and historical figures—allow us to reconceptualize French national identity. And Marianne Hirsch explores in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*[3] the manner in which visual artists engage audiences with a past that is historically remote and requires imaginative recreation of the event. Although many of these studies are predicated on some sense of the Holocaust as a singular event in Western history, one that demands our response to a past that exerts its influence yet resists full intelligibility, the work of these critics nevertheless paves the way for a greater understanding of how cultures and societies use public "texts" and other widely circulating cultural materials in order to gain a better sense of the pasts they experienced, endured, and possibly even inherited. Furthermore, these texts, which have since gone on to create a sort of make-shift canon of theoretical accounts

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[1] Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[2] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, Vol. 1-3, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, c.1996-1998).

[3] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

in the field of memory studies, offer us multiple and variable options to start thinking about the dynamics of 'public' representations of the past that are not necessarily as traumatic as the Holocaust or other genocides but still use the "contents" of a painful and often times explosive past to participate in collective efforts build a social, cultural, and even national or trans-national character.

In this vein, many of the essays in this volume are informed by, and in some instances indebted to, the work of theorists like Marita Sturken, whose *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* takes up questions of a shared (and, indeed, traumatic) American past through an examination of public memorials and other social "spaces" of representation and remembrance. While her account is still very much committed to the idea of working through collective trauma—as many of the essays in the volume are engaged with as well—she nevertheless offers two fundamental and provocative ways of thinking productively and perhaps more generally about what constitutes a cultural memory in the first place and the consequences of its appearance in different social contexts. First, Sturken offers an account of the cultural aspects of memory relies on a notion of memory "that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning."[4] This elaboration is particularly significant to many of the essays in this collection because music, as well as its accompanying manifestations in and engagements with other popular arts and media, lends itself to a scholarly consideration of the way pasts are shared in public spaces and inscribed into a diverse host (and history of) representational practices.

In addition to advancing a view of memory that is deeply implicated with different cultural products, Sturken addresses the social aspects of memory through the contemplation of the cultural framework in which it is presented:

> What does it mean for a *culture* to remember? The collective remembering of a specific culture can often appear similar to the memory of an individual—it provides cultural identity and givevs a sense of the importance of the past. Yet the process of cultural memory is bound up in complex political stakes and meanings. It both defines a culture and is the means by which its divisions and conflicting agendas are revealed. To

[4] Ibid., 3.

> define a memory as cultural is, in effect, to enter into a debate about what that memory means.[5]

Although Sturken suggests that cultural memory exists in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the 'meaning' of a particular narrative about the past, her account nevertheless implies that memory in general is dynamic, unstable, and quite possibly evocative of a struggle for meaning that might already be occurring in the social fabric that shares it. She goes on to say that cultural objects that circulate freely and influence the way we read other forms of representation—including literature and the media—as representational spaces in which "definitions of the nation and 'Americanness' are simultaneously established, questioned, and refigured."[6] This last point is crucial because it rescues memory from the prison of trinkets and other objects that act as mere repositories of the past, and transforms it into a dynamic representational field where narratives about the past—and, by association, about a cultural or national character based on remembrances of the past—are presented, modified, forgotten, or retrieved.

Though Sturken and Nora, among others, are more interested in public memorials and other forms of visual culture—and, indeed, in conceptions of place altogether—as sites that participate in the creation and/or re-evaluation of collective memory, surprisingly little has been made of the direct involvement of popularized forms of music in the elaboration of cultural memories.[7] Among these forms include not only specific types of popularized music that casual audience members might encounter while flipping through cable channels or surfing the internet—like rock, rap, jazz, or other American staples of the contemporary music scene—but also the various showcases for the many musical texts with which we are continuously inundated—including soundtracks, music channels, literary reconstructions and video showcases. As "raw materials" of cultural memory, such popularized forms of music become appropriate and compelling sites where memories are disseminated, narrativized, and

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[5] *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 1.
[6] Ibid., 13.
[7] I do not use the term "popular music" here as a way of speaking about "pop music," that strange and wonderful concoction of radio-friendly songs belting across American radio stations. Rather, I use the term deliberately to suggest a more expansive view of music that has been popularized within different genres, time periods, and national traditions, and that has managed to find and maintain an allegiance to particular configurations of a popular audience.

shared. In addition to functioning on their own as spaces of commemoration and contestation, musical 'texts' appear to have entangled themselves with other publicly circulating texts and are clearly implicated, aesthetically as well as thematically, in the continued influence literature exerts in the drafting of shared memories that make sense of a particular past or shared character.

