The future transformed

Jessica Brennan is an experimental graphic designer and illustrator based in Newcastle. Responsible for this issue’s cover print, Brennan recently completed a thesis paper for the University of Newcastle called ‘The Effects of the Transforming Album Cover on Music Listeners’. We speak to Brennan about what a “transforming album cover” actually is, and whether album art is a dying art form in the digital age.

What draws you to album sleeve design?

I think like most things I’m initially drawn by colour and composition. An artwork that can manage to grab your attention from the shelf as you walk into a store will be something I would take notice of. I actually also like the cardboard wallets as well when flicking through CDs, just because they have a tactile quality that differentiates them from the crappy plastic jewel cases, and I think that the ink on the cover also appears warmer and deeper on the better quality stock. It’s these qualities that add up to make you feel like your purchasing something more personal and alive from the artist.
What is a “transforming album cover”? Any examples?

The “transforming album cover” refers to the changing state of album cover artwork, from a tangible object, to a virtual experience. For example, in an attempt to recreate the experience of staring at a tangible album sleeve, iTunes has introduced the ‘iTunes LP’. It is essentially an interactive form of album artwork, which is there to give the listener some kind of multimedia visual element to experience as they are listening to the album. This can be viewed in action with transformation of Bob Dylan’s *Highway 61 Revisited* cover artwork from record sleeve, to CD, to iTunes LP format.

Another side effect of online artwork, as noted by designers, are the challenges presented in designing for the new formats. The accompanying thumbnail on most new music players now is restricted to a 240 pixel artwork. The tiny JPGs displayed on computers and iPod screens now demand simplicity, bold colour, and plain type. An example of this would be Datarock’s self titled album: its simply crafted, bright illustration with large plain type is suitably minimalist for viewing at a small scale.

A current album cover I really like is MGMT’s *Congratulations* created by artist Anthony Ausgang. The image is so vivid and amazing! It complements the music perfectly. There was also a limited edition scratch version of the cover, which when rubbed with a coin revealed a collage of photographs of the band. Everything about the cover is a magnet for your attention.

I have to mention The Beatles album Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band. The artwork managed to encapsulate all that was the music on this album, it brought forth an entirely new concept in the capabilities of the album cover, and was totally representational of the experimental sound and song writing. This album cover was well and truly beyond functioning as simply just a protective casing for the record inside.

I also like a lot of Alex Steinweiss’s work. It must have been insane to be the first artist to create an album cover, and I think that he naturally set principles that are going to be forever relevant to this particular art form. Combining original typography with bright, graphic, original illustrations Steinweiss was influenced by poster design and the music of his era. An example of this would be *Contrasts In Hi-Fi* by Bob Sharples.

What are some of your favourites, and why do they work well?

I have to mention The Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The artwork managed to encapsulate all that was the music on this album, it brought forth an entirely new concept in the capabilities of the album cover, and was totally representational of the experimental sound and song writing. This album cover was well and truly beyond functioning as simply just a protective casing for the record inside.

Another side effect of online artwork, as noted by designers, are the challenges presented in designing for the new formats. The accompanying thumbnail on most new music players now is restricted to a 240 pixel artwork. The tiny JPGs displayed on computers and iPod screens now demand simplicity, bold colour, and plain type. An example of this would be Datarock’s self titled album: its simply crafted, bright illustration with large plain type is suitably minimalist for viewing at a small scale.
In your mind, what are the rules, or the essential considerations, for an effective album cover?

More importantly than jumping out from the shelf to the consumer, to me, effective cover art should extend the listeners experience of the music beyond aural interpretation. It should heighten the bond between musician and audience, taking the music listeners experience to a higher level of understanding. It should essentially, function in the way of an artwork.

Given the rise of digital music formats, do you think there’s a risk that album cover art may become irrelevant? Are there ways to combat this?

I strongly believe that in regards to recorded music, the accompanying artwork – whatever form that may take, will always be important and relevant. The first album cover artwork was created in 1939 by art director Alex Steinweiss, who suggested that the use of original artwork on the previously plain record packages might entice more customers to stop and explore the albums. One of Steinweiss’s first experiments was designing the package for Beethoven’s 6th; following this sales rose by a dramatic 800%. The results speak for themselves.

It wasn’t until the introduction of the digital music format that we were faced with, for the first time in almost seventy years, a practically non-existent artwork, its maximum size reaching only 5x5cm. With consumers now carrying new iPods and MP3 players the industry had decided for us that there was no need for substantial artwork any longer. In return we would receive bargain prices on all of our music file selections, and then the sales results came in. It had become apparent that tangible album sales were still outselling their digital counterparts. They had not reached the album purchasing audience.

It seemed that even though tangible artwork had not been pushed as heavily in the marketing campaigns, the consumer still had an underlying want for the visual communication, not just the aural sensation. The following year then saw the beginnings of larger scale digital artworks, with the introduction of new digital album booklets that were to accompany album files. Thus acknowledging the power of the visual imagery to connect an audience more fully with an album and increase its inherent value.

It will be exciting to see how this idea continues to evolve as designers explore the infinite possibilities presented to them as technology continues to develop, and also how far groups who are determined to keep a tactile experience in place for their consumers will push their artworks in order to compete and maintain value with the listener.
“It’s amazing how many people you meet who are supposedly into good art and have absolutely no musical taste. I find that really weird.”

Patrick O’Brien has moved the epicentre of Melbourne’s avant-garde music scene back to Clifton Hill.

Pat lives in his aptly titled Sunshine & Grease space – just around the corner from the old Community Music Centre, home to the experiments of artists like Essendon Airport and Laughing Hands, in our last golden era of the late ’70s and early ’80s. Speaking to Pat means looking through an ever-present pile of CDs on his desk – next to a soap box full of cassettes. Today he is sleepy as he has been at a friend’s drinking into the night with Japanese guitarist Tetuzi Akiyama, who he had applauded the two previous evenings at other Melbourne hubs Make it Up club and Stutter.

Sunshine & Grease is becoming more and more essential to the Melbourne musical landscape as our best fringe musicians begin to congregate at the refuge for the increasing number of monumental performances, generally only heard about through a message to the mailing list on the day of the event. “They put on so many great shows – improv, noise, weirdo-folk or punk shows, Nai recordings, sixty-hour video installations. Suddenly the place transforms into a party, or a church, an exhibition space or some sort of acoustic ecology safe-house,” tells Duncan Blachford of various Melbourne free-form acts such as Snawklor, and the Endless Melt label.

“It’s amazing how many people you meet who are supposedly into good art and have absolutely no musical taste. I find that really weird.”

