The concept album as curatorial 'medium': Colin Riley's *In Place*

A Place to Remember

It's hard to place Colin Riley's music. Described by reviewers as 'unclassifiable', 'a unique indie voice', and 'wry, understated and slightly bonkers', it doesn't fit into established categories such as contemporary music, jazz, or electronica. He's a self-identified composer, largely self-taught from an early age, and he's been teaching the craft at Brunel University for over two decades; yet he also draws on jazz, improvisation, a love of pop, field recordings, and a fascination with poetry and language. This hasn't been a comfortable terrain to move in, bogged down by institutional mores and the trip hazards of economic models that prefer musicians to be centred within a given genre, or at least more of an identifiable (or marketable) 'character'. As the boundaries between genres and the social identities they perform have weakened, however, an increasing number of musicians find themselves in this landscape and institutional spaces are opening up, even if media and marketing models are still lagging. Without an obvious milieu, then, Riley has initiated and often self-produced – or curated – many of his own projects (including, for a time, the Isleworth Festival), taking on the conceptual character that projects afford: a narrative dimension, collaborations on the edges of disciplines, and points of connection that might orient audiences unguided by clear genre markers.

It is precisely this identification with the edge or in-betweenness of things, this no-place, that gives his project *In Place* (2015-2018) its bearing and that resonates strongly with these times.[1] Composed collaboratively with seven commissioned poets – supplemented by found texts – and a mixed ensemble with varied musical experiences, this 'multi-media song cycle' dwells on the relationships between memory, place, language, and identity.

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[1] In addition to the album, *In Place* has been a touring project and, more specifically, a conceptual platform incorporating a dedicated website, four broadcasts on Resonance FM, and an extensive series of blog posts and other writing. See https://inplaceproject.co.uk, accessed 1 October 2020.

These are familiar themes of song cycles going back two centuries, of course, yet they have gained a new urgency – and a changed significance – from shifts in the role of memory within our own historicity. Memory is not what it used to be. Nor is the song cycle. Faith in the historical self-consciousness that powered modernity – and that coincided with the emergence of the song cycle – has eroded, even whilst the character or qualities of our current moment remain contested and unclear.[2] My aim here is not to resolve this; indeed, its irreducibility to any single solution appears to be one of its characteristics. We can, though, dwell on the braiding of memory, place, language, and identity in contemporary Britain by reflecting on how *In Place* articulates the possibilities of the song cycle from a non-centred or edged perspective, one that intersects with histories of the album and the emergence of its conceptual forms.

We will begin by listening in to *In Place*, considering how its *topoi* are engaged, and trace these in the intersecting histories of the album and song cycle, and their convergence with the concept album from the late 1960s – around the time Riley began composing, in fact. This will give us pause to reflect on their longer histories as forms of *remembrance* and the implications, for their present condition, of a contemporary musical culture in which musical memory itself is vulnerable, one in which only the 'next song' matters.[3]

Edgelands

Riley describes the process of creating *In Place* as a form of collaborative curatorial composition, a process of gathering, assembling, and binding. There is a degree of self-

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[2] This fuels the current discourse on contemporaneity explored predominantly across the gallery arts – see, for example, Paulo de Assis and Michael Schwab (eds.), *Futures of the Contemporary: Contemporaneity, Untimeliness, and Artistic Research*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019. The problem of historicity for modernism has been widely explored, notably for example in Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: Viking Press, 1961; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, (1979), transl. Keith Tribe, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004; Paul Ricœur's last work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, transl. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2004; and in François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, transl. Saskia Brown, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

[3] Eric Drott, "Why the Next Song Matters: Streaming, Recommendation, Scarcity," *Twentieth-Century Music* 15/3 (2018), pp.325-357.

consciousness to this, perhaps, in that it is precisely the dispersal, separation, and *un*binding of people, ideas, and identities of our dis-United Kingdom that compels a project addressing identity, place, language and memory. The apparent loss of a commons provides its catalyst and its awareness of *positionality*. Rather than being put in or 'accepting' one's place, it engages with the mobility, vulnerability, and sensibility of *dis*placement, of belonging in the movement between one place and another, neither origin nor destination.