Within these critical gestures laid out before us, then, the essays in Part One of the volume, "Listening to the Past: Musical Performance, Reception, and Remembrance," offer distinct ways that popular and popularized music in general can be treated as cultural texts that can be 'read' as both personal and public engagements with the past. The opening essay by Brian Diemert, "Time and Timelessness: Contexts for Popular Music," initiates these debates with a probing consideration of the ways American rock music in its various incarnations has been disseminated in recent and contemporary American culture and understood in relation to questions of history—both cultural as well as musical—and experiences of time—personal as well as public. In so doing, Diemert offers the reader multiple ways to start thinking about and theorizing the notion of the 'popular' implicit within American rock music and its re-appearances in popular texts, including autobiographies, fiction, re-issued CDs, music videos, personal collections, and anthologies. Following this trajectory, Robert McParland's essay "Yesterday: The Beatles, Narrative, and Memory," considers the relation between text and cultural context through close readings of The Beatles's song lyrics and attempts to read through those songs the continuing legacy of The Beatles—constituted in part by ongoing negotiations between personal experience and public record. The third essay of the collection, Joseph P. Fisher's "The Drugs Ain't a 'G' Thang, Baby, or Kicking *The Chronic* Straight Outta Compton," historicizes the gangster rap genre through close readings of landmark albums by N.W.A., Boogie Down Productions, and Dr. Dre. Fisher's intervention, which focuses on both critical debates surrounding authenticity and testimony in rap music and the aesthetic elements involved in its production, including lyrical content and sound effects, seeks to uncover the often-neglected origins of gangster rap and the cultural forces and institutional mechanisms responsible for contributing to that silence. Jeffrey Filipiak's essay, "'I've Seen It Rain Fire in the Sky': John Denver's Popular Songs and Environmental Memory," follows suit with an exploration of John Denver and his role in the creation of a public discourse about American environmentalist attitudes in the 1970s and the way his oeuvre might be remembered today within that context—and alongside academic accounts of that movement. Filipiak reads Denver's

uncomplicated pop narratives about the personal experiences of nature with a critical eye toward the political consequences such strategies might have on the way audiences relate themselves to a larger environmental movment. Part One ends with Bjorn Vilhjalmsson's "Coming In from the Cold: Icelandic Punk Rock and Sites of Cultural Memory," an essay about the way the Icelandic punk rock movement is re-imagined within Iceland as a cultural and artistic movement that re-affirms the rhetoric of nature and landscape implicit within certain conceptions of the Icelandic nation. Vilhjalmsson's essay departs from readings of individual songs and focuses instead on the collective representations and remembrances of Icelandic punk rock through specific documentary films, which he treats as both historical documents commemorating a time now past and as sites of identification for those too displaced to have enjoyed it directly. In sum, the essays of Part One raise questions about how cultures and generations—primarily within America and Iceland—begin to remember, forget, or re-create specific events or periods vis-à-vis musical performance, text, product, and commemoration. In the process, these essays seek to "write" and even "re-write" various traditions of musical performance and various cultural histories and conditions of reception in which those forms of music flourished.

While the essays in Part One demonstrate that popular music plays a constitutive part in the 'writing' of shared memories in part through its re-creations in literary texts and films, the essays in Part Two, "'Reading' Sites of Memory: Musical Texts and Media," draw attention to the manner in which literary texts, films, and videos engender questions about collective remembrance specifically through the way they are structured according to various compositional, thematic, or philosophical aspects of music. The orientation of these essays springs from a move in cultural memory studies, led primarily by Pierre Nora and Andreas Huyssen, that privileges public sites of memory of past events and the legacy they create and pass on to future generations. Although Pierre Nora's study, in particular, identifies the *institution* of literature in general terms as a "site of memory," or *lieu de mémoire*, his work invites further reflection upon the manner in which *specific* literary tropes, reading practices, and performance aesthetics participate and interact with one another in a public setting in the commemoration of past events. And although Nora's three-volume study is shot through with commentary about how literature and other "sites" of memory might constitute a distinctly French national past, many of the essays in this volume extrapolate this relationship between memory and space to include comments about the function of literature and music in an increasingly globalized space in which the category of the

nation is being made to compete with heightened attention to locales, border crossings, and the translation of cultural materials from one context to another.