Photography by Jason Edwards

The Sunshine on Clifton Hill

Local by Samuel Miers

The Sunshine on Clifton Hill

Local by Samuel Miers

The Sunshine on Clifton Hill

Local by Samuel Miers

The Sunshine on Clifton Hill

Local by Samuel Miers

The Sunshine on Clifton Hill

Local by Samuel Miers
up sell you something, even on the quietest day.

Though Pat was constantly frustrated by the quiet days growing up in Victoria’s bushfire capital, he couldn’t get enough of the city. “I would come to Melbourne on the weekends and blow off all the tensions, ’cause I had been in Kinglake hating life all week. Everybody was telling me what a freak I was, but I guess I embraced it.”

In 1998 he took off to Canada where his tasks continued to expand. On returning to Melbourne he struck a friendship with Mark from the legendary Synaesthesia Records and ended up working there for three years. Pat had also been on the Bus Gallery board for six years; at the tail end of this time, he set his sights on a small dead space at the front of the building.

So his baby Sunshine & Grease (named after Paul Kidney’s band) was born. The store is important for outskirt record stores in Melbourne such as Round and Round, Missing Link or even Malvern’s Vicious Stoth Collectables. “Sunshine & Grease is certainly the most eclectic; focusing on underground music of the past and present by losers and never-were,” says Duncan Blachford.

Pat prefers to deal with labels directly, ordering boxes from his favorite imprints around the globe. “I was, but I guess I embraced it.”

“Sunshine & Grease is the kind of store you can only hope exists in whatever town you’re living in and the city is a hell of a lot better for it,” says Duncan Blachford.

Pat prefers to deal with labels directly, ordering boxes from his favorite imprints around the globe. “I was, but I guess I embraced it.”

“Sunshine & Grease holds many obscure zines, not just those on tape. There’s a Paul Kidney Experience CD – I can send that to buy this person’s music at Sunshine & Grease, and Tom Hall. Most of those have already sold out, which has been especially rewarding. “The Paul Kidney Experience CD – I can send that to buy this person’s music at Sunshine & Grease, and Tom Hall. Most of those have already sold out, which has been especially rewarding.

The owner’s heart is certainly not only in music; Sunshine & Grease holds many obscure zines, books, films and art. “It’s amazing how many people you meet who are supposedly into good art and have absolutely no musical tastes. I find that really weird. For my focus is fairly equal: I mean I’m interested in all of these things – I’m interested in culture.”

This is evident in the sort of exhibitions he commissions, especially the Victor Mearants- curated show of 20th century avant-garde artifacts. “He turned the gallery into a very much a living museum,” Pat recalls, “in that he was there every day. He’s a great storyteller and a great conversationalist, and that was a very big part of the show, people would come in to the gallery and spend two and a half hours there, sometimes more. This is a 7 by 4 metre space. There were also musical instruments that he designed and built. He would play those and let people play them. I felt really privileged to have that show.”

With the continual struggle for the post-MP3 record store to survive these days, the gallery/gig space has proved to be a successful diversification for Pat, as he can make a little from renting the space out for exhibitions, as well as the usual $6/7 cover charge for bands. Sunshine & Grease is still only open from Thursday to Saturday with Pat working at the RMIT library the first three days of the week to get by. The environment is very much a community and not elitist, everyone is welcome. There is also no rivalry with other venues. Pat often attends Make it up club and Bluffer nights – together they’ve provided a laboratory for local and touring experimental/improv artists on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, collectively for around 15 years. The people organising and frequenting these events are also part of the Sunshine & Grease community. At Make it up club, when introducing artists to the stage, curator Sean Baxter will sometimes drop in things like, “you will be able to buy this person’s music at Sunshine & Grease, and is that right Pat?” Sean also joined Pat on his multiform O’Tomorrow radio show (where he is the experimenter behind it) that built. He would play those and let people play those and let people play...

Furthermore, the store is important for outsiders. Australian labels such as Breakdance The Dawn, Trapdoor Tapes, Sabbatical, Chapter, Near Tapes, Inverted Crook, Albion’s Basement and Endless Matt. While these labels have developed a following online, Sunshine & Grease often gives you the only chance to “get a physical clue about a release before purchasing, instead of clicking ‘buy’ on the internet,” as Michael Zuliki of Albion’s Basement points out. Here their latest offerings are given, in Duncan Blachford’s words, “a home order in 20th century avant-garde germ from the ages.”

“I would come to Melbourne on the weekends and blow off all the tensions, ’cause I had been in Kinglake hating life all week. Everybody was telling me what a freak I was, but I guess I embraced it.”

Pat has also started his own label this year, releasing music on tape and CD-R from Paul Kidney Experience, Dylan Martinelli, Aaron Wallace and Tom Hall. Most of these have already sold out, which has been especially rewarding. “The Paul Kidney Experience CD – I can send that to buy this person’s music at Sunshine & Grease, and Tom Hall. Most of these have already sold out, which has been especially rewarding.

The Paul Kidney Experience CD – I can send that to buy this person’s music at Sunshine & Grease, and Tom Hall. Most of these have already sold out, which has been especially rewarding.

This is evident in the sort of exhibitions he commissions, especially the Victor Mearants- curated show of 20th century avant-garde artifacts. “He turned the gallery into a very much a living museum,” Pat recalls, “in that he was there every day. He’s a great storyteller and a great conversationalist, and that was a very big part of the show, people would come in to the gallery and spend two and a half hours there, sometimes more. This is a 7 by 4 metre space. There were also musical instruments that he designed and built. He would play those and let people play them. I felt really privileged to have that show.”

With the continual struggle for the post-MP3 record store to survive these days, the gallery/gig space has proved to be a successful diversification for Pat, as he can make a little from renting the space out for exhibitions, as well as the usual $6/7 cover charge for bands. Sunshine & Grease is still only open from Thursday to Saturday with Pat working at the RMIT library the first three days of the week to get by. The environment is very much a community and not elitist, everyone is welcome. There is also no rivalry with other venues. Pat often attends Make it up club and Bluffer nights – together they’ve provided a laboratory for local and touring experimental/improv artists on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, collectively for around 15 years. The people organising and frequenting these events are also part of the Sunshine & Grease community. At Make it up club, when introducing artists to the stage, curator Sean Baxter will sometimes drop in things like, “you will be able to buy this person’s music at Sunshine & Grease, and is that right Pat?” Sean also joined Pat on his multiform O’Tomorrow radio show (where he is the experimenter behind it) that built. He would play those and let people play those and let people play...
Fabulous Diamonds
Local
by Jacinda Fermani

FIXED APPEAL
and blunt in his opinion on the subject. “I didn’t seemingly nonchalant veneer, Zlatic is forthright hype or simply unwilling to show cracks in their parts” for example. Or, more abrasive, “taking a proudly chosen to display the negative reviews that Jarrod Zlatic and Nisa Venerosa have quite Whether the duo are truly apathetic to media as a surprise and it will most Diamonds’ is good publicity, MySpace page as a surprise for those critics, and that perhaps they simply had to come up with something to say.” “People seem to think we jam,” he explains. “I play things and Zlatic says of the band’s live performance technique. “Whenever you go to see a band - myself included - you’ve heard old stuff and then you have new things that can be a bit kind of doing and they try to strip you up a bit, not in a bad or good way but just as something new.”

