Beyond Records: Lancaster’s vinyl community and the romance of the turntable

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Abstract:

The goal of this paper is to identify and analyze a music subculture in Lancaster, Pennsylvania: the vinyl community. This subculture, though not connected to any specific genre can be defined by a certain set of principles that revolve around the enjoyment of listening to vinyl records when record industry statistics dictate that the mainstream mode of listening to music is through mp3s and CDs (both digital recording technologies). This community represents the principles of a brand community in the aspect that the concept of “vinyl” represents certain cultural capital that comes from an accepted set of beliefs that consumers express through the purchase of records. The principles of the vinyl community can be described as including:

1. A largely white, male, often middle-class membership base.
2. The practice of epistemophilia: the love of acquiring musical knowledge and sharing musical knowledge.
3. An appreciation of a physical form of music (in contrast to the mp3 format.)
4. A perception that vinyl is of a better sound quality than digitally recorded music (CDs. And mp3s).
5. And above all, a search for an authenticity or the “real” in music. Though not specifically limited to the vinyl community, the search for the real can be displayed through this community.

The research takes the form of three conversations with local store-owners and several more ethnographic conversations with customers. The main focus of the paper is a comparison between Stan’s Record Bar, (located 48 N. Prince St.) and Mr. Suit Records (located 18 W. Chestnut St.).
Beyond Records: Lancaster’s vinyl community and the romance of the turntable

It’s 12:30 on a Friday night in Lancaster Pennsylvania, and in a one-room record store between 25 and 30 people mingle amongst each other digging through the stacks of vinyl that rest in various bins and boxes on top of the tables in the place. It’s the night of April 20th (morning of April 21st to be exact), and in nine months investigating Lancaster’s record stores, I have never seen so many people in one record store at one time. Record Store Day (April 21st) is some kind of annual holiday for Mr. Suit Records. From 12 to 1 in the morning on the morning of the 21st, owner Mike Madrigale opens the store to troves of customers who are eager to pick up the limited edition records that bands release specifically for the holiday. Outside, on the streets, it’s easy to hear Lancastrians walk past the store going about their evenings. It’s striking because a city that people usually associate with Amish communities and farming actually has such a vibrant local urban nightlife.

Lancaster may never have been considered a cultural capital. Its humble history and rural reputation suggest that the city stands as a striking example of Middle America, not cultural dissent. But the city’s record stores tell a different story. The relatively small urban center in the heart of the city serves as a home to two distinct record stores. Stan’s Record Bar and Mr. Suit Records, three city blocks away from each other take different approaches to selling vinyl LPs. Stan’s, founded in 1953 represents literally the old approach to selling music. Having survived the multiple transitions in musical media, Stan’s relies on its extensive used record collection in order to sustain its business. Mr. Suit, established in 2007 represents the new impetus towards the viability of vinyl in the modern marketplace. That, combined with the fact that owner Mike Madrigale conducts international business via eBay suggests that vinyl’s renaissance occurs internationally. In the search for authenticity in music, Lancastrians found vinyl. Both
establishments offer different approaches to the same product, but each has a mission that is founded in searching for the “real.” The existence of these two retail stores shows that a section of Lancaster’s population uses local music establishments to assert their own authenticity by association with the vinyl industry. Furthermore, the internationality of the trade suggests this desire to find the real through music is not simply limited to a small Pennsylvania town.

The method and research of this work took its inspiration from Bryant Simon’s analysis of Starbucks, *Everything but the Coffee*. Simon spent extensive amounts of time in Starbucks across the country, conducted ethnographic conversations with customers, and corresponded with corporate officials and owners. Likewise, the main primary evidence for this work consists of roughly seven months of in store observation, a series of customer interviews, and three key conversations with Mark Glessner, owner of Stan’s Record Bar, Mike Madrigale, owner of Mr. Suit Records, and Jeremy Weiss, owner of CI Records. Having spent approximately 2-3 hours in store every week, store observations are a large chunk of the research. Like Simon, I have sought to capture as accurately as possible the makeup of a subculture, and then to further analyze and contextualize the greater social and political significance of this subculture. While the vinyl community in Lancaster is no Starbucks culture, there is still value in understanding how this subculture operates. The “vinyl community” stands as a striking example of one way in which Americans express anti-corporate values and shows how the marketplace can allow consumers to communicate anti-mainstream ideals through purchasing.

The locations of these retail shops are indicative of the community that purchases vinyl in Lancaster. Less than a block away from Mr. Suit, the Pennsylvania College of Art and Design sits across the street from the 2011 Occupy protesters. Local restaurants like Senorita Burrita and Carmen & David’s Creamery signify that the community appreciates small business. Adult
bookstores and small businesses, mixed in with art galleries and coffee shops suggest that the area appreciates non-mainstream markets. In fact, In Lancaster city, the only chains are a few drug stores (CVS and Rite Aid), two chain restaurants (a McDonald’s and a Subway) and one local franchise (Isaac’s). Neighboring Mr. Suit there is a tattoo parlor. Stan’s is just one block removed from the Prince Street Café, and Lancaster’s own Fulton Theater. It is not only through music that the patrons of Stan’s and Mr. Suit seek out unconventional markets, but rather that vinyl represents just one way that this community appreciates localized, non-mainstream commercialism. Lancastrians are still consumers, but their local consumerism does not come at the hands of large corporations and public companies. Rather, small businesses thrive in an urban setting.

Lancaster in general has been experiencing an urban renaissance in recent years. A recent article in the *Keystone Edge* reports “Since 2007, downtown Lancaster has had a net growth of 110 new retail business. In 2011, the city had $95.3 million in expansion, an increase of 63 percent over 2010.”¹ This expansion comes not from corporate-sponsored economic growth, but rather through local businesses and a resurgence of the arts. The article continues that “In 2009, the Local Economy Center and Center for Opinion Research of the Floyd Institute for Public Policy at Franklin & Marshall College…found that the arts district has a $73 million economic footprint and that more than 1,000 jobs have direct connections to art and culture organizations.”² The context of urban renewal via cultural institutions provides the social origins for musical subcultures to emerge. The vinyl community develops from the expansion of institutions of fine art, local businesses, and small city consumerism.

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² Ibid.
This cultural explosion, based in anti-corporate practices is not without a musical boom, either. In 2007, WXPN-FM 88.5 expanded from Philadelphia to include Lancaster in its broadcasting reach. A Lancaster Intelligencer Journal article from October 26, 2007 notes “WXPN is a noncommercial, member-supported radio service of the University of Pennsylvania.”³ This is important to Lancaster’s cultural landscape because it further proves the pervasiveness of anti-corporate practices within the city limits. Though WXPN does not just broadcast within Lancaster city, its existence within the city proves that Lancastrians seek out non-corporate avenues within broadcasting, too. While most musically oriented radio stations are for profit and sell advertising space, the member supported WXPN proves a division from this status quo. Lancastrians not only appreciate less mainstream practices in their physical businesses and shops, but also in their radio shows.

This landscape of independent business on a small scale emerges from an urban population’s urge to seek out authenticity through consumption. Sharon Zukin, a sociology professor at Brooklyn College writes in a discussion of art graduates “they share an expectation with wealthier lifestyle mavens that they can participate in a consumer society without compromising their own values.”⁴ While Zukin specifically focuses on art students, this idea can be expanded to understand the ways in which Lancastrians navigate urban consumerism. In a city whose market values rest heavily on local independently run businesses, the members of the community expect to retain their own sense of self-truth while partaking in American consumerism. Zukin continues “Downtown farmers’ markets and ethnic food stores underline

their (urban neighborhoods) images as oases of authenticity in a Wal-Mart wasteland.”