> "It felt like my landscape was defined by edges of things, but also by the strong sense of an industrial heritage…. The experience that my physical edgeland environment provided for me (with its juxtaposition of opposites, its multi-layering of landscape textures, and its sense of Northern-ness) is much more about an openness to embrace many possibilities at once. It is this aspect has enabled me to connect with the edges of many other things. It's part of my make-up."[4]

Listening to the recording, at home, one of the most striking characteristics is its slippage between personal and public modes of address, intimacy and broadcast. Like the places invoked by the poets it gathers, the plosive 't' separating 'here' from 'there' wavers, an in-here-ing subtending an else-where-ness. Close miked vocals whispering recitations alternate with bull-horned lyrics, just as crisp studio techniques melt into field recordings. Instrumental voicings variously colour, shade, impress, pressure, meld or echo words. The effect is to make language *matter*, a material utterance across the borders between body and place, imagination and soundscape, self-identity and self-difference. In the words of the poet Robert Macfarlane (2015) that inspired and anchor the project, "Words act as a compass; place-speech serves literally to en-chant the land – to sing it back into being, and to sing one's being back into it."[5]

We might think of this interstitial movement as a form of wandering or situational *dérive* following the paths where words have been trodden in – and indeed, Riley identifies

[4] Resonance FM broadcast, 22 June 2016, on https://inplaceproject.co.uk/blog/ accessed 28 September 2020.

[5] Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015.

strongly with psychogeographic practices locating the subtle traces of histories marked in the landscape not by monuments but by incomplete erasure.

> "I have always been fascinated with the idea that layers of history leave contours and traces of those who have been in the same space before us. I love the way that ruins and industrial relics act as signs to how different a place would have been in a previous time and my walks often involve tracing the routes of disused railways, canals and ancient tracks."

Unlike the conventional sequence of song *cycles*, commonly understood as a journey of departure and transfigured return (emblematic in Schubert's *Winterreise*), here the passage within and between each song has more of a flickering quality, suspended between states. Being 'in place' is simultaneously vocalised and evoked. At the album's closing song, rendering Nan Shepherd's verses attending to the Naiadic call of waters-flow, we have not reached a destination nor arrived at a final (self-)discovery. If anything, we are invited to catch the drift. It is not the stream, here, but the *current* that provides the sense of an ending, not in a still pool but in its lull, a lullaby floating and metamorphosing within the ensuing non-silence. Sense is dis-lodged, uprooted from any natural or organic claims of 'home'. Instead, it makes a dwelling within the locutions of language, field recordings, samples, dialects, place names, personal memories, metaphoric diversions, histories and imagined routes.

In Place has neither subject nor object, but roams over and ruminates on the interplay of *topos* – an ambiguous term (from the Greek) indicating 'place', 'region', 'space', 'literary theme' (or topic), or 'subject of language' – and *tropos*, the turn (of phrase), an altering or changing figure of speech. Words are not 'set' to music, but significance emerges *between* the phonic and the sonic.[6] The commissioned poets are sampled reciting their own texts, intercut with vocalist Melanie Pappenheim's aired, shaped, tongued and lipped phonemes, themselves overlapping with the chatter of waters, winds whispering through grasses, and

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[6] John Mowitt, *Sounds: The Ambient Humanities*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015.

muted market banter, all glossed by a band of strings, percussion, and keyed instruments.[7] The meanings of words do not begin with the sign and end with their referents, but flow across layers.