In this regard, Part Two begins with Yael Maurer's essay "Gone But Not Forgotten: Rushdie's Sites of Memory," which offers a reading of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* through the lens of Pierre Nora—as an attempt to de-territorialize Western conceptions of pop stardom through the elaboration of an alternative history of rock and roll. In her analysis, Maurer traces the opportunities as well as the perils of identifying the pop icons in the novel as sites of collective memory, and suggests the possibility of forgetting as a constitutive part in the creation of cultural memories that are not necessarily wedded to stable conceptions of nation or place. Abigail G. H. Manzella's essay "The Sites and Sounds of Music in *The Soul of Black Folk*" is a critical treatment of the role played by music and musical notation in Du Bois's attempt to write a history of African American experience that had largely been silenced in history. Manzella likewise engages with the work of Pierre Nora to offer a more nuanced understanding of *lieux de mémoire* and the manner in which music, as a site of memory in Du Bois's text, exposes rifts between race and nation. Aaron Prevots argues in "Culture Beyond Borders: Jazz as a Realm of Memory in Jacques Réda's *L'Improviste*" that both jazz music itself and, to a varying degree, the various literary pieces in Jacques Réda's collection, function as cultural sites of memory that are gradually reabsorbed outside their initial borders and, in the process, enter history and teach us about the cyclical nature of remembering itself. In so doing, Prevots also compares the logic of jazz music, as artistic expression, to Réda's various literary genres, including the biographical sketch and the lyric poem. "'It's Time to Drink Blood Like It's Sherbet!': Music, Montage, and Memory in Ashiq Samira's 'Misri'" by Anna C. Oldfield highlights the various technologies of remembrance and appropriation in the work of one of Azerbaijan's most renowned pop singers, Ashiq Samira, whose musical career is itself drawn from the rich tradition of epic folk song. Through a close reading of montage sequences in one of Samira's music videos and a lucid discussion of the folk traditions she implements into her career, Oldfield explores the various ways that Samira commemorates and re-writes past conflicts with an eye toward the possibility of future reconcilliations. The last essay of Part Two, Vlatka Velcic's "Gentle Barbarians: Memories and Myths about the Former Yugoslavia in Kusturica's Films and Music," is an engaging account of film maker Emir Kusturica's movie music and his attempt to (re-)imagine former Yugoslavia in terms of the mythic space it has now become.

Collectively, the essays in Part Two invoke and in many instances refine the notions of culture, nation, and belonging that collective memory occasions.

In addition to the engagements with and revisions and extrapolations of Sturken and Nora, the essays in this volume offer insights into the way we understand historical perception and cultural commemoration across significant temporal, geographic, and even representational distances. Consequently, as memories of remote events gain visibility in the public sphere and are shared by a society as a whole, individual keepers of a shared cultural memory must turn increasingly to narratives and representations of an event from which they have been distanced, either partly or entirely.[8] In this vein, the group of essays in Part Three of this collection, "Comparative Engagements: Literature, Music, and the Art of Cultural Memory," explore not only the modes in which memories are shared and made available to other groups and newer generations, but also the manner in which literature, film, and music can become entangled with one another and provide the representational basis for the continued articulation or revision of cultural memories. Much of the work in this section is inspired by the work of critics like Marianne Hirsch, whose analysis of Holocaust photography in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* creates provocative opportunities for cross-disciplinary dialogue about how successive generations inherit, understand, and begin to narrativize remote historical traumas and what they do with that information.[9] Though Hirsch's study focuses primarily on visual texts—not only photographs, but also art installations that commemorate the lives of those who perished in the Holocaust—the chapters in this volume will, more or less, address the complexities of historical perception, identification, and displacement inherent in the work of several musicians and writers, whose compositions offer us sounds and glimpses of the past but from significant generational and geographic removes. In total, these essays attempt to pinpoint particular artistic and interpretive strategies that writers and musicians use as they respond to one another's accounts and continue to re-fashion cultural memories anew.