Through visiting Central Market (Lancaster’s Farmers’ Market one block away from Stan’s), sampling food from the myriad of independent restaurants, and sipping coffee from local cafes, a resident of Lancaster can actively retain their sense of authenticity by avoiding the multitude of chain stores and corporate enterprises that dot the outskirts of the city and its suburbs. Music is just one of the manifestations of this focus on authenticity.

But then again, there is no clear way to determine authenticity. Stanford scholar Glenn R. Carroll mentions “A common sociological observation stresses that authenticity is not a ‘real’ thing or something that can be objectively determined but rather a socially constructed phenomenon.” This passage illustrates how authenticity is by nature a subjective assessment. The act of purchasing a vinyl record is not necessarily authentic per se, but the perception that the analog sound is both closer to the “absolute sound,” and of better sound quality (two basic principles of the vinyl community to be discussed at length later) suggests that the vinyl community seeks out products closer to the “real” than mainstream ways of consuming music. In this way, the community searches for a kind of authenticity that they themselves create. Authenticity becomes constructed by the community based on the ways in which that community partakes in the marketplace. Instead of striving to attain some lofty pre-determined notion of what authenticity is, the vinyl community in Lancaster creates its own authenticity.

Cultural theorist Dean MacCannell uses Erving Goffman’s analysis of front and back regions to examine authenticity in tourist circles. The front region is where customers interact with employees of any certain establishment. The back region is where the employees go.

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5 Ibid. 725.
between “performances” and interactions with such customers. While this does not necessarily pertain to physical space, the front region is a performance that a cultural producer puts on for the general public, and the back region is that same person’s “real” or “true” self. MacCannell writes “Being ‘one of them,’ or at one with ‘them’ means, in part, being permitted to share back regions with ‘them.’ This is a sharing which allows one to see behind the others’ mere performance, to perceive and accept the others for what they really are.”

In Lancaster, the access to the back region is granted when a customer engages in conversation a store owner. The dialectic relationship that exists between the front and back region in a tourist setting can be slightly rethought in the Lancastrian vinyl community. Essentially, these stores are back regions as opposed to the modes of mainstream consumerism. These stores become back regions though standing as an example of the dialectical antithesis of mainstream commercial practices.

In music, the example of the dialectical thesis that occurs in retail shops would be when an employee of FYE or Best Buy walks up and asks a patron “You finding everything all right today?” This hypothetical example, a common trope within mainstream music retail, would demonstrate front region performance. The employee goes out of his/her way in order to fulfill the perceived notion of “good” customer service. This type of interaction does not occur at Mr. Suit or Stan’s. For one, the only employees at the two local record shops are the owners. While Mark Glessner, the owner of Stan’s very often helps customers find music, the conversation normally goes something like “you’re looking at X, here’s A, B, and C, you’ll probably like them too.” (A more in-depth analysis of these interactions comes further in the work). Mike Madrigale, the owner of Mr. Suit, on the other hand, rarely leaves the desk at the front of the store. Nevertheless, he has never seemed un-open to discussions of new, old, good, or even bad

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music during operating hours. In the end, the point is that the conversations that occur between patron and employee at the local shops do not seem like front-region performance, but rather demonstrate examples of back-region “realness.”

The existence of the record industry in Lancaster serves as a manifestation of the pursuit of authenticity in music. Bryant Simon when examining Starbucks writes, “Authenticity is difficult to define… People interested in the real, and seeking the real in the marketplace, look for products that seem more textured and less mass produced.”

Vinyl records fit precisely into this definition. In 2008, the vinyl LP accounted for $56.7 million of music sales nationally. This is compared to the $568.9 million that download albums accounted for in the same year. The market for vinyl record sales is about one tenth that of the digital world. Therefore, people who partake in the record industry as purchasers of vinyl represent a community specifically focused on seeking out underground culture. Purchasing vinyl asserts the consumers’ impetus towards non-mainstream options simply because vinyl is less popular than digital downloads. By buying LPs, consumers actively purchase less mass produced products. In this way, the vinyl-purchasing community links itself to the alternative, or underground.

As of 2010, vinyl is the only physical form of music that is growing in the market. Between 2007 and 2010, CD shipments have dropped from $7.5 billion to $3.4 billion. LP, on the other hand, has increased from $22.9 million to $87.0 million in the same time period. While CD shipments still produce a higher degree of profit, vinyl grows nevertheless. The inherent suggestion presented here is that the community searching for the real via music in Lancaster is growing. The very establishment of Mr. Suit in 2007 suggests a relative “newness”

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associated with the vinyl resurgence. There is nothing new about LPs or the vinyl formatting of
music, but rather a reevaluation of its purpose has occurred. That is to say that while the LP
once represented the mainstream option for music listening, in contemporary America, it
represents the alternative. It is through this medium that people actively seek out the genuine,
and very often this search leads people away from the mainstream.

Stan’s Record Bar and Mr. Suit Records have taken different approaches to selling music.
While Stan sells no new music and relies entirely on used music sales, Mr. Suit prides itself on
bringing in “New vinyl in at least once a week.”\textsuperscript{11} Stan’s Record Bar, on the other hand,
“stopped selling new releases when Wal-Mart started selling CDs cheaper than the wholesale
price.”\textsuperscript{12} This is a major point of difference between the two establishments. While Mr. Suit
makes sure to keep up with the new trends within the music industry, Stan’s seeks to rely on the
nostalgia surrounding the vinyl record business. This indicates the emergence of two distinct
markets within the vinyl record industry. Mr. Suit, established in 2007, focuses on the new,
“alternative” culture that consists of consumers who seek out non-mainstream forms of music
listening. In this way, vinyl itself, in an age of digital downloads and iTunes, represents a
cultural form outside mainstream commercialism. Either way, both businesses are inextricably
linked through the product they sell. Each takes a different approach to marketing the same
product: music. While the differences in approaches may seem striking, each taps into the same
impetus towards “indie” in different ways. Whether one digs through the used vinyl and CDs of
Stan’s, or excitedly waits for the new releases at Mr. Suit, in both scenarios the shopper
exemplifies the pursuit of a “genuine” alternative Lancaster culture through music.

The stores display significant continuities as well. One of these is the demographic makeup of the store. It is majorly young, white men. While one is much more likely to partake in a multi-ethnic experience at Stan’s Record Bar, rarely any Hispanic people can be seen digging through the boxes at either of the stores. In a city that is 39.3% Hispanic and 16.3% black, this seems a significant feat. Based on the statistics, such an ethnically and racially diverse urban landscape should foster a diverse crowd. But nevertheless, the demographic makeup reflects a largely male, largely white community. Of the customers interviewed, none were either Latino or African American, and only one was female. In no way does this suggest any racial or gendered hierarchy within the vinyl community, but rather that through extensive observations of the stores, it seems that the people who come regularly are usually men, and usually white. More often than not, they are young, as well.

The explanation for why the demographic is relatively monolithic in terms of white men could be as simple as thinking about the type of music in the stores. By and large, these shops sell music made by white men. A majority of the music sold could be loosely describes as some sort of “rock” music with a focus on guitars, drums and vocals. Most of the used music is made by bands who were once popular that still sell records based on either older generations re-discovering their favorites, or a younger generation discovering it for the first time. Most of the new music comes either from bands with cult followings or who are up-and-coming. Nonetheless, a staggering lack of rap, jazz, or even world/Spanish music seems to be the norm in each shop. While the expansive stock of multiple genres does exist within the stores, based on observations, the community seems to be white men listening to music that was made by white men.