The album invokes place where bodies touch and are touched by language. That it should do so now is hardly surprising, as Britain is rendered increasingly abstract as Union Jack, Rule (or cruel) Britannia, white-cliffs-of-Dover. Yet if Jerusalem is to be builded amongst these mountains green, pleasant pastures, and Satanic mills – no doubt aided by skilled migrant labour – it will be with bricks of borrowed words chiselled straight and piled fortress high, its arrows of desire facing the imagined envy of invading hordes. By contrast, *In Place* cherishes the dialects of place where 'native' English reveals its foreign-ness, precipitate of uncertain origin or washed ashore on our pebbled isles. Grumma; rafty; huffling; cancervell; simmer kloks; gairneog; iomashruth….

The assembled poets step carefully through the contradictory landscapes of English nostalgia, its constellations of class, gender, and race, and its disciplines of environmental conduct and citizenship.[8] Its gardens are not orderly, nor its regions orbiting the centripetal force of its capital and the greater South East. Rather, its accents are Celtic, Gaelic, Anglo-Saxon, immigrants ancient and modern, colonial and coincidental. Through the haze of the shipping forecast, Selina Nwulu recalls how

> We learnt this country fiercely
> my father felt its knuckles crush his jaw
> my mother delivered its children
> I have been kissed deeply by its tongue
> it has licked Yorkshire on my vowels, left me
> with the blushed cheeks of a first crush.

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[7] In addition to Pappenheim, the band comprises Kate Halsall (piano, keyboard, harmonium), Nic Pendlebury (viola), Ruth Goller (bass guitar, double bass, uke bass), and Stephen Hiscock (percussion).

[8] David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, London: Reaktion Books, 1998.

Daljit Nagra hears echoes of the Indian sub-continent resonating through London's streets, 'the Sanyo [pumping] heartsore time-bubble bhangra', whilst miners' folksongs are raised from their slumbering pitheads to mark the passing of King Coal. The Furness Fells of Cumbria are cast as a geological litany by Richard Skelton and Autumn Richardson, before we slide into the abandoned moss-cloaked memory-stations of the former Manchester-Liverpool Railway incanted by Paul Farley's poems. Nick Papadimitriou's words skid through the littered swards and polluted memories of Blighty's imagination, whilst Jackie Morris re-wilds the land and waters through its un-passported creatures.

Riley's inspiration for *In Place* came in part from a love of walking the disused railways and canals of his native North West and the obscured histories etched into his adopted London periphery – traces of discarded industrial, social and cultural memories intimating alternate presents. This is an album created through movement. In Nietzsche's words, paraphrased by Frédéric Gros, 'we write only with the hand; we write well "only with our feet"….We should notice if, while reading, the foot "pricks up its ears" – for the foot listens.'[9] The music treads lightly through this soundscape, traversing the styles of genred fields whilst carrying its song forms, opening the filtered gates of instrumental pop, crackling the needled floor of pining folk melodies, pausing in spectral shadowed harmonies before coursing the serpentine flows and shifting scree of modern chamber music, and picking up the gaited rhythms of post-minimalism.

Listening on the move to a digital copy of the album provokes a peculiar reversal. Now, it's not my mind that wanders the tracks laid down from the sedentary comforts of home. In counterpoint with its headphonic space I pass the estate agents, Polish bakery, Saxon church, fly tipping site, commuter line, and Asian minicab office, adding the rhythms of my own steps and breathing into the mix. This listening embodies time with each civilized upright step obeying the earth's gravitational attraction, yet its metaphorical feet remain in place. It moves on the spot. The places gathered by the album are nevertheless bound by a

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[9] Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, translated by John Howe, London: Verso, 2014.

certain action of memory, its words reciting like a language course to be repeated not verbatim, but within the rhythms of the body – taken for a walk.