We have, with our US palette, many variables because of our old equipment and depending on the venue or the amp we’re using, the keyboards will sound very clear and clean whereas other times it would be Strident and really distorted. Those types of things do really affect the end product. When we went and recorded the latest album [we] made sure that there wasn’t particularly too much and I think almost everything sounding to a point where you can’t really replicate that.” That isn’t to suggest that Fabulous Diamonds it is merely a highly productive moment of nonpareil. Nor does suggest that the record doesn’t prove an equally compelling experience live. Far from it. Venerosa says of the band’s live performance they've chosen to leave each track untitled, instead acknowledging that the “unknown” is exciting and attractive within it’s own means. It makes a lot of sense, he says, that both Zlatic and Venerosa have chosen to leave new things that can be a bit kind of doing and they try to strip you up a bit, not in a bad or good way but just as something new.”

Fabulous Diamonds II by Fabulous Diamonds is out through Chapter Music.
“I must admit I’ve been in hibernation, and am not really very involved with what’s going on in [Adelaide’s] electronic music scene.”

Moving home was her chance to “kick back”, to swim in the Southern Ocean and be away from the mental and physical pollution of living in a big city. “I must admit I’ve been in hibernation, and am not really very involved with what’s going on in [Adelaide’s] electronic music scene. I’ve played a few shows both as sanso and as a drummer in an improv group and the guys who organised those shows are pretty enthusiastic about putting interesting shows on around the city. But that’s about all I can say. It seems a little bit like there is not much going on but as I said... hibernation sanso!”

Fountain Fountain is the first time that Agate’s vocals feature with any prominence in her music. It’s something that happened when the time was right. “With Sentimentalist I didn’t even try...
It actually didn’t occur to me to sing on any of those songs, except for the slight vocalizing at the end of “Like White Fire”. All of the songs on Sentimentalist are about some sort, but more often than not Agate’s voice acts as a decadent glossolalia-like foil to the instrumentation. Melodica bubbles to the surface with a subtle playfulness that permeates the entire album. Take for example the stop-motion video for “Hello Night Crow”, byyond and artist Fergal Brennan, which acts as a visual tip-‐off through this delicate landscape. Composed from a variety of forest images and animated sequences, the clip’s subdued palette cleverly lulls the viewer into the album’s alternate reality.

Colour is particularly important to Agate, a trait carried over from her work in post-production. She sees colour correction in everything she watches. “Certain colours are so deluxe in a delicious kind of way that they make my mouth water,” which she thinks could be weird, but shrugs off in a playful manner. Despite this, the sanso live show, which was recently performed at Decibel Festival in Seattle, doesn’t rely on visuals. “I’m not into the visual stimulation scenario is a little lacking in the visual stimulation for the audience.”

On Fountain Fountain, there are ramblings of sort, but more often than not Agate’s voice acts as a decadent glossolalia-like foil to the instrumentation. Melodica bubbles to the surface with a subtle playfulness that permeates the entire album. Take for example the stop-motion video for “Hello Night Crow”, by Beyond and artist Fergal Brennan, which acts as a visual tip-off through this delicate landscape. Composed from a variety of forest images and animated sequences, the clip’s subdued palette cleverly lulls the viewer into the album’s alternate reality.

Fountain Fountain is by contrast much more lush in both its recording process and final presentation. Mastered by Lawrence English, it’s Agate’s first record for the Digitalis label. “I love the mastering process. Lawrence is excellent and has done a fantastic job! I find mastering really exciting, because it means the recordings are finished, also because it always sounds sooooo much better after mastering. Punchier, more deluxe.” Added emphasis, sanso’s own.

“When I work out the artwork for my releases I don’t usually have any kind of preconceived idea... It’s important to me that it makes sense, that it’s a connection to where my mind was at when I was writing and recording the songs. With Sentimentalist... I had to be a little less fussy. Typeface has some strict guidelines, for example I wasn’t allowed to use any font except for the Type font, the one they use for everything. This bugged me because it was all a bit too tidy, and my music is far from tidy! But I do like the way it all looked aside from that.”

Digitalis gave Agate creative freedom on this album, from concept to final packaging. The artwork is hand-drawn by Brennan, based in Ireland, and in a limited run will appear as yellow coloured vinyl as well as in CD form. “I hypnotised Brad from Digitalis to let me do coloured vinyl... it was all part of my plan for this one.”

Agate hopes her next release will follow soon after Fountain Fountain, with the majority of the record complete. Surrounded by the pleasantness of her recording environment, its aesthetic is sure to be closely tied in to the delicate euphoria of Fountain Fountain. “It’s about finding something, someplace or someone extraordinary... climbing to the top and embracing it 100 per cent.”

Fountain Fountain Joysou Mountain is released through Digitalis Industries/ Boomkat.

“I like to be completely surrounded by instruments... it’s a lot of concentration, focus, and splitting ones mind into separate partitions.”
aking his role as one of the experimental electronic community’s most strident deconstructionists into account, the idea of Oval’s Markus Popp re-emerging as a musician would seem curious, if not utterly perplexing, at a glance. In a career that has spanned the best part of two decades and several of the glitch movement’s foundational and most celebrated releases – 1993’s Wohnton, 1994’s Systemische and 1995’s classic 94 Diskont, which he made with early Oval collaborators Sebastian Oschatz and Frank Metzger – the Berliner has made a point of eschewing himself from anything even approaching conventional process.