Located on 118 W. Chestnut Street, Mr. Suit Records serves as Lancaster’s premier location for new and used vinyl. With an extensive collection of new records sitting next to locally-made cigar-box guitars for sale, Mr. Suit displays a connection to the community that provides it business. Neatly organized rows of LPs, EPs, and singles sit in wooden boxes that create rows for music lovers to peruse their favorite music. New releases and prominent records-for-sale sit displayed on shelves instead of in boxes. Music is always playing. Sometimes it is loud guitar-orientated rock, sometimes it is mellow acoustics that dominate the sound of the space. At the counter, local writers have left self-produced pamphlets that customers take if they are interested. All the while, 29 year old owner Mike Madrigale, with short dark hair and an enthusiasm for music matched by few, sits behind the counter in front of his computer, determining what song will come on next.

Mr. Madrigale, a young entrepreneur and a graduate of Kutztown University took time to discuss his role in the local, national and international transfer of records. Music is always playing in Mr. Suit. It is normally some sort of rock music (if the distinction “rock” is taken loosely), and it’s almost always bands that not a lot of people follow (I never recognize the music being played in Mr. Suit.). Though the store sells exclusively analog products (vinyl and VHS), the 29 year old owner, Mike Madrigale doesn’t always play music through the record player behind the desk. Sometimes it comes from the CD player (digital music). This, in itself suggests that the store represents an openness to digital music that not all of the vinyl community shares. An audiophile might not appreciate the use of digital music in this way. While Mr. Suit does not necessarily fit within the logical framework of a strict audiophile ideology, it does fit into the larger community of people who simply enjoy listening to records. The vinyl community,
fractured though it may be in modes of operation and means of expression, remains united on the basic principles that conjure its existence.

These basic principles that guide the vinyl community revolve around the perceived greater care for music than those who pursue more mainstream ways of acquiring and listening to music. Part of this is the belief in the physical format of music. Another facet of this community is the belief in “epistemophilia,” – the love of acquiring and sharing knowledge simultaneously. Also as part of the principles that bind the community is the conviction that vinyl has a better sound quality than CDs and mp3s. While this is a contested claim, nevertheless, the perception of the community remains that analog absolutely sounds better than digital. In this way, while the culture isn’t monolithic, the basic principles that guide the vinyl community remain the same. Some customers suggested that they like to support the artists, others like the artwork. Others still simply enjoyed having a tangible thing to go along with the music. So while the culture is fractured in some ways, it is simultaneously continuous in others.

Mr. Madrigale believes in the online community’s ability to market records. When interviewed about what makes Mr. Suit distinct from other record stores in Lancaster, Madrigale responded “I think variety and turnover (distinguished the store).”14 The combination of the new and the used music serve to set Mr. Suit’s apart. When further questioned about the store’s internet presence, Mr. Madrigale said “that’s (eBay) what helps with the turnover…a lot of business online is shipping classic rock records to places like Europe and South America.”15 Whereas one record could sit unsold in store, eBay allows Mr. Madrigale to ship the multiple copies that Lancaster’s public brings in according to demand without thought of the city’s boundaries. Mr. Madrigale related an anecdote about a storeowner in Russia with whom he

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14 Mike Madrigale, interview by author, November 30, 2011
15 Ibid.
trades on a monthly basis. This relationship simultaneously allows Mr. Suit to foster business via the internet and helps the Russian storeowner sustain his own business.

Ebay in particular represents a shift away from localized niche markets that are defined geographically. Scholar Jason Combs writes “the internet, specifically eBay, has significantly altered long-standards of acquisition and dispersal within the antiques trade.”\(^{16}\) The online flow of specialty goods creates a scenario that allows store owners to sustain businesses in communities that do not necessarily partake in their commerce. Because eBay serves as a major portion of Mr. Madrigale’s business, he keeps a storefront open in Lancaster while conducting sales to people in other parts of the country and even the world. In this way, a niche market stops representing a local community interested in purchasing similar products and starts representing an international community with similar interests. This revolution to specialty markets essentially erases the geographical limitations that had once confined the transfer of records nationally and internationally. In a way, many people use eBay as a mainstream way to access non-mainstream products. The connectivity that the internet provides helps to expand the persona of the “vinyl listener” from a small group of localized residents to an international grouping of people who all agree on the same thing: analog is best when listening to music.

This suggests a striking irony that goes along with using the internet to market records. That is to say that using a digital resource to market an analog product seems contradictory to the very principles that the alternative community prides itself. Michael Newman, in an article about pursuing authentic alternatives to mainstream societies, describes this community as “consumers

eager for movies, music, and other culture that do not conform to dominant commercial styles.”

This is not to suggest that the use of eBay is a dominant commercial style, but rather there are similarities between the dominant iTunes mode of business, and eBay’s. With both eBay and iTunes, the consumer uses the internet to electronically purchase music. In both cases, there is no tangible money transferred, everything is done electronically. One of the only discernible differences between the two is that with eBay, the consumer must wait for the shipment of the album, and with iTunes, the consumer receives the music instantly. Another key difference is that the eBay user does receive a record, while the iTunes user gets the digital version of the music. In this way, the definition of authenticity becomes skewed to some degree. While marketing the vinyl records serves as a way to tap into the alternative culture, using the same technology and overall strategy as iTunes calls into question just how outside dominant commercial styles the international trade of records is.

Nevertheless, Mr. Suit’s internet presence comments on the internationality of the vinyl revival. Mr. Madrigale continues “I easily do half of my business online… even though I’m here six days a week, eleven to six, and you have to be in Lancaster. Whereas on the internet, it’s always open, it goes the entire world.” To Mr. Madrigale, the opportunities of the international sale of records are only hemmed in by the limitations of the internet. In this case, this ideology opens his business to a plethora of new buyers. While he works the store from 11 AM to 6 PM six days a week, he can simultaneously access consumers the world over. eBay’s hours of operation are 24/7. Whether or not this questions the ties between authenticity and non-mainstream modes of sales remains irrelevant to Mr. Suit. It simply accounts for about half of

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18 Mike Madrigale, Interview by the author, November 30, 2011
the store’s business. In this way, Mike Madrigale can market a non-mainstream product in a relatively mainstream way in order to foster business. This helps him aid the autonomous alternative community in its search for the real in the marketplace with regards to the transnational flow of music.

The breakdown of the localization of the Lancaster vinyl trade suggests a questioning of just how independent and autonomous the market is. Matthew Bannister writes “It [indie music] is often represented as a relatively autonomous space, the product of isolated, marginal, local scenes, uncaptured by ideology, free of other pressures that mark the mainstream, but also free of high culture elitism.”

Matthew Bannister writes “It [indie music] is often represented as a relatively autonomous space, the product of isolated, marginal, local scenes, uncaptured by ideology, free of other pressures that mark the mainstream, but also free of high culture elitism.”

eBay displays how “local” does not always apply to the trade. The ease at which Mr. Madrigale can sell products in an international market shows that the autonomy that local retail shops retain comes into question at the hands of the internet. Because the internet connects people across the globe, niche markets become transnationally linked as they agree on ideology rather than being linked geographically. The connection that the virtual world provides suggests that even the smallest corner shops in cities can capitalize on international trends. Mr. Suit has taken advantage of the global resurgence of vinyl in order to sustain a Lancaster retail store. Mr. Madrigale relies on the local community committed to vinyl, as well as the internationally revolving around the trend to sustain a livelihood.