Pacing is fundamental to the composition and provides it with its sense of finality. It doesn't grind to a halt but suspends the onward rush, the constant *desire* for closure. In keeping with Milan Kundera's 'existential mathematics', *In Place* registers that 'the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting.'[10]

Kundera's novel marked a distinct turning from the sense of historical acceleration characteristic of modernity, its pedal to the floor celebrated in Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* though already troubled in the Victorian imagination, notably in HG Wells's *The Time Machine*. The comprehension of history as simultaneously the construction of a perspective *outside* it and from which it can be rejected, or rather surpassed, in the name of a future to be shaped and crafted, has come under sustained critique since the mid-century (with Nietzsche as a key precursor), alongside a renewed interest in memory and its location in the body. *In Place* is indicative of this shift in sensibility, and with it a substantial change in the historicity of the song cycle. The song cycle's sense of interiority, its subjective quality – however fractured, as in Schoenberg – is absent.[11] Its subject is neither the singer nor the author, neither a fictional character nor another historical agent. It is, rather, decentred, polyvocal – including especially the voices of non-human things, of water flow and pit shaft, dusk and wildflowers. Its perspective is not 'universal', an aerial detachment, but earth-bound, attending to the indexes of memories' sedimented words and sounds. It doesn't *represent* this historical moment or fall back on nostalgia's seduction, but attempts to cathect attachments to place, meaning to the body, and affect to others.

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[10] Milan Kundera, *Slowness*, translated by Linda Asher, London: Faber, 1996, pp.34-35.

[11] The decades around the turn of the twentieth century were conspicuous for their concern with time. Indeed, Schoenberg's steps off the edge of tonality were taken with the conspicuous aid of variations on the song cycle, from the *Gurrelieder* to *Erwartung*, *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, *Pierrot Lunaire*, and the Four Orchestral Songs. See also Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

We can understand it best, perhaps, as a collection of *lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora's term for those material, symbolic, and functional 'sites of memory' that resist their erasure by historical writing – especially in its universal or detached, critical form – but that persist and insist on acts of remembrance.[12] Indeed, unlike the referential mode of history, "the history *of*…",

> *Lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs…. what makes them *lieux de mémoire* is precisely that by which they escape from history….The history of *lieux de mémoire* is…[one] that, in the last analysis, rests upon what it mobilizes: an impalpable, barely expressible, self-imposed bond; what remains of our ineradicable, carnal attachment to these faded symbols.'

This concern with memory bears an intimate relationship with the history of the album and of the song cycle, to which we now briefly turn. As we will hear – this highlights the pivotal axes at play between history and memory as such: of public and private, the social and individual body; and of the preservation of a common past through archive document and collective, living remembrance.

Conceptual Albums

The song cycle and the album co-existed long before the advent of sound recording. Indeed, the album preceded phonography by centuries. Its origins lie in the Roman chalk-whitened (hence '*album*') or painted boards on which specifically *public* notices were posted – treaties, annals and edicts, but also daily events. In marked contrast with those 'archival' records preserved and added to the founding documents of the republic, divinely protected in temples under priestly authority, *alba* constituted an important practice in what might be called the 'living memory' of the *demos*, that collective self-knowledge by which a multitude

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[12] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', translated by Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989), pp.7-24. Nora's argument attempts to engage the problem of the expanding gap between 'history' and 'memory', developed at a time (the 1980s) when the passion for heritage, commemoration, and returns to the archive was becoming a distinct phenomenon.

may bind and maintain itself.[13] By the Middle Ages this 'white album' referred to a bound volume of blank pages for inserting cherished verses or sketches, private collections of memorabilia extending later to photographs and eventually music.[14] Only in 1909 was it first adopted as the term for the plain sleeve, then the vinyl disc, and finally the digital recording.