The first essay in Part Three, Cameron Bushnell's "Jazz in Translation: Developing a Racial Politics" center-pieces the relationship between literature and music through an exploration of translation in Toni Morrison's novel *Jazz*. Bushnell examines various musical dimensions of

[8] For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Eva Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).
[9] Hirsch, 1-17.

jazz that the novel reconfigures, including repetition, counterpoint, lyrical structure, and performance, and suggests that translations between text and music in the novel offer us a way of thinking about cultural memory in ways that allow it to accommodate uncertainty and indeterminacy. "From *Opéra Comique*'s to MTV's *Carmen*: A Mediascopy" by Raphaël Lambert explores the conservative representational politics and various industry and cultural pressures of various adaptations of Bizet's famous opera *Carmen*—including MTV's recent film adaptation *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*. In so doing, Lambert engages with questions of stereotype, censorship, and other media and performative concerns as they influence what a society collectively remembers and perpetuates through a text's many different appearances and revisions. Godfre Leung's "Working Through Margarete: Two Fantasies of the German Anthem" traces recent post-war German attempts to deal with national guilt and the lost fantasy of a strong Aryan nation. Focusing in part on Velvet Underground singer Nico's 1974 solo album *The End* and the consequences of her appropriation and performance of the role of Margarete, the seductive figure of death from Celan's poem "Todesfugue," Leung offers a lucid account of the challenges Germany faces as it resolves to work through a past that neither it nor the rest of the world is keen to forget. David Rando's "The Perverse in Historical Perception: Anne Frank in the Aeroplane over the Sea" reads the lyrical content and unusual instrumentation of indie group Neutral Milk Hotel's album *In the Aeroplane over the Sea* through the erotic dreams songwriter Jeff Mangum experienced about Anne Frank after reading her diary. Using Freud and Benjamin as theoretical guides, Rando questions the unusual place of eroticism in the perception, remembrance, and artistic recreation of past historical catastrophes, and in so doing, raises the question of how we begin to relate to a past so remote and mediated. Part Three ends with Michael Harris, who launches a biographical and artistic comparison in "Coltrane and Coetzee: A Distant Mirror (In Reverse)" between American jazz saxophonist John Coltrane and South African novelist J. M. Coetzee. Harris argues that both artists use their art, respectively, to chronicle and respond to unstable political situations involving racial injustice. Using Marianne Hirsch's conception of "post-memory," or memory passed on from significant removes in order to foster ethical identifications with victims, and exploring both Coetzee's turn to music and Coltrane's increasing interest in the written text, Harris identifies various cross-disciplinary interactions that enable these artists give shape to and remember experiences that defy conventional artistic practices.

As a whole, the essays in this volume offer arguments and scholarly meditations on the unique power of music—in many of its most popular incarnations, mostly within America but also throughout the world—to help negotiate the way we represent, think about, write about, and react to the past. Though this volume is by no means exhaustive in its treatment of various styles of popularized music, it nevertheless takes a broad look at the memory work of musical styles, genres, and traditions that manage to find visible and sometimes enormous audiences—including jazz, punk, rock, and folk, in their various national variations. In addition, this volume gathers together the work of scholars who see in the aesthetic composition, performative contexts, and interpretive operations of these various genres and styles of music the potential to participate actively in the creation and renegotiation of accounts of the past. What sets this volume of essays apart from the aforementioned "canonical" studies is that they extend the debates about cultural memory to different and mutually reinforcing art forms and offer assessments of the work of Sturken, Nora, and Hirsch, among others, within the context of an increasingly globalized space that disseminates increasingly entangled texts for widespread consumption and commemoration. In so doing, this collection center-pieces music, as well as its relation to literature and the media, not as separate spheres of 'high' or 'low' artistic endeavor, but as mutually overlapping artistic forms whose composition, performance, and reception continue to feed one another and become privileged sites at which artists commemorate the past and critique the way the past is understood or remembered. In this vein, the contributors to this volume treat the lyrical and musical content of music and the iconic self-fashioning of musicians as literary 'texts;' music as an important theme, trope, or force in literary texts; and literary and musical texts as intersecting, public art forms that adapt and respond to one another and to their cultural contexts. In total, the essays that follow are a testament to the idea that music and memory are inextricably linked in a labyrinth of cultural products that shape the way we look at ourselves and our pasts.

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PART ONE

LISTENING TO THE PAST: MUSICAL PERFORMANCE, RECEPTION, AND REMEMBRANCE

CHAPTER ONE

TIME AND TIMELESSNESS: CONTEXTS FOR POPULAR MUSIC

BRIAN DIEMERT

From one perspective, things exist only as we perceive them, but most of us don't believe that to be true, so we imagine their continuing existence in our absence. Among the several means available to us to ensure our own existence in our absence is art, as Shakespeare's 55th sonnet reminds us: "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments/ Of princes shall outlive this pow'rful rhyme."[1] Still, art's relationship to time is puzzling: some forms, like the "still unravished" urn,[2] appear always present to us when we gaze upon them, while others, especially the performing arts such as music or dance, disappear even as we sense their presence.[3] Simon Firth, one of popular music's best critics, generalizes that the fine arts may be seen as "organized around the use of space, and the performing arts as organized around the use of time. In spatial arts value is embodied in an object, a text . . . In temporal arts the value of the work is experienced as something momentary, and the analytical emphasis is on process; 'subjective' reading is necessary–a reading taking account of one's own immediate response–and the work's artistic meaning lies in that response."[4] Firth's proposal is

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[1] *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited with analytic commentary by Stephen Booth (New Haven: Yale, 1977).