Just three blocks down Prince Street from Mr. Suit Records, another establishment, and a whole new attitude towards selling music can be seen through Mark Glessner, owner of Stan’s Record Bar. Mark, an aging man with thick aviator eye-glasses and long grey hair pulled back into a ponytail sat down with me to talk about his shop. Located at 48 N. Prince St, Stan’s Record Bar has the most extensive used record collection in Lancaster. The store is cluttered

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with old turn-tables, used equipment, and thousands of used CDs and records. The antique paraphernalia and dusty interior create a rustic feel that dominates the aesthetic of the space. Two rows of records separated by a wall running the length of the store make it less open and more crammed than Mr. Suit. Nevertheless music also constantly plays during the hours of operation at Stan’s, but it normally comes from the older cannon of American music. Again, I never know what’s being played, but it is most certainly always being played on a turntable. Periodically throughout the day, customers come in striking up conversation with owner Mark Glessner about what they want to purchase, or what records he can find for them. All in all, though cluttered, the space is friendly as patrons often chat as they dig through the used records.

Founded in 1953 by Andy Kerner, Stan’s Record Bar represents how vinyl record retail shops have survived the multiple transitions that have occurred in the music industry since Glessner’s acquiring of the shop in 1980. “In the spring of ’90, everybody walked in the door, nobody wanted vinyl.”

During this time, he noted “Everybody (other stores) dropped the records and became an ‘entertainment store.’” Although demand for CDs and cassettes seemed to outweigh the economic viability of running a record store, Glessner chose to maintain the integrity of the shop as a record store in name. This helps situate Stan’s in the context of searching for the real in the marketplace. It’s tough to make a value judgment about a specific establishment, but suffice it to mention that instead of following mainstream, Stan’s actively sought out ways to maintain its status as a record store while simultaneously sustaining a viable economic endeavor. If records are consumed by “subcultures of fans whose very identity…is premised on their perception of the music’s authenticity and on its autonomy from the

20 Mark Glessner, Interview by the author, November 28, 2011
21 Ibid.
mainstream,”

then Stan’s fosters this very notion of authenticity by remaining autonomous of the mainstream through maintaining itself as a record store. Because Stan’s embraced records throughout the transitions happening in the music industry, the store serves as a prime example of how autonomy from dominant cultural mores very often implies authenticity.

This authenticity is much different from the attitudes that Mr. Suit offers. That is not to suggest that there is an antagonistic relationship between the two businesses, but rather, each takes a distinct approach to marketing vinyl. Stan’s has no online presence. There’s no Facebook page, no eBay account, and the store generates income entirely based on sales that happen within the confines of the establishment. This invariably excludes Stan’s Record Bar from the international flow of analog music. Stan’s business policy guarantees that Mr. Glessner has no play in the international market. This suggests that the market for vinyl records in Lancaster persists as a niche in a local marketplace, rather than an expansive enterprise poised on shipping records globally. While Mr. Suit looks outward in a transnational sense to sustain its business, Stan’s looks inward at its own community. Stan’s is not a product of the vinyl resurgence, and therefore relies on the techniques that predated this revival in order to survive as a business.

When discussing new options for listening to music Mr. Glessner noted “if you invested nothing into it (music), you’re expecting nothing out of it, you’re not going to get anything out of it.” This is a particular quandary that he associates with the digitalization of music as it devalues music both in terms of sound quality and abstract personal value. When discussing the outward communication that goes along with listening to a record player rather than an iPod, Mr.
Glessner noted “so there you have you little niche culture of people who want to express or communicate more than the iPod people.”24 This sentiment fits in with his business strategy. Rather than try to acclimate to the new modes of selling music, whether that is online or through different media, Mr. Glessner relies on the community to provide the financial incentive to maintain a retail shop to keep his shop open. Where Mr. Suit attempts to reconcile the role of the internet in marketing records, Stan’s services a crowd that starkly opposes the values of the wired generation. Mr. Madrigale uses the internet in order to send his records worldwide; Mr. Glessner personifies the impetus to negate the internet and digitalized media and relies solely on the sales that his used records generate.

Mr. Glessner is a part of a community of people wary of the digitalization of music. Tara Brabazon and a group of other Popular Culture Collective members suggest “Now that the physicality of music is disrupted through digitalization, platform panic has erupted from musical purists.”25 Mark Glessner is among these purists. Although he does not resent anyone who chooses digital over analog, his store aims to provide top quality music to those who care. He believes in music’s ability to unite people with similar tastes and to express their common interests. Brabazon continues “Vinyl activated most of our senses: touch, as the stylus hit the groove, sight, through watching the revolving record, and hearing, with the crackling anticipation before the track commenced.”26 The visceral experience that vinyl provides is the reason Mr. Glessner is in business. He is a believer in vinyl as a form of expression that friends can gather around. If owning a record store is a labor of love, Mark Glessner shows endless amounts of it as he believes in his product and in the community that supports his business.

24 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
There is one similarity between the attitudes of the two shop owners. They both agree that their clientele base is comprised by all demographics. When asked about the typical customer, Mike Madrigale responded “It’s neat that it covers kind of all demographics… Let’s say a seventeen year old comes in and buys a Fleet Foxes (popular independent band) record. Later in the day, a fifty year old guy will buy a Fleet Foxes record.” This sentiment is embraced in Stan’s. In the same day that Mr. Glessner recounted a story of a thirteen year old girl requesting The Doors, over the course of the interview, a young African American man and middle-aged African-American woman came in requesting Eric Clapton and Tupac respectively. What is interesting about this sentiment is that it covers multiple genres of music. The people who purchase vinyl “nine times out of ten” are not hemmed in by a single genre of music. Folk, rap, electronic can be seen sitting on the shelf at Mr. Suit on a daily basis. The extensive used record collection at Stan’s offers everything from movie soundtracks to The White Stripes. While alternative culture is often linked to an independent aesthetic, in Lancaster, it is more about the media than the product. That is to say that Lancastrians purchasing vinyl take pride in purchasing vinyl, not in promoting any specific genre of music. In this way, indie culture is removed from indie music, and that is a phenomenon that is seen in both stores.

This seems contradictory to previous statements, but it fits in with the perceptions that the store-owners have of their shops. While the stores are somewhat demographically monolithic, the owners base their claims of diversity on their own moral values, not the observed realities of the customer base. While I would never deny the personal openness towards diversity each store-owner feels towards ethnic and racial minorities, observational experiences suggest that (more so at Mr. Suit) the demographic is mostly young men. In the relative scheme of

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27 Mike Madrigale, Interview by the author, November 30, 2011
28 Mark Glessner, Interview by the author, November 28, 2011
29 Mike Madrigale, Interview by the author, November 30, 2011
acceptability, no store owner would openly suggest ethnic or racial intolerance exists within their place of business. Nevertheless, this is not to argue that any racial, ethnic, religious, or gendered intolerance is in place at either store (or at any cultural business in Lancaster), but rather that the people who shop at these stores are normally the white male majority.