Where Oval’s early records saw the then trio distance themselves from the synthesisers and other electronic instruments to craft an oddly beautiful sound via mutilating compact discs and intricately compiling, processing and collaging their remaining sonic detritus, Popp’s later experiments saw him remove himself from the music altogether. Indeed, for Popp, the skittering rhythmic intonations, hyper-fragmented melodic shards and dense, static-drenched textures that comprised records such as Ova.press (2000) and Ova.commerci (2001) – which were made entirely on a Mac Powerbook using a customised software interface – weren’t music as we knew it, but a means for reassessing the role of the author or composer in contemporary electronic production. In Popp’s world, the traditional position of the composer was all but extraneous to the production of electronic music via software. The composer was now, rather, a pilot whom could navigate a path through a defined set of possibilities and parameters only relevant to the particular software in use. Put simply, unlike the work of a traditional composer, contemporary electronic music compositions could not be achieved without the software. The role of the musician as we knew it was all but null and void. So it was with much surprise that after nine years in creative hibernation, Popp reappeared in mid-2010 with two releases – first, the 15-track EP Oh, then the sprawling, 70-track double-disc album O – that seemed to entirely re-imagine his approach again. While both records shared several of the agile, fragmented sonic qualities of their predecessors, there was one particularly marked difference: these were the sounds of instruments – drums, guitars and strings – being played. Indeed, the shimmering suite of tracks that comprise Oh, and O even more so, were the result of Popp the musician, kitted with little more than a cheap, stock PC fitted with standard plugins and sounds.

We spoke to the affable, endlessly talkative Popp about misconception, denial and becoming a musician.
“Some of the reviews seem to stop at the mere fact that I am now playing this stuff, be it on an instrument or be it through an interface... but they didn’t seem to ask: ‘What is he actually playing there?’”
I'd kind of lost track of you for a few years... I did too, by the way (laughs). Pretty much all I have done over the quiet years is practice. I was sort of building up a set-up I could take down, because at the time I was doing these other records. I didn't even know if a composer was or what a composer does, you know? I don't think so. So, what was the challenge with the new record? I knew that at some point there would be continuities, because in the end music goes through me, so to speak, so I will always be the final instance and responsible for the music in terms of approving certain elements and discarding others. So in the end I was always sure that there would be continuities regarding certain elements, atmospheres and so on.

I'd love to hear a little about this new approach, which from what I can understand, is much more about you playing instruments and the computer in a much more directly musical way. What was the trigger point for that departure?

I guess one way to put it is that I wanted to challenge music on its own turf, because I see that as a much broader argument in. Being the 'creator' of your own music is a much stronger stance or position to me in comparison to being the music's 'observer' or the music's 'navigator'. That's just how it comes about, just to give you a picture. Of course, there are conscious decisions, and many of them, that go into the musical concerns or musical approach that went into this new record. But the other stuff is just a pure set of constraints I have to work with. Sure. Taking this more direct kind of musicianship into account, do you feel that there is a different relationship between you and the music now? I would say that there are so many (laughs). Some people are so short. In a really odd way, it reminds me of MacDiarmid's approach to making mixtapes and his various Blackkonducta series, where all his tracks are about 40 or 50 seconds up until 1:30. People often describe him as having a short attention span, but I've always felt like he's bringing all these moments together to create a much more expansive, holistic mood or dynamic.

Who would claim that, say, piano pieces by Ligeti would be in themselves a bad value proposition because they are only two minutes each or something? It always depends on the framework you see music happening in and if it makes sense to you to have that hip-hop reference in mind. I'm glad I didn't get so far I would just as happy with people grafting these tracks on the second CD as ringtones because that was kind of a concept I worked with while doing these tracks, just to make them more concise and to the-point and to have a document — a CD — that's like the end of a sketchbook. That was kind of the purpose of the CD too because I just simply didn't see overall, you're getting value for money because there are so many (laughs). Some people are almost angry that they're too short.

Do you think there was an element of denial in your earlier practices, in that sense? On the one level, you were disengaging yourself from musical language, but you were still kind of part of it whether you liked it or not.

Yeah, of course. This is exactly that systemic element, you know. I was totally aways at the time that even disrupting the process or the methods or approach would eventually, ultimately only optimise the system. So there was no outside of the system. After all, the old Oval CDs were perfect retail products on the store shelves, it was probably tiring gone today. It was never anti-music; I was never an anti-musician. There was just this certain reluctance — I wouldn't call it denial, even though I know that 'denial' has been used as a quote before — but I would say that denial was at work in the sense of me being aware of music being such a huge part of my life. But on the other hand I didn't feel, I didn't feel enough or prepared or enough to be part of it. So I had to take a different route and a different path and do Oval in the way I did with the old records. That was my only legitimate way to do music at the time because I couldn't play music in the way I can play it today. I took that long to be able to play it the way I play it today. Of course, I could have released something in the meantime, some intermediate beta version of something or a prototype of something, but I just didn't feel that it was good enough. And I don't even know if I consider it good enough now. I was listening to the record yesterday and I was like 'Hm, yeah, yeah' (laughs). I think I can get away with this (more laughter). Put it this way, if I can get away with this, then a lot of exciting stuff is possible.

I think you're getting away with it... Cool!

I'm especially taken by the second disc. While they're very short, fragmentary tracks in one sense, it's very encompassing as a grouping of tracks. It works more like an atmosphere.

I'm glad that it works for you I mean, some reviewers, they approach this in terms of kind of value propositions per track or something. They always claim that the tracks are so short, but...
I was never an anti-musician

For me, this is kind album, almost like a thing becoming a musician’ if you will.

Yeah, I'd love to hear about that process of taking into account, first of all, to be able to actually play this stuff. That goes for the guitar parts and the string parts and the drum parts, which are kind of worlds unto themselves. It's not only to be able to play the drums and pull it off but be able to understand how drums work. Of course, it's much more important to realise what your personal approach, what's your signature, what's your contribution to the legacy of drums in music.

Playing isn't the objective, but the way in which you're playing.

Yeah, so I didn't want to use any drum machines. I don't like electronic drums sounds very much, which is really just a personal thing. I didn't want it loop-based, because that's just like a compromise. So I had to take the dexterity and sit down and listen to lots and lots of music and to understand, first of all, how drums work and what they do in music and then, in the next step, figure out what my contribution could be

Well, there were so many more parameters to take into account, first of all, to be able to actually play this stuff. That goes for the guitar parts and the string parts and the drum parts, which are kind of worlds unto themselves. It's not only to be able to play the drums and pull it off but be able to understand how drums work, of course. It's much more important to realise what's your personal approach, what's your signature, what's your contribution to the legacy of drums in music.

Playing isn't the objective, but the way in which you're playing.

Yeah, so I didn't want to use any drum machines. I don't like electronic drums sounds very much, which is really just a personal thing. I didn't want it loop-based, because that's just like a compromise. So I had to take the dexterity and sit down and listen to lots and lots of music and to understand, first of all, how drums work and what they do in music and then, in the next step, figure out what my contribution could be without ending up as an amateur drummer or a super drummer, over the top kind of bullshit guy (laughs).