[2] John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1970), 698.

[3] Benjamin quotes Leonardo Da Vinci's preference for painting over music because "it does not have to die as soon as it is born. . . . Music which is consumed in the very act of its birth is inferior to painting which the use of varnish has rendered eternal" (Trattato I, 29, quoted in note 15 of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn [New York: Schocken, 1969], 249).

[4] Simon Firth, "Music and Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Guy (London: Sage, 1996), 116.

intriguing, but our post-Derridean education in binary structures makes us suspicious of considering temporal and spatial art forms as distinct entities. Nonetheless, Firth's challenging insight hints at a source of music's power—its negotiation with the temporal and its paradoxical relationship with both the social and the personal, the collective and the individual. As Anthony Storr reflects, music "aptly represents human emotional processes because music, like life, appears to be in constant motion."[5] The song in motion, however, relies on memory for us to conceive of its wholeness.

Music structures time in space through rhythm, tempo, and repetition, but that structured temporality disappears, except in memory, when the performance stops. As Morris Dickstein comments, "poetry has no intrinsic need to be read aloud, [but] music or choreography scarcely exists except as fulfilled performance."[6] "Scarcely exists" is a hard phrase but allows memory its place, for when I (re)play a song , I (re)structure more than just a moment's listening because songs unfold a larger time and place. Popular songs embody a dual process that utilizes the mnemonic features of musical performance to re-present themselves as part of human experience, while only occurring in listening's moment. How this ephemeral form acquires lasting presence within a culture's memory is complicated and touches a range of study from sociology to musicology to literary criticism to neuroscience[7] and beyond. My efforts are directed towards a consideration of how popular songs, particularly rock songs, become embedded in the west's culture of remembrance: how can a moment's expression produce meaning and resonance once it has disappeared, for, surely, as Marita Sturken finds with the image, memory is produced by and does not reside in the song?[8] In this sense, the song assists in the inscription: it helps to make a memory narratable. Any event, as van Alphen and other theorists contend, "depends on discourse to come about: forms of experience do not just depend on the event or history that is being experienced, but also on the discourse in which the event is

[5] Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (New York: Free Press–Macmillan, 1992), 79.

[6] Morris Dickstein, "The Age of Rock Revisited," in *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Penguin, 1977, rpt.1989), 196.

[7] A case in point is Daniel J. Levitin's *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of Human Obsession* (New York: Dutton, 2006).

[8] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 2.

expressed/thought/conceptualized."[9] And a song is part of that discourse but it can also be the event.

The apparent ephemerality of a song, lasting in most cases only a few minutes, is in some respects countered by its heavy reliance on repetition in both its construction and inevitable evocation of tradition. A song structures a temporal moment,[10] but in doing so it implicitly, often explicitly, embodies, through allusion, quotation, and echo, a "dialogic process of active remembering."[11] In this way, songs articulate their pasts and so they become part of a collective memory because they are widely heard and so widely contextualized, which is to say, widely renarrated in multiple contexts.[12] Indeed, a popular song is only one of the "variety of discourses and layers of representation"[13] that help construct social and collective memory. Music, then, is rescued from time's loss because it restores the past on multiple levels. "Only through time time is conquered," T. S. Eliot wrote in "Burnt Norton", and music, because of its particularly unique relationship to time and history, does this well. Eliot continued:

> Words move, music moves
> Only in time . . .
> Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness.
> Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
> Not that only, but the co-existence,
> Or say that the end precedes the beginning,

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[9] Ernst van Alphen, "Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover and London: Dartmouth College University Press of New England, 24-38), 24.

[10] Robert P. Morgan writes, "in the moment of experiencing the elusive, constantly evolving transformations of the note-by-note succession of a composition, the listener—instinctively or otherwise—perceives its relationship to a more fundamental and 'orderly' basis," ("Musical Time/Musical Space," in *The Language of Images*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980]), 265.