Though this is true, there is a strong connection between the revival of records in past years and independent music. Though independent music is literally defined by music produced by labels outside the big five (Sony Music Inc., Universal Music Group, BMG Entertainment, EMI Group, and Warner Music Group), the term “indie” often comes to define a certain aesthetic rather than a contract-management term. Vincent Norava and Stephen Henry describe the sound as including “the careful balancing of pop accessibility with noise, playfulness in manipulating pop music formulae, sensitive lyrics marked by tonal abrasiveness and ironic posturing, a concern with ‘authenticity,’ and the cultivation of a ‘regular guy’ (or girl) image.” 30 Though the assertion above serves to show the diversity of sound that Lancastrians enjoy, this is notable because nearly one hundred percent of Mr. Suit’s new releases can best be described as “indie.” So while each store does embrace diversity with regards to the music they sell, at Mr. Suit, there is a specific emphasis on independent music.

The Launch Music Conference, an annual Lancaster music festival also reflects the multiple genres that are covered by Lancaster’s vinyl community. Jeremy Weiss, the founder of the conference notes “it’s absolutely a genre-less conference.” 31 On the promotional conference guide, eight different categories of music are presented so that fans with specific musical tastes can find shows that they might like. These eight categories are: Americana/Country/Roots/Etc., DJ/Hip Hop/Electronic, Metal/Hardcore, Pop, Punk/Pop Punk, Rock/Alternative/Indie/Etc.,

31 Jeremy Weiss, Interview by the author, April 14, 2012
Singer/Songwriter/Folk/Etc., and World/Jam/Jazz/Other. In doing this Mr. Weiss markets the conference as looking out for the interests of a diverse crowd. By staging a local music conference, Jeremy clearly taps into a niche market. The only bands at the conference who have been popular on a national level are Rusted Root (who wrote and performed “Send Me On My Way,”) and Candlebox (a grunge band who wrote “Far Behind”), and receive significant national attention or national radio play. Simultaneously, through presenting such a wide range of musical tastes, he widens the demographic of people who might be interested. While it makes sense that the LAUNCH Music Conference does not necessarily gain attendance in the ways that popular music festivals such as Bonnaroo and Coachella do, Mr. Weiss very strategically widens the ranges of music in order to attract as many people, across genres, who are interested in Lancaster’s local music scene.

Vinyl is a sort of brand community within Lancaster’s landscape, according to the definition given by scholars Albert M. Muniz Jr., and Thomas C. O’Guinn. A brand community can be described as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand.”

Lancaster’s vinyl stores represent a manifestation of this unity about a single product. Though the LP itself is not a brand, the same principles that assess brand communities apply to vinyl listeners. Admirers of vinyl choose Mr. Suit and Stan’s over the much more convenient and often cheaper iTunes not for a lack of interest in convenience, but rather because a persona goes along with those who buy vinyl. They agree on their product and subscribe to the messages that that product advances. Vinyl listeners care about the music, to the extent that they go out of their way to acquire it in non-mainstream

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ways. Mr. Madrigale noted that customers drive as far as Harrisburg in order to shop at Mr. Suit, Stan’s, Angry Young and Poor, (a more specialized punk music record store in Lancaster) and CI Records. Vinyl is not tied down geographically because the seemingly limitless internet allows Mr. Madrigale to reach customers the world over. Vinyl is not even chained to one genre of music. Rather the admirers of records build their identity based on the purchases they make. Because they buy analog, they know more about music, care more about it, and are more interested in finding the real music than the people who illegally or legally download their music.

The vital differentiation that negates vinyl as being a brand community is that with vinyl, not all the money from purchases goes to the same company. Bryant Simon writes “Membership comes through buying.” In order to create a brand community, consumers must show the preference of a brand. For example, when a group of people consistently purchase Starbucks’ coffee because they all agree (consciously or subconsciously) that Starbucks is cool, a brand community is created. This gives the company more agency over what that identity created by the brand community is. Though the purchase of a turntable, amp, and records signifies membership to the “vinyl community,” there is no one brand that controls an invented identity. The money then goes to the record store, artist, and label. Whereas with true brands, the corporation receives all of the money, in the realm of music, more parties are involved with receiving the profit. The record store profits from the business, the label receives a portion for their role, and the artist receives royalties.

Though this is one similarity between iTunes and local shops, the aesthetic and moral implications surround the vinyl industry distinguishes the two. iTunes, as well as the vinyl

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34 Mark Glessner, Interview by the author, November 28, 2011
35 Bryant Simon, *Everything but the Coffee* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2009), 84
community use this idea of a brand community in order to sell products. Because iTunes represents the mainstream, it invariably prevents those searching for the real in the marketplace from using its resources. The two identities that the persona of iTunes and vinyl stores create, though both representing a type of brand community, are equally different. In the same way that a coffee enthusiast does not drink Starbucks, vinyl listeners do not buy from iTunes. Vinyl doesn’t have a corporate affiliation, and because of that it represents the anti-mainstream. The end result is that it seems more textured and authentic.

Another cultural institution within Lancaster’s urban landscape that adds to the subcultural vinyl community is the Chameleon Club. The Chameleon Club is a two-story bar located on Water Street that hosts live DJs for dance parties and small shows, and an upstairs stage area for the more well attended shows. While the club itself does not have physical connections to the purchase and sale of vinyl records, continuities between the principles of the “vinyl community” and supporters of the Chameleon Club can be seen. To be specific, the Chameleon Club has become an avenue through which fans of music could consume music in a non-mainstream marketplace. The founder of the club, and former owner Rich Rouff said during an interview “They (the community) developed a trust with me and what I was booking. I would just say ‘here’s a new band. Come check em’ out.’ And they would.”

In this way, the spread of musical knowledge came through word of mouth via the opinions of a club’s owner, rather than through top-40 radio, or television. During the interview, Rouff insinuates that the trust developed between the fans and management of the club gave Lancastrians an alternative to MTV and local radio when accessing new music. In this way, the avoidance of radio and mainstream music television stand as a clear example of Lancaster’s

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37 Ibid.
avoidance of mainstream musical practices. While this does not necessarily include the specific mention of vinyl listenership, the escape from the mainstream, in search of more authentic alternative persists in both the motives of vinyl listeners and Chameleon Club patrons.

Mr. Rouff becoming the source of musical knowledge to whom Lancastrians listen to about music develops the same didactic relationship that often occurs in Stan’s Record Bar. In the same way that Mr. Glessner would point younger store-goers to good music, Mr. Rouff becomes the source of good music as he books bands to play at his club. Using this as an example, it becomes clear that a significant trend regarding the flow of musical knowledge comes to light in Lancaster. The trend follows that the entrepreneur, with greater experience and expertise guides the general vinyl community to seek out and listen to new and original music. Whether it is Mr. Glessner pointing out good old bands in his store, or Mr. Rouff booking bands and people showing up on faith in his good taste, the trend emerges. Mr. Glessner exemplifies this trend on the small scale, as his interactions occur on a person to person basis. With regards to Mr. Rouff, he shows the larger scale aspects of the trend as his actions determine the participation of many.

This overall impetus towards the search for the authenticity in the context of the Chameleon Club come through the club’s presentation and intimate setting. Jeremy Weiss, owner of CI Records in Lancaster, and a club promoter for Chameleon Club shows notes of bigger venues “You walk in and you’re a number.” And in Lancaster “We’ve seen almost an inversion of that concept.” In a way, the subcultural music fans of Lancaster’s inversion of mainstream market concert-going experience suggests a thorough aversion to mainstream principles. Not only do the members of the vinyl community avoid mainstream processes through listening to vinyl, but also when they go to shows. In both the private sphere (sitting in

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38 Ibid.
one’s room listening to a record on a turntable), and the public sphere (at concerts) to the members of this community actively seek out more textured, less mass produced items and experiences in search for authenticity in music.