The real importance, as I see it, comes after deciding to use instruments or play stuff physically. The crucial question is: ‘What is it that I am going to play?’. How exactly am I going to play? Some of the reviews seem to stop at the mere fact that he actually playing there?’. That's what makes all the difference. It isn't the fact that he or she is playing a certain instrument, whatever – they kind of got that aspect but they didn't seem to ask: ‘What is he actually playing there?’. That's what makes all the difference.

Your favourite musician, provided you have one, how he or she plays is what makes all the difference. It isn't the fact that he or she is playing a certain instrument. Listening to your favourite guitar band as opposed to the high school dropout band is what makes all the difference. It's certain something and certain way of playing that makes your favourite band your favourite band.

Of course...

It's on this certain something that I have spent the most time working. Getting the tech aspect down, but then to actually do something you want to do as a musician, that's kind of the hardest part. People are like, 'Oh wow, he's playing instruments now.' But it should be 'What is he playing with them?'

But maybe we're getting into proper ‘Music Journalism’ here, so maybe that's something that not everybody wants to be identified with, and I wouldn't read it (laughs). But I would say, all in all, I'm happy with how things went. I could pull it off and I'm content and if I do a good job in preparing the live shows, then a 2019 live Oval gig would be one that as a listener I would actually go and see, whereas I as a listener might not have gone and saw a laptop show. In the end, if the main premise is to show that Oval is about music, I would say that kind of got that across.
It’s a balmy Spanish afternoon as Trish Keenan and James Cargill sit in the courtyard of a well-to-do hotel in Barcelona. This is the afternoon before Broadcast’s debut at Sonar, Europe’s largest music festival for electronic and experimental music. The pair have come straight from a soundcheck; the interviewer fresh off a 26-hour flight.

Perhaps it’s fitting that their latest release, *Broadcast and The Focus Group Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age*, which emerged in 2009, is so closely entwined with sensations associated with altered realities and at times, woozy, almost lullaby-like melodies. A mini-world within a mini-album, if you will.

With Ghost Box co-founder Julian House, the pair created an album that fused long-term collaboration plans from both Broadcast and The Focus Group.

“I didn’t really have an idea of what it was going to turn out like,” starts Cargill, speaking of his expectations for the record. “It was constantly this discovery of ‘bloody hell, that works’. It was very much an evolving thing of ‘this is turning out to be something we really like’. So I didn’t really have any expectations before. We set out just to do a little EP; it was way beyond what we expected. I don’t think that had ever happened to me before.”

“We’re not part of a genre that we can back ourselves up with. We’re very much ‘we’ve done this thing now and alienated all those people’.”

Broadcast
International
by Alexandra Savvides
Live pics by Cimarron Cooke
As Cargill and Keenan sit across from each other, a wobbly tape recorder placed between them, it becomes clear they are very much attuned to the mood of what the other is saying. It’s this dynamic that rears its head throughout the rest of our conversation.

“In a way, a real album happened. It wasn’t one of these constructed, slogged-out albums that everyone seems to make, where you love tape, you love the colour of analog but really is it all has to go onto a hard drive, chopped up and tidied and cleaned, in order to make some sort of produced, professional-sounding album,” Keenan continues. “So it was completely unprofessional and real.”

Does this mean the opposite, the professional, in the listener, not just autobiographical music. "Definitely," Cargill says, "conceptual elements were in place before some of the music, which kind of finished. We built the relationship with Julian over the course of a few weekends. [we’re] on the same wavelength anyway.” The process was “kind of perfect” for Cargill and Keenan, as given the existing relationship with House, and each knowing the other’s interests and references, nothing else needed to be said. This sense of mutual perfection even comes through in House’s sleeve art for Witch Cults. The usual Ghost Box template of stark, clean-cut typography is put aside in favour of this whimsical typography. It feels quite different from any of House’s previous sleeves for the band; cartoony and playful, but still retains that undercurrent of uneasiness.

The last time that Cyclic Defrost checked in with Broadcast was in 2005, after drummer Tim Hall had parted ways with the band. Losing a dedicated percussionist wasn’t just significant for the structure of Broadcast. The ensuing years have seen a gradual shift of the band’s sound as a result of this departure, directly or otherwise. Witch Cults is filled with pace and propulsion but not necessarily driven by rhythm as we know it. Indeed, the rhythms from the Tender Buttons album onward feel less painterly. As Cargill and Keenan explain, this shift is as much to do with logistics as it is with any new songwriting approach.

“Well, we struggled with drummers right from the very start,” Cargill says. “After Haha Sound we ended up in this scenario where we generally can’t go and work in studios, it just doesn’t work out for us, we’re not together enough and we’re probably missing a drummer or a keyboard player. It ends up that we just make records in the house... it immediately restricts your noise levels. Rhythm sort of dies away a little bit. Songwriting came to the front.”

This “domestic music”, as Keenan terms it, naturally changed the way they used rhythm as a backing to vocals, or a way to move a song forward. “You know, the drummers we like are expensive. It always comes down to economics or space,” she says.

“The thing is I do think Tender Buttons has a lot to rhythm to it, it’s just not complicated rhythm,” Cargill continues. “There’s certainly beats in there. The acoustic drummer element had gone by that point. That wasn’t a conscious thing to do because the songs for Tender Buttons [were] kind of what we wanted it to sound like and then we’d take that to a drummer and [get] real drums on it. It was still going to be sparse but have acoustic

The band started to piece together elements of Witch Cults over the course of a few weekends. House took places of Cargill and Keenan’s music and according to Cargill treated it “in the same way that he makes the collages of his own music. Basically our stuff was the source material, and he’d give us stuff back and then we’ll arrange a bit more. Sometimes you miss what you’re good at yourself. So we definitely contributed to each other’s ideas.”

“We gave him a whole lot of stuff you know, not all of it he used. It was interesting to see which ones he plucked out and thought were valid for the idea,” Keenan adds. “It felt properly collaborative.”

“More so than somebody coming in and doing a guitar line.”

“It didn’t feel like how it might have been in the past,” continues Cargill, “send me a few files and then they send you something back that’s kind of finished. We built the relationship with Julian over 15 years anyway from him doing the sleeves... we’re on the same wavelength anyway.”

The process was “kind of perfect” for Cargill and Keenan, as given the existing relationship with House, and each knowing the other’s interests and references, nothing else needed to be said. This sense of mutual perfection even comes through in House’s sleeve art for Witch Cults. The usual Ghost Box template of stark, clean-cut typography is put aside in favour of this whimsical design. It feels quite different from any of House’s previous sleeves for the band; cartoony and playful, but still retains that undercurrent of uneasiness.

Indeed, the rhythms from the Tender Buttons album onward feel more peripatetic. As Cargill and Keenan explain, this shift is as much to do with logistics as it is with any new songwriting approach.