It is the passage of the album from a public record to a personal archive that would afford the emergence of the 'album leaf' in the nineteenth century, a short piece of music initially written not for publication but as a gift for a friend or admirer to treasure in their album and to play at home. Meaning was produced as a double binding – of object signs and of relationships: a shared memory to be maintained, *not* a shared identity defined by the documented past.[15] Like Schumann's *Album for the Young* (1848), written for his daughters, these works often conveyed an idea like a tryst (or a mixtape), a meaning secreted and to be performed in the memories of those disposed to it. This sense of attachment often carried also to collections of lyric poetry and thus to the song cycles they inspired, offering a form of public intimacy – or rather, of *extimate* (to use Lacan's term) performances of private attachments – as their popularity grew. In their institutionalised form, song cycles – distinguished approximately from songbooks (or Lied collections) on the one hand, and from song's dramatization as opera on the other – were expected to be 'bound' by an idea,

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[13] Phyllis Culham, "Archives and Alternatives in Republican Rome," *Classical Philology* 84/2 (1984), pp.100-115.

[14] Albums appear first as relatively inexpensive ways to preserve formulas for legal codes concerning property rights, wills, and other forms of authorised contract between lay publics, only later taken up as a medium for recording and sharing privately treasured materials. Warren C Brown, "The *gesta municipalia* and the public validation of documents in Frankish Europe", in Warren C Brown, Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Adam J Kosto, *Documentary Culture and the Laity in the Early Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. We can observe, in passing, that this transferral of memory from the public to private domain is consistent with the retreat described by Hannah Arendt from the political sphere of 'action' among a plurality of equals – and the concomitant requirement for promissory and contractual mechanisms to ameliorate the necessarily unpredictable quality of public acts – to the 'contemplative life' as the proper sphere of human action i.e. beyond the necessities of everyday living.

[15] The important distinction I want to make here is with the notion of religion that arrives with Cicero as *re-ligio* – literally 'tied back, obligated, to the enormous, almost superhuman and hence always legendary effort to lay the foundations, to build the cornerstone, to found for eternity. *To be religious meant to be tied to the past*' (my emphasis). Arendt, *op. cit.*, p.121. Secreted in the historical passage of the album is the *performance* of a binding of individuals to each other, as distinct from a collective identity bound by the pre-established authority of an historical archive.

narrative, a single author, mood, or compositional structure, anticipating the 'concept album' that would later claim them as precursors.[16]

Whilst the gramophone opened up possibilities for almost any and all sound reproduction, its phenomenal and largely unanticipated success as a *public* record – as distinct from, say, a repository for preserving voices beyond their mortal frames, or as an alternative for stenography – attests to its operation as an *album*, a mechanism for living memory that binds people. It not only secured the ephemeral through a form of storage, a mnemotechnic, but enabled its contents – especially song – to be repeatable at will. The album encompasses the material that perishes *and* the connective meanings that persist. It is this that underscores the corresponding etymology of the record, from the Latin *recordari* – to remember or call to mind, literally to call back again into the heart (*cor*).[17] Everything depends on this: that the body, language, and care touch each other and are touched by others.

The displacement of the 'album' as a term for the disc itself, in its industrially-manufactured copies, implicates the pressing abstraction of memory, even if it was vulnerable to scratching, warping, and the mortal invasion of dust. In its digital form, what remained of the concept was a limited duration, vinyl's twenty-three minutes of sound reproduction per side extended to the CD's eighty-minute 'lifespan', but today – floating free of its material support – reaching a world 'record' four hours and forty-nine minutes. In the digital domain, the album as such has become a mere convention. With the arrival of streaming as a dominant mode of music distribution, even the issue of duration becomes moot, rendering the album and its forms of memory precarious if not obsolete. It is unsurprising that this recent period has corresponded with the rise of the EP, shrinking the time commitment albums required, and with the common practice now of releasing individual tracks over a

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[16] John Daverio, "The Song Cycle: Journeys Through a Romantic Landscape," in *German Lieder in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rufus Hallmark, New York: Routledge, 2009. Gareth Shute, *Concept Albums*, Milton Keynes: Investigations Publishing, 2013.

[17] The proposition comes from the ancient grammarian Varro – see John T Hamilton, *Security: Politics, Humanity, and the Philology of Care*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, p.74.

period of weeks or even months, lest the artist's new material be rapidly forgotten and disposed in the constant tide of new information and the attrition of public attention.