CI Records is another record store in Lancaster’s urban landscape that allows the vinyl community to exist. Though the store itself does carry mostly new and some used vinyl, the business is also an independent record label, and owner Jeremy Weiss serves as a promoter for the Chameleon Club. Jeremy, a thirty-something with dark hair parted down past his left eye was once a guitarist in a local band, a long-time partner of former Chameleon Club owner Rich Rouff, and now local store owner shares the same love for vinyl as both Mr. Glessner and Mr. Madrigale display. His store, though selling music primarily also keeps in stock a myriad of nick-knacks ranging from skateboard decks to tee shirts and even some belt buckles. CI Records does have a politically leftist vibe, as Obama pins, stickers, magnets, and even a bobble-head of the President himself can all be seen on the shelves. Be that as it may, the whole feel of the store revolves around music as band tee-shirts, CI hats, and most important of all, records, serve as the main stock of the place. Behind the counter, an employee (usually in the form of a young white man) sits in front of his computer, usually playing some kind of heavy rock or metal music. The space is not intimidating, but sometimes the music surely is.

But not only is Weiss responsible for a successful business; he also plans the LAUNCH Music Conference, which occurs within Lancaster’s multiple musical venues every April. 2012 will be the fourth year of the Conference. Beyond being a strict music festival, Mr. Weiss describes the weekend as “Conference by day and a music festival by night.” In fact, the festival part of the weekend is considered secondary to the Conference part, in Jeremy’s eyes.\(^{39}\) The dual purpose of the LAUNCH Conference shows that both the producers and consumers involved

\(^{39}\) Jeremy Weiss, Interview by author, April 14, 2012.
with the vinyl community care deeply about the acquiring and sharing of musical knowledge. With topics such as “How to Prepare for your Release,” “Booking and Touring 101,” and “How Do I Get Signed,” the Conference displays not only a connection to the music, but also a deep care to industry hopefuls. In essence, the Conference shows how the vinyl community shares its knowledge and love through music in a public setting. Another connection to vinyl occurred at this year’s conference, as a vendor at the Day Trade portion of the show (that occurs after the panels conclude and before the shows begin) sold classic rock records to the attendees. In a way, the conference’s goal is to promote individual relationships that simultaneously create and define the community. It creates the community by giving those who participate in the vinyl community an event to attend. It defines the community because the LAUNCH Music Conference has become the seminal underground music event in Lancaster over the past three years.

These relationships are, to Mr. Weiss, what serve as the makeup of the vinyl community in Lancaster. “Relationships in every industry are so crucial, and in today’s technological world it’s so much more difficult to develop a personal relationship, or to get some face-time with people.” He then went on to describe how conferences owe it to artists to provide them with access to quality information. Talking to Mr. Weiss, one would very easily how much he cares about creating a local community based on personal relationships and trusts. The Conference and Festival that he helps plan and execute operates under the notion that the goals of the event are to bring music down to a human scale whether that is in regard to production, performance, or even simply listening.

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41 Jeremy Weiss, Interview by the author, April 14, 2012.
To purchasers of vinyl, the LP and turntable represents a status symbol. This is not a status symbol in the sense that it displays wealth or monetary security, but rather the turntable identifies the owner’s savvy towards music. People who listen to records want to express that, to some degree, they are aficionados. Scholar Kieran Downes writes “what some audiophiles call ‘the absolute sound’ is not absolute in the sense of being universal, but is rather a value formed through the process of acquiring cultural capital.” This assertion exposes the claim that the audiophiles who are so concerned with the sound quality of vinyl seek what they express as “the absolute sound” in an attempt to generate cultural status. Owing a turntable proves that one cares deeply about the music. In this sense, the vinyl purchasers place a significant importance on being part of a selective community that simultaneously displays a deep care of music and a commercial denial of mainstream practices. The search for the “absolute sound” leads music connoisseurs, and this pursuit leads invariably towards analog and away from digital. In this sense, the creation of a community arises out of the search for the best quality music. While the quality of the music stands as an important aspect to the vinyl purchasers, the ownership of a turntable links them to an exclusive community that exists outside of mainstreams society.

It is not just an obsession of gaining cultural capital that defines the vinyl community, though. Lancaster’s vinyl community is a local formation of a dislocated national and international trend that revolves around the consumption of cultural capital and the further exchange of this knowledge. Henry Jenkins would refer to this spread of knowledge as a form of “epistemophilia,” through which participants in the community simultaneously gain and exchange information in social settings. John Kunz of Waterloo Records in Austin, Texas relates “There is still a tremendous romance for the record. When people bring in their collections,

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they’ll tell you about their attachments to the records. CDs never had that romance.”

To understand the vinyl community, one needs to recognize that it is not just a simple love of music that unites the constituents. Rather, the community’s existence is based on love of sharing information about music. While one can instantaneously download an entire album from the iTunes store or Amazon to their computer without leaving their house, there is an uniqueness to the ways in which people acquire records. The record occupies a tangible, visceral quality that downloads do not. To listeners of analog, the LP represents the artifact surrounding the ways in which the exchange of knowledge occurs.

This love of the sharing of music knowledge manifests locally as well as on a national scale. Mr. Madrigale gave his best estimate of how often customers talk to him when they look through his records for sale. He mentioned that roughly 75% of the people who come into his store talk to him. And of these customers, he guessed that 9 times out of 10, they’re talking about music. So the same romance that can be seen in the Austin community is reflected in Lancaster’s community. This clearly displays the main tenant of epistemophilia as customers routinely come into the store in order to discuss music as they search through the stacks of vinyl looking for their favorite bands.

At Stan’s, a similar trend emerges. Though often customers aren’t actively engaged in simple discussion, Mr. Glessner takes a certain didactic role in helping customers find the music they want. On a specific occasion, a young man wearing a black hoodie and sporting a scraggy beard came in asking Mr. Glessner about progressive 1960s and 1970s rock bands (none of which I’ve ever heard of). Nevertheless, the important aspect of the exchange is that Mr. Glessner assumed the role as the expert, and the young man actively asked him questions in

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44 Mike Madrigale, Interview by Author, March 2, 2012.
order to acquire knowledge. In this way, Mr. Glessner became the teacher of sorts as he took on a didactic role. The young man in the hoodie, on the other hand, continually asked questions as throughout the conversation in order to seek out what the “expert” deemed to be quality music. This, in a way, suggests a notion of epistemophilia because the two are exchanging knowledge, but it is distinct as the flow of knowledge is one way in this conversation. In Mr. Suit, the conversation reflect more a mutual exchange, whereas at Stan’s, the exchange reflects a transfer where Mr. Glessner spreads musical knowledge while his customers often raise questions instead of relaying information to him. In this way, Mr. Glessner becomes an expert, spreading knowledge rather than a participant in a two-way discussion.

This cultural capital that revolves around the music-lover persona is grounded in the vinyl purchasing community’s perception of sound quality differences between analog and digital recording technology. “Digital recording stores a sound wave’s form as a sequence of numbers…analog recording stores a sound wave’s shape as the shape of a record’s grooves.”45 This difference between analog technology and digital technology leads to what scholar Kieran Downes asserts that “a particularly dedicated group of music lovers felt that CDs had one little problem: they sounded awful (her emphasis).”46 While vinyl represents analog recording technology, CDs are recorded digitally. While mainstream commercial models favor the use of digital recording, small record stores like Stan’s and Mr. Suit rely on analog for business.