“This ‘domestic music’, as Keenan terms it, naturally changed the way they used rhythm as a backing to vocals, or a way to move a song forward. “You know, the drummers we like are expensive. It always comes down to economics or space,” she says.

“The thing is I do think Tender Buttons has a lot to rhythm to it, it’s just not complicated rhythm,” Cargill continues. “There’s certainly beats in there. The acoustic drummer element had gone by that point. That wasn’t a conscious thing to do because the songs for Tender Buttons [were] kind of what we wanted it to sound like and then we’d take that to a drummer and [get] real drums on it. It was still going to be sparse but have acoustic
Even if a conventional notion of rhythm has been displaced over the course of several albums, Keenan feels the construction of songs for Witch Cults shows it is still there, albeit in less obvious ways. “Neil Bullock’s drumming is great, it’s really charged and so if you write a song on top of Neil’s playing it’s going to sound very rhythmical and pacy,” she says. “There’s these internal rhythms and conceptual rhythms throughout the whole thing [Witch Cults]. I think it’s actually the paciest album we’ve made in terms of scene changes and timbre and mood changes. It’s the most complex rhythmical album in that respect.”

“This complexity is at its most apparent on ‘Ritual/Looking In’ from Witch Cults. There is this odd stop-start motion that purposely jolts you out of any feeling brought across from earlier tracks - as if it is an entirely different thought altogether. “It’s almost like this idea of traditional rhythm is becoming less focused,” says Cargill. Keenan comes in too at the same time with her take. “The idea of a voice on a beat, that they go along together, it’s almost... we’re broken in that sense. Kind of limping a little bit. But I think that will come back when the moment’s right. Again, when things align nicely, I think with Neil, the references we gave him, the things we wanted him to do really excited him.”

“I think that’s one of the things I like when I look back at everything we’ve done,” Cargill continues, “when we’ve been forced in these situations where at the time we think ‘this is a bit of a disaster you know, it’s not how I wanted it to turn out to be’ but then I look back and I think ‘well actually that’s good because it’s a lot more interesting and we’re not taking these predictable routes and repeating ourselves’.”

Since this interview there’s been another release between The Focus Group and Broadcast, Study Series 04: Familiar Shapes and Noises, released on the Ghost Box label. “I think what I like about Ghost Box is that they’re constructing these worlds that you can totally understand,” says Keenan. “There’s titles and very clear concepts.”

We move on to the topic of influences from the past. Initially, they both felt the reaction to Broadcast’s early sound was tarnished by the seeming irrelevance of ‘old’ music. In an era characterised by drum and bass and “future music”, anything that sounded different was thought to be wrong. There was also an implication that all these sounds which had come before had gained enough attention, according to Keenan. “A lot of things that we love were totally missed by everybody. For me, it’s like, I think it’s valid looking back because a lot of things that were focused on [at the time] were boring by today’s standards.”

Cargill credits Simon Reynolds, and the hauntology tag used to label the output.
Cyclical Defrost

based piece. Dream/Ritual and concluding with another film-a set filled with “colour, harmony and pop songs”, Wavelengths, a short film by House, followed by twenty-minute improvised piece to Winter Sun is divided into three modules, the first being a in the evening, in Sonar Hall, matches music that ties in with what we are a little bit.”

“Perhaps it wasn’t so strange after all, if people were consciously trying to write like "Trish. ‘Well I wonder,’ she continues, “a lot of different people from all over the world contributed, and it’s interesting how much your creative work is really about editing. That somehow the text, the music the songs you generate is really this slightly askew, British guy who takes music and breaks down some of the structures of some my songs is exciting for everybody who likes music.”

Broadcast and The Focus Group Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia. Study Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia. Study Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia. Study Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia. Study Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia. Study Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia. Study Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia. Study Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia. Study Investigate Witch Cults of the Radio Age is out through Warp/Inertia.
while most listeners will associate Finland with the profile-free-folk drift of the Fonal label and countless metal bands. Olli Aarni’s Ous Mal project filters a panoply melancholy through disorienting hip-hop beats and a disorienting mélange of electronics, archaic samples and acoustic textures. Ous Mal’s 2010 release Nuojuva Halava may be cosmetically reminiscent of the current trend in hip-hop production towards thickly textured instrumental dreaminess, but this record exhibits none of the sex and gusto of your Flying Lotusues or Mount Kimbies: this is mournful night time music, instilled with just a modicum of hope to keep it from becoming dour.

Based in Helsinki, and a student of Finnish language, Aarni doesn’t have any ties with Finland’s famous free-folk scene, and nor does his music betray any direct connection. What it does share is a peculiarly surrealistic approach to sound design. If you’ve ever wanted to hear hip-hop completely removed from its urban sonic roots, you’d couldn’t do much better than to check out Nuojuva Halava, which follows a series of CD-Rs released on labels such as Under the Spire and Finnish label 267-Lattajaa.

“I have some friends who make similar stuff, but I don’t see myself as a scene person,” Aarni says via Gmail chat on a “cold and windy” Helsinki night. “Most of my friends listen to different stuff than what I do.” Aarni does listen to a bit of modern hip-hop, with which he shares a minor affinity primarily for its sampling aesthetics. But he insists that he isn’t “concerned about how people locate me on the map of electronic music”.

“Decay is one of the main themes of the record,” Aarni says of Nuojuva Halava, “and some kind of presence of the past in everything. Maybe some kind of presence of different times in a single moment. I haven’t put it into words really, I try to capture and document that kind of feeling.”

Aarni juxtaposes conventional acoustic instruments – cello and guitar chief among them – with the disjointedness and syncopation of hip-hop. In a way, Nuojuva Halava sounds like many histories worth of Western classical music trying desperately to adjust itself into the framework of modern urban music. Like its restless spirit is haunting an alien palette. “The live instrumentation sounds the way it does because I want it to fit into the mix,” Aarni says.

“I use old and partially broken equipment for recording. I’m not sure that I feel truly nostalgic for the past, I just like the way the past seems (to us) now, in the present. It’s just an interpretation and I don’t know why it’s such a recurrent theme for me.”

Ous Mal’s aesthetic bears some similarities with the hauntological murmurings of William Basinski and The Caretaker. Often it feels like Aarni’s source material is breathing its last exhausted sigh before its inevitable relegation into a buried obscurity, but unlike those artists, Ous Mal isn’t exclusively ambient. There is a melodic and
Joni Mitchell – Clouds [1969]

Joni Mitchell’s Clouds plays to me exactly as described upon listening; like clouds floating slowly by, twisting and shadowing into shapes of the imagination, leaving the listener laying on the ground below completely absorbed in the experience. I chose this album cover as I am not only a fan of Mitchell’s music but also her artwork. Trained as a commercial and fine artist, Joni’s skills as a visual artist are staggering. Clouds features an original self-portrait by the artist herself. Created over a period of two weeks in 1969, Mitchell notes the subtle changes in her face, in its lines and fullness throughout the days and manages to capture a beautifully textured, vivid image. I love this marriage of visual art and music, and find it amazing that both came from the same person.