The album has not, however, disappeared entirely within this new musical economy, but has been recast as the *playlist*. Having developed streaming services as a superabundant archive to counter file sharing, the music industry faced a novel problem: many listeners became inactive and churn rates were high due to feelings of overload and glut. As Eric Drott notes, 'If desire is a function of lack [as Lacan claimed], then the unlimited and inexhaustible musical plenitude to which streaming services provide access doesn't fulfil desire so much as short-circuit it.'[18] The curated playlist provided a means of restricting supply, giving an impression of finitude, initially affording identification with selections through celebrity recommendations and other forms of social relation (such as the persona of a record store assistant). Whilst such 'curation' may imply a 'human touch', it only supplements the algorithmic forms of selection based on user-generated data through which subject positions – 'prefabricated ways of being' – are packaged and routinized for mood and activities, like exercise or 'chilling out'. The playlist is individualised; the album's qualities of performing affinity and producing intimacy are instead abstracted further, rendered replaceable and interchangeable.

The significance of the *concept* album, then, lies in the attempt to secure its binding principles, both for its contents and, at least potentially, the individuals it connects. The term's emergence in the late 1960s can be understood – at least initially and in part – as a self-conscious exercise in addressing the weakening of these ties with the spectacular growth of the music industries. The blurring of public and private made visible the manufacturing of identities, subject positions as alike as the record's multiple copies in its commodity form. The discourse of the concept album then played out in the tension between 'authenticity' and ironic self-fictionalising, and in the paradoxical 'singularity' of the mass-produced copy.

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[18] Drott, *op. cit.*

Writing in 1934 under the pseudonym Hektor Rottweiler, Theodor Adorno doggedly examined 'The Form of the Phonograph Record', claiming a paradoxical value in its reification of evanescence: objectifying the ephemeral, records afforded a compositional *writing with sound* by inscribing marks directly on its surface.[19] By implication, its memory of sound could be altered, fabricated, made anew. It was precisely the exploration of the creative possibilities in recording that Evan Eisenberg dubbed 'phonography', as studio composition became an artform in its own right.[20] This was especially the case for pop producers – like Phil Spector – who had even more creative freedom than those recording classical repertoire because they didn't have to defer to a composer's authority, but could blur authorial lines with their recording artists.

By the late 1960s the pop single was becoming conventional, constrained by the three-minutes of fame afforded by the 45rpm 'single' and the music industry's gilded formula of expressive authenticity. With the phenomenal success of bands like the Beatles, the standardising impulse conflicted both with some bands' aspirations for artistic credibility *and* with the liberation aesthetics of many pioneering rock critics. On the one hand, this paved the way for punk as a quasi-revivalist recuperation of rock's purported 'essence', as well as retrospective (and freshly posthumous) claims for Woody Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940) as the first 'concept album', attributing its value to a genealogy emphasising rock's urban folk roots. On the other, the artifice of the album could itself be made a feature, both in the application of innovations in studio techniques and in the ironic self-representation of artists as a manufactured product (notably with The Who's *The Who Sell Out*), a feature of Pop Art's explosive success. The contribution of Art School alumni from this time to the 'invention' of pop was not coincidental.[21]

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[19] Theodor Adorno, "The Form of the Phonograph Record," (1934), transl. Thomas Y Levin, *October* 55, (1990), pp.56-61.

[20] Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, 2nd edition, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.

[21] It's no surprise this coincided with The Who's conceptual turn with *The Who Sell Out*, similarly satirizing their own commodification. The emergence of rock criticism, notably in the pioneering writings of Richard Melzer, Richard Goldstein, Robert Christgau, and Ellen Willis, was riven with this tension. Devon Powers, *Writing the Record:* The Village Voice *and the Birth of Rock Criticism*, Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013; and Les Roka, "A Day in the Life of American Music Criticism: The 'Sgt. Pepper' Debate of 1967-69," *Journalism History* 30/1 (2004), pp.20-30.