The perceived difference in sound quality is an aspect of the industry that the vinyl community takes a certain pride in. When asked about why he still markets vinyl throughout his tenure as owner of the store, Mr. Glessner responded, “It was mainly the sound quality, just my

consciousness wouldn’t allow me to just to carry just digital CDs. I mean, it would be unethical.

His strong favoring of records shows his connection to the community of people who care about the music. His business fosters the attitudes of these people by providing them the physical product on which they base their claims of authenticity. The anti-digital impetus that Mr. Glessner exhibits fits into the persona that the vinyl “brand” community fosters. In his view, he owes it to the customer to provide the best quality music. By maintaining his shop as a vinyl store, he simultaneously maintains the values of the vinyl community and pursues authenticity through pursuing non-mainstream business models.

This attachment to the superiority of analog sound quality has no definitive proof. Scholar Marc Perlman makes a distinction between “golden earism” and “meter readism.” By large, the “golden earism” attitude reflects audiophiles’ claims that analog recording technology retains the sanctity of the music. To audiophiles, the subjective assessment of listening to vinyl supports their argument that analog is superior. He writes “time after time, audiophiles have resisted the judgments of audio engineers, trusting their ears in the face of the dicta of scientific theories and engineering measurements.” In this way, audiophiles dismantle the connection between sound quality and scientific tests. To audiophiles, their experiences decide their attitudes.

Conversely, the “meter readist” attitude reflects the notion that sound quality is measurable, and that at the very least “meter readist” sympathizers can dismantle “golden earists” claims that they can distinguish digital and analog recordings. Parlman describes the ABX tests that essentially serve as a double blind test. A listener hears both analog and digital

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47 Mark Glessner, Interview by the author, November 28, 2011
recordings and is then asked to distinguish between the two. Perlman writes “These tests typically show that most people who claim to hear differences between components cannot do so under double-blind conditions.”

In this way, scientific tests suggest that audiophiles cannot, in fact, determine the difference between analog and digital by ear alone. This then undermines the claim that vinyl has an essentially superior sound quality when compared to digital recordings. Nevertheless, the claims that vinyl has a better quality persist.

Perlman’s ethnographic studies show an audiophile persisting in the superiority of vinyl in the face of scientific evidence that suggests otherwise. When describing a conversation with an audiophile, Perlman writes:

there's no debate whether analog is better than digital: it is. A cheap CD will beat a cheap turntable, but even a moderate turntable will blow away any CD. CDs are strident and flat; Jack can't listen to one for more than 15 minutes at a time. On a CD you can hear the pluck of a double bass, but on an LP [long-playing record] you can hear the body of the instrument, the wood.

This audiophile’s whole perspective is based upon his aesthetic assessment of the recording. Although in a laboratory, he might not even be able to distinguish the CD from the LP, he still leaves no room for argument in what constitutes the better sound quality.

This is important to the community because the question of sound quality becomes irrelevant. There’s cultural capital in vinyl not because it actually has a better sound quality, but rather because people who listen to vinyl agree that they perceive the sound quality to be better. The perception of superior sound quality unites the community. It is a point of agreement. Beyond that, the culture of vinyl believes in the sanctity of the music, and agree that vinyl does this, whether or not it actually sounds better. John Kunz, of Waterloo Records says “I have always maintained that we have these wonderful analog listening devices that don’t want to hear

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49 Ibid. 796
50 Ibid. 787
zeros and ones. They want sound waves, a human-size arc.” To audiophiles, the very process of coding music for digital recording serves as a way to desecrate it. Because analog recording techniques preserve the actual arc of the music in wave form, it is a more true representation of the live sound. In this way, audiophiles are pre-disposed to laud vinyl for adhering to preserve the music and criticize CDs and mp3s for breaking the music down into code.

In a New York Times article, Hans Fantel comments on the relative absurdity of the analog vs. digital debate over sound quality.

Their complaint about the digital encoding and recording of music is basically poetic in character. They see the digital process as a gruesome metaphor and envision Mozart being hacked into digital bits. The image is that of a hatchet. It is true, of course, that digital sound is cut up into about 41,000 separate "samples" each second - each being expressed as a number. But in playback, the musical waveforms are reconstituted from all these separate bits, and Humpty Dumpty is as good as new.

To audiophiles, music does not deserve the treatment that digital recording techniques necessitate. The notion that music is more than 1s and 0s persists well within the psyche of the vinyl-listening community. This exposes the underlying theme that vinyl listeners believe in music as an abstract ideal, to be preserved in its purest form. Digital recording technology defies this very principle. Because the process of breaking down the wavelength is essential to the digital recording technology, it can never appeal to the listener who desires to hear the music in a way as authentic as possible; an audiophile. To the degree that it is poetic, the vinyl listener understands that the sanctity of the music becomes primary, and any violation of this principle is deemed as an inauthentic way of listening.

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51 Gary Calamar and Phil Gallo, Record Store Days, From vinyl to digital and back again (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2009), 187
Though not every listener of vinyl would consider themselves audiophiles, the basic principles that bind the “vinyl community” persist. One customer of Mr. Suit suggests that he comes in at least two times a week and sometimes as often as five times per week. Also, when asked, why he spends so much time in the shop, he responded “I like digging through stacks of records.” In this way, the customer displays not only a deep commitment to vinyl, but also to Mr. Suit and Mr. Madrigale in the process. This particular customer does not shop at Stan’s, but suggests that Mr. Suit’s “distinct personality” draws his attention. He likes that Mr. Madrigale keeps up with new releases, and noted that Mr. Suit carries stuff that is “more my musical taste.” While he never once talked about the hacking of the precious sound wave into many samples, he did reflect that the tactile album itself is a big part of why he chooses vinyl over digital. That he prefers Mr. Suit suggests that he buys into a brand community, but his commitment rests with vinyl, and just seems to prefer Mr. Suit over Stan’s. While this would at first seem to represent a brand community, Mr. Suit, or Stan’s for that matter, does not make any claims as to what the community is based on. Mr. Madrigale and Mr. Glessner simply provide the music they have accumulated, and people shop at either store based upon their personal preferences.

Vinyl listeners stake their claim to genuine-ness based on a deeper care for the music. When analyzing the dance music industry of England, David Hesmondhalgh writes “the lack of a star system within dance music concentrates attention on ‘the music itself’, rather than on personality and ‘image.’” Though independent music does not have a direct correlation with dance music, its situation outside of the five major labels suggests a lack of emphasis on the star. Also, the existence of a multitude of smaller labels in comparison to the “big five” majors shows

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53 Anonymous Customer, Interview by the author, March 2, 2012
54 Ibid.
that independent labels, at the very least, attempt to show more of a care for music. While the major labels invest in producing less artists that are more popular, the business strategy of independent labels is to diversify the number of bands they sign in order to access the multiple demands of vinyl listeners. Evidence of this arises in the multiple genres of music Mr. Suit offers, and through the thousands of used records that Stan’s has in stock.

Not all storeowners have such an aversion to the digitalization of music. When discussing the topic of the internet and music, Mr. Madrigale announced “both of them (vinyl and digital formatting) aren’t mutually exclusive. Once a month, someone will come in angry and think if you buy records, it takes away your iPod. It really doesn’t.”\textsuperscript{56} Again, Mr. Madrigale navigates the line between digital and vinyl as he seeks the attention of the vinyl resurgence’s purchasers. By maintaining an open mind about the different formats of music, he can tap into both the community staunchly against digitalization, and groups who sync their iPod to include all of the vinyl they purchase. A typical new commercial release on vinyl comes with a free download code, which essentially allows buyers to download the music they purchase to their iTunes. It’s not affiliated with the iTunes store, but nonetheless, a purchase of a new analog record comes with the digital mp3 as well. Mr. Madrigale continues “especially with the new stuff, you have the record if you have time to listen to the record, you got the download if you want to listen to it in the car or jogging.”\textsuperscript{57} While his ownership of a record shop suggests his commitment to the sanctity of the LP, Mr. Madrigale also accommodates those who like to listen to digital music.