[11] "Against the Wind: Dialogic Aspects of Rock and Roll," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 116.

[12] Andreas Huyssen sensibly tells us that "The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory" (*Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* [New York and London: Routledge, 1995]), 3.

[13] Ibid., 256.

> And the end and the beginning and after the end,
> And all is always now.[14]

The jar/urn stands behind velvet ropes–can be circled, maybe touched, surely revisited, but the performing arts, such as music, Firth says, are realized only in the moment; yet they seduce with the illusion of a past we now experience through its articulation: "all is always now". A venerable concert hall may be felt to "echo" with notes once heard (building also have their "auras" in Walter Benjamin's sense), but a recording may preserve a particular performance.

Of course, nothing can be replicated purely because perception, too, is a temporal experience. A performance can be mechanically and electronically replicated, but its perception and reception remains variable. Music, then, is even more problematic than other art forms. Prose, whatever its reproduction, will always give us the same words, and a painting does not alter its appearance (though restoration projects deal precisely with this question). The urn remains the "still unravished bride of quietness,"[15] but music demands an interpreter, a performer, for us to realize it. Music allows us to hear what was always heard, but as with the rhapsode's performance, the interpretation of another in the presentation is crucial. In this respect, music, like any performance, stands apart from the other arts because it requires a channel, a technology, that may be simple or complex in order to be realized. An orchestra? A singer? A band? A recording/altered recording/re-mixed recording/re-recording/digitized recording? All can present a recognizable piece of music because an unheard pre-text is presumed to exist behind all of its technological manifestations, but none captures the field of the spectral piece. Indeed, a song is only discernable through its interpretations, but the literary text and the work of visual art presumably possess a phenomenological, spatial presence even when no one can see it. And I wonder if it isn't precisely music's insubstantial quality that accounts for the claim that analog recordings (vinyl LPs, for example) have a "warmer" sound than digital formats (compact discs, mp3 files): the trouble may well stem in part from the fact that digital recordings do not sound the same as we remember

[14] T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (New York: Harbrace, 1970), 175-181.

[15] The notion that LPs have a "warmer" sound is commonplace. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gramophone_record or http://www.lpclassics.co.uk/guide.asp.

from earlier, perhaps more familiar, formats.[16] There is, of course, nothing intrinsically wrong with re-presenting songs with new technologies, and many artists and listeners prefer the newer versions or "cleaned up" recordings of songs.[17] But surely, this difference stands behind complaints about re-mixed or re-mastered albums, alterations to the order of songs, and alternate versions or re-recordings of songs that appear on anthologies or other retrospective compilation albums/discs. In each case, the past isn't present in the way we remember it being. Instead, we have an echo of the past that, oddly, alters our experience of the original—a point we will see illustrated in my later discussion of Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country*.[18] This point resonates even more when one considers the fragility of vinyl recordings: fundamentally, individuals with the same LP come to acquire distinct recordings that reflect their own usage. To put the matter baldly, the skip in a vinyl album that a sibling created when he or she threw a ball and hit the turntable becomes a scar on the record that personalizes your experience of the recording. Consequently, you might always expect disruption at a particular moment whenever the song is heard. Less traumatically, vinyl recordings will still reflect a loss of fidelity that results from preferential playing.

In this respect, the life of vinyl recordings offers tangible proof of Henri Bergson's contention that "repetition is . . . possible only in the abstract." But my point applies in the digital age as well because, as Bergson knew, everything in time "changes inwardly and the same concrete reality never recurs,"[19] which takes us back to the problem of revisiting the urn. Still, recorded performance (audio or visual) appears to

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[16] The problem is particularly complicated in the case of popular music. Obviously, re-issued or re-recorded material can disappoint—too many discount CD's offer the ridiculous notice that "this album contains tracks that may be re-recorded by the original artist. Featured groups may not include all the original members" (an obvious sop to legalities regarding the previously recorded performance). But what are we to do when the artist alters the material? Dickstein's essay begins in his disappointment with Dylan in concert but fails to exam the problem of where music locates its authenticity. It's a bit like wondering which version of *The Prelude* we are supposed to enjoy.

[17] Sturken makes the same point with reference to her discussion of Oliver Stone's use in *JFK* of Abraham Zapruder's film of President Kennedy's assassination. See Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 31-33.

[18] Sturken makes the same point with reference to her discussion of the use Oliver Stone made of Abraham Zapruder's film of President Kennedy's assassination in *JFK*. See Sturken, p. 32.