M.I.A – Arular [2005]

I remember when I heard one of M.I.A’s first songs from this album late one night on the radio; I went and bought the album the next day. I’m sure everybody is familiar with M.I.A’s music, but what grabbed me when I picked up Arular for the first time at the record store, still unsure of what to expect, was the artwork. It was bright, raw and had its own voice. As eclectic as her music, Arular features spray-painted stencils.
of sharp collage style patterns overlaid by yet more standouts of brightly coloured tanks, guns and missiles. Everything about this album is BANG BANG! Sometimes literally, with gun shot sounds I littered throughout.

The artwork has a cleverly composed structure with bold graphic symbols that resonate like swiftly dealt punches, symbolising M.I.A’s experiences growing up in Sri Lanka and urban Britain. This is another example of musician/fine artist, with the artwork created by Mathangi Arulpragasam herself.

Cream – Disraeli Gears [1967]
One evening in London in 1967, Australian born artist Martin Sharp was approached by a musician to produce artwork for an album cover. That musician was Eric Clapton. A collage comprised of photography, Victorian decorative engraving images and hand-drawn elements, Disraeli Gears is an overflowing cartoonish fantasy land. I am a long-time admirer of Sharp’s work, especially his cartoon and collage origins, both of which I experimented with as a kid. I remember when I was first listening to Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix and the list goes on till I inevitably discovered Cream. The music from this era was intense and highly creative, as were the artworks accompanying them.

I became a bit obsessed with the different styles in high school and began to mimic some of the techniques shown on posters and albums, replicating the various styles of hand-drawn typography and decoration of each prominent artist of this time to teach myself the art. It actually taught me a fair bit as well I think about layering colour. Like a lot of work from this time Disraeli Gears was first produced in black-and-white, upon which a separate layer of colour was applied. In this case Sharp used his new favourite paints – fluorescents. Sharp described his use of these fluorescent colours as trying to capture the warm electric sounds of music in London at the time. I think that it is these techniques he employed and use of colour that make an artwork that is still fresh today.

The Cure – Disintegration [1989]
Disintegration feels like you’re soaring upwards through the ocean to take your first breath. In the first track ‘Plainsong’, Robert Smith’s vocals are warped and echo like rays of light in water.

The album cover conjures much the same feeling in an image of pure dark romance, with Smith’s pale face looking upward, appearing from the murky depths. His expression is framed by layers of flowers, some dark and some bursting with light. The lighter flowers appear to have the same effect as projected images, and feel like collaged memories. Disintegration is a technique I admire and find can be challenging but especially rewarding – when an original type is intentionally sprung from the lines of an artwork.

The Jayhawks – Blue [1995]
I was introduced to the Jayhawks album Tomorrow the Green Grass by my Dad, and agree that the album is a classic. I remember when he was trying out a set of speakers he had built and ‘Blue’ was one of the first songs he wanted to hear through them. The artwork for Tomorrow the Green Grass itself isn’t that great but the album is brilliant, and if you don’t have it you should go out and buy it now.

‘Blue’ is the first track from the album and was released as a single. I think the cover image is really interesting, and the way the blumeti, scratched photograph is covered in dust speckles gives a visually simulated texture to the otherwise smooth gloss paper sleeve. The type used for the title ‘Blue’ is almost organic to the photograph. This is a technique I admire and find can be challenging but especially rewarding – when an original type is intentionally sprung from the lines of an artwork.

Black Sabbath – Paranoid [1970]
Paranoid appears like a creepy dream, if you dreamt that you were being chased in the woods by a guy dressed in his undies, t-shirt and bike helmet... whilst waving a samurai sword.
Bootsie Boys – License to Ill [1986]

In New York 1986, three young Beastie Boys were fishing from a punk-rock group to a rap crew. License to Ill is an exciting display of the musicians’ diverse musical interests and influences, ranging from their love of white guy humour. Reviewed by Rolling Stone with the headline “Three Idiots Create A Masterpiece,” the album’s influences, mixed with their own brand of wise-cracking honesty, were evolving from a punk-rock group to a rap outfit.

License to Ill was one of my favourite albums as a kid in primary school, which I owned on cassette tape.

The album cover features a jet liner tail, smooth and polished seemingly powering through the skies. The front cover, but when flipped over reveals the front of the plane has crashed into a mountain. The legend on the side of the plane also reads (INFS), which when read backwards in a mirror reads “EATME.” Love it.

Dark Day – Extremating Angel [1980]

Luis Buñuel’s film The Extremating Angel is about a diner party at which all of the guests find themselves unable to leave. There is little explanation as to why they cannot leave. The doors do not seem to be blocked off, there does not appear to be a nuclear war kicking off outside; all of the guests are simply overcome by a paranoiac, assumedly psychological condition, which throws them inside. Buñuel was a Surrealist, and surrealism can only be made if it in the context - explanations are not really the point.

Dark Day is the project of Robin Guthrie, a previous member of DNA, Arto Lindsay’s No Wave group. Basing from DNA, you’d probably expect something quite to-f-f and shambolic, but it’s quite the opposite. Dark Day’s record Extremating Angel is one of the clearest recordings to come out of the No Wave era, perhaps even more than Brian Eno’s No New York compilation. I picture this album recorded in a perfectly anesthetised setting, with whitewashed walls, perhaps as an asylum for the few un-brained members of a futuristic society, run by Hal from Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey. Every sound here is effected. “I’m only human,” speaks the most inhuman voice imaginable over a synthetic synthesizer pattern. Keyboards flawlessly arpeggiate, echoing perfectly in time with incredibly minimal live drums. A bass line is floating in the distance, subdued in chorus effect, sounding like computer-generated speech, as if doomed to the 80s contemplating how it might sound in the future. The guitars are similarly processed. Different characters seem to appear, perhaps through different vocal processing effects, and create surrealistic narratives, some appearing nonsensical yet eerie, some uncomfortably honest snippets from tales of dysfunctional modern lives, some crushingly nihilistic. “No. Nothing. Ever.”