Also, what is brought to light here is the connection between the authenticity of using vinyl and the further validity of using records to seek out genuine music. While to a certain

\textsuperscript{56} Mike Madrigale, interview by author, November 30, 2011
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
degree, the very usage of analog music suggests the search for the real in the marketplace, another analytical step can be taken to examine the music consumer listen to. It is difficult to judge whether or not “indie” is more authentic than “non-indie” music, but rather it is important to stress that part of “indie” music’s agenda is to present itself as authentic. Therefore, the purchasers of independent music on the media of vinyl assert their concern with authenticity. In their minds, vinyl represents a genuine way to listen to music, and further, independent music represents authentic music. So therefore, to the consumer, independent music on vinyl represents the highest possible degree of authenticity within the marketplace in terms of music. Whether or not this is true is not at hand, but rather, the community’s emphasis on genuineness suggests that the pursuit of the real manifests itself through record sales.

This can be widened out to a national sale because, as of 2003, independent music sales are expanding. The Christian Science Monitor reports “Profits (for independent labels) are up – in some cases 50 to 100 percent. That’s in contrast to overall album sales, which dropped about 11 percent in 2002.”\(^5^8\) This expansion in a time of general slump suggests that independent crowds are growing nationally, and have been for quite some time. As seen through the growth of the vinyl industry in recent years, the impetus towards independent music in 2003 physically manifests itself through the record trade by 2007. What independent music has done is to tap into the general search for authenticity in music in order to turn a profit. This is not to accuse independent labels or artists of being in-genuine, but rather to assert that their focus on genuineness fosters a crowd with like-minded principles. To find authenticity in music is to find independent music, and this genuineness manifests itself through vinyl records.

So what? Why does this analysis of a relatively tiny national trend within an even less nationally significant city matter at all? Bryant Simon, whose method and analytical framework, have been significant influences on this work writes “In a sense, Starbucks is us, the product of large powerful social forces combined with millions of mundane and prosaic choices.”

This notion can be taken from the analysis of Starbucks and applied to the “vinyl community” within Lancaster and throughout the country. Stan’s, Mr. Suit, CI Records, and The Chameleon Club all operate under the same basic tenants of American capitalism. None of them follow business modes extraordinarily unique in any way. To the owners, success isn’t just an expression of anti-mainstream political, social, or individual feelings; it is their livelihoods. It is true (as I have argued) through the commercial world of vinyl the community express its membership, but the fact remains that the members of the community operate under the same notion of capitalism that the person downloading a single on iTunes operates. The members of the vinyl community partake in American consumerism just like anyone going to a mall to buy CDs, or someone purchasing an album on iTunes. These consumers just make their choices based on a certain set of principles in order to avoid the stigma of “buying into” the standards of mainstream commercialism. So in a sense, Lancaster’s “vinyl community” might not be “us,” but rather, it is “part of us,” and for that reason, it deserves significant analysis. And what the “vinyl community” succeeds in is a focus on a genuine set of principles regarding the consumption of music and transfer of musical knowledge.

But it’s also more than that. It’s not just about the music, the industry, the vinyl player at all. These people who listen to vinyl are just a small part of a sort of urban renaissance that happens in Lancaster. About two miles from these shops, and within the reach of the Red Rose Transit (Lancaster’s bus system) there’s a mall. The Park City Mall has within it a FYE. At this

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FYE, there are more different products sold, as DVDs, video games, posters, toys and other tech products can be found on the shelves. But the people who shop at the records stores downtown are not the same people who are at the FYE. Universally without exception, every customer interviewed who lives in and around Lancaster noted that the record stores were not the only local businesses that patronize. They go to the bars, bookstores, restaurants, and even the Central Market. By in large, the vinyl community rejects the mores of big corporation suburban commercialism. In Lancaster, people seek intimacy. On the off-chance someone comes into Mr. Suit and wants to talk about something other than music, Mr. Madrigale mentioned that the topic of conversation is normally about local businesses.\(^{60}\) They trust Mr. Madrigale, Mr. Glessner, Mr. Rouff, and Mr. Weiss to provide the music they want on the format they prefer. But by participating in the larger-scale focus on local shops, these people not only reject mainstream consumption of music, but mainstream consumption in general. The vinyl community invests in its community, and their participation in the realm of music reflects a small part of a larger movement. While the Park City Mall is always packed, and the FYE always makes money off of CD and DVD sales, the sparse customers of Mr. Suit, Stan’s, CI, and the packed shows at the Chameleon Club represent a crowd that focuses on the intimate, personal relationships and a support of a local community. These relationships develop when people go to the same store five times a week or go to shows because they trust the owners’ musical taste. Music is just one way in which this revitalization of the urban Lancaster landscape develops.

This is something that everyone I talked to commented on. One customer related “you hear about stores, and you want to check it out yourself, and you really begin to love the town.”\(^{61}\) It is this love of the town that pulls the vinyl community together in such strident ways. But

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\(^{60}\) Mike Madrigale, Interview by the author, March 2, 2012.

\(^{61}\) Anonymous Customer, Interview by the author, April 21, 2012.
once more, it is about more than just the stores. The same customer continues about local businesses “You want to be a part of the town, and you want to know everyone in the town. And you do that by relating to the places in the town (that) are what make it something that you love.”62 It’s the focus on the community of Lancaster that what makes it simultaneously unique and vibrant. Although at no point did any customers display an explicit disdain for larger corporations, their local consumerism suggests a community-wide rejection of mainstream, corporate consumerism. Furthermore, the attachment to the people of the community unites that very community. It is Mr. Glessner helping his customers find their music. It is Mr. Madrigale opening his store at midnight because people are so eager to get first dibs on record store day releases. It is Mr. Weiss putting on an annual conference in order to help bands trying to “make it” while simultaneously entertaining the vinyl community for a whole weekend every year.

Lancaster’s music scene is tied directly to the record industry. Whether one is a fan of the 58 year old Stan’s, or an avid pursuer of new music via Mr. Suit, the new and the old work cohesively in order to satisfy a diverse crowd. Though each establishment takes a distinct business strategy, they each tap into the same niche market in different ways. Stan’s used record collection is unparalleled in the Lancaster climate. Mr. Madrigale’s collection of new commercial records and use of international business distinguishes Mr. Suit as an avid participant in burgeoning new interpretation of analog music. Either way, both businesses look to entertain the crowd of consumers who seek authenticity in the market place. The search for the real in music led to vinyl in Lancaster, and this is a sentiment that is reflected nationally. The expansion of independent markets and vinyl as a mode of listening to music in a time of overall contraction suggests that Lancaster’s music scene fits in a national framework. While many argue that the music industry is in decline as a whole, local establishments like Mr. Suit and

62 Ibid.
Stan’s prove otherwise. Rather, though the market for music shrinks, as long as niche markets stay focused on pursuing the real in the marketplace, the vinyl industry will maintain its growth. As long as Mr. Suit and Stan’s provide the best new and used records, Lancaster will listen.
Bibliography