[19] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Random House–Modern Library, 1944), 52.

offer us something of the past that seems, and I hesitate to use the word, "real." Songs mark the period from which they emerge, but they also renew themselves in the mind of the listener with each new occurrence. In this respect, they transcend time and can legitimately be called "timeless," though they are, paradoxically, wholly dependent on time. They are not "timeless" in the hyperbolically flattering way Disney or Time/Life use the term, but timeless in the sense that they, like cinema perhaps, exist in a kind of temporal fold: they are of a specific moment but persist in memory outside the moment. As E. L. Doctorow writes, "When people say 'our song' . . . The song names them, it rescues them from the accident of ahistorical genetic existence. They are located in cultural time."[20] And it is precisely music's "timeless" quality that makes a song, a hymn, so important in religious and meditative rituals in which transcending time is an aim. Again, Storr observes, "music adds significance to ceremonies and to words because it induces arousal and structures that arousal in a way that ensures collective participation."[21] Music can absorb us into a collective, into an intellectual, emotional, and sensual array that is unique among art forms.

In our culture, collective participation in music is almost assured because of popular music's ubiquity—a situation that was not the case prior to the advent recording (and marketing) technologies. As Fredric Jameson observed, songs appear without origin because it is often impossible for us to tell when and where we first heard a song:

> we never hear any of the singles produced in [rock, blues, country and western, disco] . . . 'for the first time'; instead, we live a constant exposure to them in all kinds of different situations, from the steady beat of the car radio through the sounds at lunch, or in the work place . . . The passionate attachment one can form to this or that pop single, the rich personal investment of all kinds of private associations and existential symbolism which is the feature of such attachment, are fully as much a function of our own familiarity as of the work itself: the pop single, by means of repetition, insensibly becomes part of the existential fabric of our own lives, so that what we listen to is ourselves . . .Under these circumstances, it would make no sense to try to recover a feeling for the 'original' musical text, as it really was, or as it might have been heard 'for the first time.'[22]

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[20] "Standards," *Jack London, Hemingway, and the Constitution: Selected Essays 1977-1992* (New York: Harper, 1994), 177.

[21] Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 67.

[22] "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," (1979), *Signatures of the Visible* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 20. Sturken offers a comparable observation, 3.

Here is a vision of mechanical reproduction run mad, yet the omnipresent quality of a song means, love it or hate it, we have no choice but to experience it—even if that experience is one of conscious avoidance.[23]

As Walter Benjamin anticipated, the sort of replication Jameson describes implies the degradation of a piece of art's "aura", which he defined as "the authenticity of a thing . . . the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it experienced."[24] The notion of hearing a song "for the first time" fades in the sonic chaos of post-modern, urban culture, while the songs themselves are often received in a state of distraction.[25] Removed from live performance through recording technologies, but dependent on duration, songs float without origin through time gathering and stimulating emotional responses, their meaning "constantly subject to contextual shift."[26] Again, music's ephemeral nature may be the inspiration for the host of technologies and techniques that aim to preserve music and songs.

The question of the extent to which this preservation can be accomplished in theoretical and practical terms is not a simple one. Despite advances in recording technology, in packaging, and media, the compact disc or digital file remains a storage device. (I wonder if the musical score, while one looks at it, offers a contrast in here,[27] but the argument will turn to the phenomenological nature of writing and so lead us into wandering mazes.) CDs, of course, are also efficient storage devices, and, like vinyl LPs (but unlike MP3 files[28]), can become fetishized commodities collected

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[23] This experience, though collective, is far from universal and may, in many ways, reflect geographical, racial, or other biases. What, for instance, is the dominant music in Southwestern Ontario malls? And what is it in the American South? Or the inner-city?

[24] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 221.

[25] cf. Benjamin, 240.

[26] Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 2.

[27] Morgan, "Musical Time/Musical Space," 269.