Whilst the coining of the term 'concept album' remains obscure, it seems likely that it emerged among the rock critics habituating Greenwich Village in the summer of 1967, contemporaneous with the publication in *Artforum* of Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art". The proximate cause for the music writers was the release of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper*, only three months after *The Velvet Underground & Nico* with Warhol's priapic cover. The Beatles likewise drew conspicuously on Pop Art both for Peter Blake's cover image and their fictional self-parody as the 'Lonely Hearts Club Band', but significantly the 'silent' breaks between tracks were removed so that the album played continuously – in a specified sequence and as a single unit – indicating the album as a compositional whole.[22] It was this capacity to voice a broader intention, idea, narrative or meaningful sequence gathering together stylistically similar songs (without hit singles) that overlapped – akin to the song cycle – that then came to define the concept album.[23]

Although the concept album fell into disrepute with the waning of enthusiasm for prog rock's 'excesses', especially in its rock 'operatic' forms, its continuing relevance can be appreciated better, perhaps, through the intimate relationship it afforded with the gallery arts. For artists it became not only a quasi-sculptural object opening onto music, but also offered a distribution system as an adjunct or alternative to the exhibition. Just as the industrial copy could acquire the aura of a singular work – notably with Richard Hamilton's numbered copies for the original pressing of the Beatles' *White Album* (1968) – so an artwork could move in the other direction, becoming an icon through mass reproduction as with Robert Indiana's *LOVE* or Jim Fitzpatrick's *Viva Che*, paving the way for the T-shirt and

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[22] Gary Burns, 'Beatles news: product line extensions and the rock canon', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Kenneth Womack, Cambridge: CUP, 2009; and Allan F. Moore, *The Beatles: Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band,* Cambridge: CUP, 1997.

[23] The lines between Pop Art and Art Pop were shading on several levels. Art Schools encouraged bohemian self-expression, providing a home brew of radical ideas, free time and permissive daring that sparked a shift from the art studio to the recording studio. John Lennon was not the only Art School-of-rock graduate. Keith Richards, The Animals, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Ray Davies, Pete Townshend and many others tuned in to visual art before dropping out to form bands. At the same time, Pop Artists pioneered a 'jukebox modernism' by using hit parades as exhibition soundtracks, both as an affront to the respectability of 'museum taste' and as a means to attract younger and less elite viewers. Mike Roberts, *How Art Made Pop And Pop Became Art*, London: Tate, 2018; Melissa L. Mednicov, *Pop Art and Popular Music: Jukebox Modernism*, New York: Routledge, 2018.

merch table.[24] The intersection of Art and Pop, and artists' fascination with the album, flourished.

The *conceptual* album gained new signifying potential through phonographic techniques of sampling, aligning it with movements in the gallery arts. For example, by collaging, inserting or modifying recognisable snippets of recordings, sampling facilitated allegorical techniques of producing meaning by voicing one thing through another.[25] John Oswald's *Plunderphonics* and Carl Stone's *Sukothai* provide early models for this new kind of musical textuality, coinciding with the turn to forms of appropriation art from the late 1970s by Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Dara Birnbaum and others. This would be developed by musicians including Matthew Herbert, Vicki Bennett, and Matmos, enabling album-length works from the sounds of a pig's life, thematically-related film sequences, or recordings of plastic surgery. In the same period, practices of field recording echoing concerns of Land Art – its artistic sibling – further eroded distinctions between gallery installation and album in pioneering works by Annea Lockwood, Hildegard Westerkamp, Chris Watson and others.[26] Just as Robert Smithson's distinction of site / non-site critically addressed the gallery as a system of representation by registering the spatial difference of Earth Works and their displacement as photographic documentation, so 'soundscape' compositions of field recording artists troubled the ontology of the recording and its 'fidelity' to the acoustic environment it captured. Both dramatized a loss of *presence* and of any unmediated access to a 'real' world.