Philip Glass and Robert Wilson – Einstein on the Beach [1976]

Einstein on the Beach is an opera spread over four LPs in the box-set that I own. I believe it may have been longer when performed, but some of the movements were edited to fit it on record. Taking about the entire opera would be too time consuming, and I’m potentially not qualified to speak at length on classical music, having never studied it and barely read a word on the topic. However, this opera can be spoken of in the same breath as Extremating Angel. Both are based around the synthesizer, repetition, and nihilistic narratives. The second piece on the first record is Extremating Angel’s micro-tonal setting, “Train/SpaceShip,” kicks off with two female singers repeating a two note (upon the syllable of the word anti-melody of “Nothing nothing nothing nothing”) repeat. Two synths, flute, and sax all repeat along, changing only subtly, throwing you off now and then. It’s still easy, though, to let this whole piece consume you and get inside your nerves. It’s interesting watching segments of this piece on YouTube. Philip Glass has this massive 70s afro, and he headbangs, but not in the sense that you see people headbanging at metal shows. Perhaps a couple times per minute, he pulls his head back slowly and looks upwards, as if communicating with something out there, then barn, drops his head, shaking his ‘fro all over. Watching this, you get the sense that he’s found his own rhythm in the piece, and try all you want, it’s impossible to tap into. But this is one of those expansive pieces that everyone will experience differently, as hidden everywhere are different rhythms. You find your own, and go with it.

Philosophy Attack – Flying Saucer Attack [1993]

What would a flying saucer attack sound like? We all have some sort of idea in our minds, probably derived from the plenty of films out there with some sort of spaceship landing or invasion scene. The first that springs to my mind, though not quite an attack is, the scene in Spielberg’s Close Encounters of the Third Kind, in which the spaceship has landed and is attempting to communicate with the military. The sounds were playing a sequence of notes (likely coming from an analogue synth) with a sequence of coloured lights.

My Dreaming Hill, the first track off Flying Saucer Attack’s debut record, has some pretty strange sounds, like what a laser or tractor beam might sound like. Not long after, a washed out guitar kicks in and the pop song begins, but the strange sounds continue. Layered over this track is a dissonant sequence of notes, seemingly guitar-based feedback, that somehow neither adds to nor detracts from the existing melodies; they do not harmonise, but at the same time do not distract. It’s easy to imagine these notes as the voice of the spaceship in Close Encounters, perched upon a desert hill (or dreaming hill?), sending a message of peace or war or indifference to the populous of another world.

This record tells me, I heard it was all recorded on four track, and I wouldn’t be surprised if the guitars were plugged straight in, amp-less.
Both moved across the screen at breakneck speed, pursued by a floating dark spirit in a huge cape, a mountain and through a forest, while being stereo. The hero was galloping on a horse down a scene I caught synced up with the music on the stereo. I immediately thought that they could be tapped into a collective unconscious, either the same one that humans have greater difficulty accessing, or one of their own. Flying Basser Attack sound like that. Like a swarm, a collective unit, so close together that you can't find the space between the individual units composing it. It's easier to imagine it as a swarm of bees, the way this record buzzes. Like a superorganism, the swarm expands and contracts, and in moments like the entry of the interlude at around 2:00 in 'Wish' the bees all get to clicking their wings, sustained notion of anarchy or a collectively driven society.

That's the last time that I was on tour in the United States, I played a show in Santa Cruz, California that was put on by a hardcore punk kid. After the show, he let me stay at his apartment. When we walked through the door, he put on a DVD with the sound off and asked if I'd like to pick a record. We walked through the door, he put on a DVD with the sound off and asked if I'd like to pick a record. I scanned through his collection, and it was pretty comprehensive as to the staples and standards I knew, and that anarchism is either a personal, self-sustaining notion of anarchy or a collectively driven spirit focused upon bringing change. Either way, the crust punk feels a sense of urgency, and this is expressed as much through their lifestyle as it is through the tempo of their music. The crust punk is driven to keep moving, galloping. The black spirit that follows him can't actually be identified, its presence is certain, it is perhaps even omnipresent, but it is intangible. The crust punk cannot stop moving or he will be consumed by it. This dark force is often referred to in terms such as "capitalism", "the system", "corporations", "society". It is evil, and it is powerful, but the crust punk is heroic, he gallops onwards, he gallops through the forests and the burrs of black metal cling to his jean-legs, he gallops through the hills from San Francisco and heads into northern California, or perhaps heeds the woods to find nothing but a wasteland, the concrete and tar artifacts of progression and modernity. But no matter how far he runs, or how fast, the black spirit will always just over his shoulder, haunting him, driving him, haunting him. But the crust punk is the antithesis of the black spirit, he is the hero, he will not be defeated, and he will most certainly never slow down.

Neil Young – “Harvest” [1972]

As someone who for a very long time did not own an iPod or a laptop and would travel for months without my own music, I was a blessing to come across this record so often, and I grew closer to it with each listen, in each new location with each new person. Whenever I went, I would find this record. Young kids in New Jersey, friends in Malboune, cough-surfers in Italy, hipsters in LA, old-fart recording fanatics in Berlin... everybody does it, everybody owns a copy, Even my Dad owned a copy, and he didn't own many records, maybe ten or fifteen, I assume he got rid of the majority of his collection when he converted to Christianity in his late teens. The first time I played Harvest at home, my Dad said to me: “You can't listen to Neil Young without a doobie in your hand!” It's the only time he's ever made reference to drugs in my presence. I don't know if I was cool at that moment, but I did admit it to him but I have of course shared a joint over this record in many a household. When the crew? I get manage to get by finding food to eat on tour. Travelling far and wide, and staying with many different hosts, it might seem like a bit of a thorn in the side to have an ideological attachment to such a specific band, I've never stayed stoned, though, and among other things, this is largely due to peanut butter and toast. It's a staple, in every pantry, not just universally accepted but loved. I'm going to draw a parallel here to Neil Young's Harvest, not only to help describe it's appeal, but also to explain the development of my relationship with it. I'm not going to claim Harvest to be the best Neil Young record, but I do think the most widespread, and one that you can expect to find in almost any record collection. To the individual with refined musical taste, it's what peanut butter on toast is to the vegan. As someone who for a very long time did not own an iPod or a laptop and would travel for months without my own music, it was a blessing to come across this record so often, and I grew closer to it with each listen, in each new location with each new person. Whenever I went, I would find this record.

I'm not going to claim Harvest to be the best Neil Young record, but it certainly is the most widespread, and one that you can expect to find in almost any record collection. To the individual with refined musical taste, it’s what peanut butter on toast is to the vegan. As someone who for a very long time did not own an iPod or a laptop and would travel for months without my own music, it was a blessing to come across this record so often, and I grew closer to it with each listen, in each new location with each new person. Whenever I went, I would find this record.