[28] As I write this I am no longer sure if MP3 files, like anything I suppose, can't become objects of fetishistic attention. As Michael Crowley writes in a recent issue of *The New Republic*, "[T]here's nothing magic about a formless digital file," yet his piece, "Remastered," demonstrates the pride a collector can take in the "huge and eclectic music collection" of one's digital music library. Like Walter Benjamin, Crowley laments the loss of exclusivity associated with collecting: "Speaking of book collecting, the philosopher Walter Benjamin spoke of 'the thrill of acquisition.' But when everything's instantly available online, the thrill is gone" ("Remastered," *The New Republic online*, Nov. 14, 2005, https://ssl.tnr.com/p/docsub.mhtml?i=20050905&s

for their own sake, gathered by listeners who establish their own canon of favorite musical performances. They also possess, as do/did vinyl records, a tactile visual component that offers its own pleasures among desirable objects. (The visual qualities of lp jackets, now largely lost to consumers, can still be compellingly utilized—as they are in Liz Phair's "Why Can't I?" video in which multiple images of Phair and her band are presented in the likeness of several of Capital Records' iconographic album jackets.[29]) A collection, as Walter Benjamin observed, locks "individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition passes over them. Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property."[30] But how is one to construct the magic circle? Does one organize by year, by artist, by genre, by the colour of the packaging? Readers of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* will recall that Rob, the central character and narrator, reorganizes his album collection "in periods of emotional stress."[31] His arrangement is closely tied to events in his life:

> When Laura was here I had the records arranged alphabetically; before that I had them filed in chronological order. . . Tonight, though I fancy something different, so I try to remember the order I bought them in: that way I hope to write my own autobiography, . . . What I really like is the feeling of security I get from my new filing system; I have made myself more complicated than I really am.[32]

Hornby has hit upon something here, for Rob's periodic reorganizing of his collection, like the tapes he makes for friends[33] and the many top five lists that he and his colleagues at Championship Vinyl produce,[34] places music in a narrative structure that is highly subjective, but deeply temporal. These lists, and indeed Hornby's novel, illustrate some of the "discourses and layers of representation" that work towards the

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[29] Drago Momcilovic has drawn Erykah Badu's video for "Honey" to my attention—it utilizes a similar visual strategy but is more explicit than is Phair's in the representation of record covers.

[30] "Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting," in *Illuminations*, 60.

[31] *High Fidelity* (New York: Riverhead, 1995, rpt. 1996), 54.

[32] Ibid., 54-55.

[33] Ibid., 88-89. The compilation tape has its own nostalgic appeal as a recent feature in *Esquire* (UK) attests ("C30 C60 C90 Gone: Before MP3s take over forever, let's hear it one more time for the compilation tape" [vol. 15, 10 (October 2005)], 131-134).

[34] See, for example, Hornby, *High Fidelity*, 87, 98.

establishment of memory, whether collective or personal, because, as Sturken says, "Renarrativization is essential in memory; indeed, it is its defining quality."[35] In Rob's case, music is crucially important to the formation of his identity and to his definition of the self.[36] The collection, Walter Benjamin says, expresses one's deepest desire "to renew the old world" and "dam the spring tide of chaotic memory."[37] Collections grant authority and cult value to specific works which we deem worthy of preservation for reasons determined solely by us: historical or aesthetic importance, technical achievement, personal taste or significance, scarcity, artistic relevance, sales, number of weeks on the charts, awards, chronology. . . Each arrangement contextualizes the artifact and the music, and, of course, the arrangement expresses something of our selves that is deeply personal and perhaps secret[38] (hence Michael Crowley's dismay at finding his "work", his collection of MP3 files, nonchalantly copied from his personally assembly). The collection, however, is just one attempt to circumvent the problem of music's ephemeral nature and, more deeply, of time's passing.

As "the soundtrack of post modern daily life,"[39] popular songs are so ubiquitous they come to "stand in our minds as spiritual histories of certain times," as Doctorow explains. "Nothing else can as suddenly and poignantly evoke the look, the feel, the smell of our times past," he continues.[40] Awakening dormant memory, a particular song can provide pleasure or perhaps sorrow that goes beyond the experience of listening to the song. Popular music is unique in this respect because its brevity and its repetitions—in malls, in traffic, in clubs and bars, on radio and television (to say nothing of its internal repetitions)—are unmatched in other arts. The experience of reading a novel can be intense, but is usually played out over many hours, if not days, and is certainly not as ubiquitous as our experience of a song. It is unlikely that those moments of reading a particular text will be repeated with the compelling force of a popular song: the considerable investment of time required to read even an average length book works against a repetition of the experience. Novels can, of

[35] Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 42.
[36] The role of music in the identification of groups and subcultures has often been discussed. See Firth, "Music and Identity," for one useful discussion of the matter.
[37] "Unpacking," 61, 60.
[38] Benjamin writes, "Today, the cult value would seem to demand that the work of art remain hidden" ("Work of Art," 225).
[39] Simon Firth and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), 152.
[40] Doctorow, "Standards," 169, 176.