Returning *In Place*

This short historical sketch returns us to *In Place*, for we should now have a better sense of what such a 'multi-media song cycle' entails. By combining elements of sampling and field

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[24] Thomas Crow, *The Long March of Pop: Art Music and Design 1930-1995*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. Gallery recognition of album artwork also arrived promptly, as with Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf's 1975 exhibition *Sehen um zu Hören* – see Laura Maes, "Sounding Out Sound Art: A study of the definition, origin, context, and techniques of sound art", PhD diss., Universiteit Gent, 2013.

[25] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 and 13 (1980).

[26] Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, New York: Continuum, 2008.

recording with its collection of poetry and found texts, it interweaves different levels of musical textuality without recourse to an underlying 'authentic' subject. Lyrical content is musically embodied not as one text overlaying another, one poetic the other sonic, but as one voice alongside others. It is simultaneously the body that lends it voice, the musical assemblage from which its sibyl sense and sibilants stick out, the world that it references, and the worlding it evokes. Its voices are plural, polyphonic without one overpowering or determining any other. They are both public *and* intimate, detached *and* embodied, environmental *and* human, together *and* individual.

It is through this form of binding, not to a pre-established idea or identity but as an intertwining, that *In Place* can be understood as a contemporary 'album', one that gathers its elements together in much the same way as it offers that second binding of affiliation. The multiple identities of Britain it conjures are equally invitations to construct a new commons, a place of memories and remembrance that provides a bond without bondage to a 'higher' order.

As an album project, *In Place* can also be appreciated for its call to remembrance at a moment when the commons of memory is under mortal threat. The eternal present provides the economic model for streaming, whereby the structure of playlists has been based on anticipation of the *next* song as the *only* perfect choice.[27] If only the *next* song matters, *this* song rapidly becomes irrelevant. This evisceration of memory proper is nevertheless shaped simultaneously by a fascination with nostalgia for the familiar *and* with an unknown (but reliable) future structured by programmed expectation. This is the perfect model for '*presentism*', the particular 'regime of historicity' elaborated by François Hartog in describing the dominant contemporary experience of temporality after 1989. This has also catalysed a return, of sorts, to the album, in particular through the 'technostalgia' of vinyl

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[27] Eisenberg's 'Finale quasi una fantasia', updating his classic text, is remarkably prescient here. 'By imperceptible degrees, a music emerges: the music the listener most deeply desires. Desires, moreover, at the very moment he hears it; for it constantly shifts and evolves to fit his moods, his activities, his metamorphic self.' *Op. cit.*, p.238. See also Drott, *Op. cit.*; and Jeremy Wade Morris and Devon Powers, "Control, curation and musical experience in streaming music services," *Creative Industries Journal* 8/2 (2015), pp.106-122.

and pop culture's 'retromania';[28] but more broadly, artists have used the album as a means of wresting attention away from the flux of the stream. Rather than a process of endless deferral and forgetting, the album form offers a means of binding a limited time to memory.

In a world saturated by data, *In Place* and similar albums address the production of musical subjectivity not (only) as a form of identification or interpellation, nor as a substitute for an irrevocably lost authentic self-presence, but as a material and 'curated' process – drawing here on one ancient etymology of *cura* – care – that it 'burns the heart' (*cor-urat*).[29] The relation of individual songs to the collection is the relation of parts to a whole, a whole constitutively incomplete, decentred, to be renewed and enacted at its edges with each listening. Its composition provides the sense (and affect) of an ending, without finitude. It is because the music must end, making it vulnerable to erasure and forgetting, that it calls to be remembered and passed on. It not only constructs a world but reveals its vulnerability, unpopulated and still-born without its listeners.

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[28] Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*, London: Faber, 2011.

[29] Hamilton, *op. cit.* The attribution is, once again, from Varro.