

# EDITORIAL

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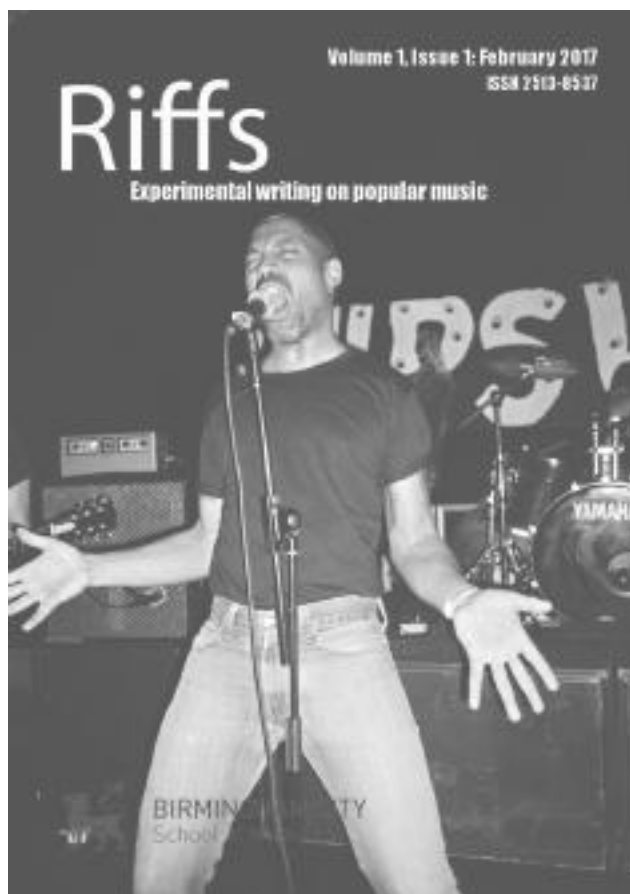
What we had thought to be an object was revealed as what I would call a *thing*. And the thing about things, if you will, is that far from standing before us as a *fait accompli*, complete in itself, each is a 'going on'—or better, a place where several goings on become entwined.' (Ingold, 2010: 96)

'Repelled by commerce and commodities, the romantics became wary of *things* in general. Repelled by what we have come to call materialism, they lashed out at materialist science, at the analysis of the lived world into objects and more objects. Music seemed to resist that analysis.' (Eisenberg, 2005: 12)

When we started creating *Riffs* in 2016, there wasn't any question in our minds that the journal should exist as a physical *thing*, as well as an online, open-source publication. Thinking back on it now, I'm not sure that there was even much of a discussion about whether we'd print it. It just seemed obvious to us – a foregone conclusion, or as Ingold might put it, a *fait accompli*. In spite of the fact that we, as postgraduate students studying and working at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR), had most likely not accessed a single physical journal over the course of our studies, a physical journal was always a significant part of our collective vision. Regardless of the advanced (and ever advancing) digitalisation of music, culture, and indeed academia, it just *felt* important somehow that this thing that we were creating needed to exist outside of the digital intangibility that we had become accustomed to, and be given form and matter in the corporeal world. Maguadda (2011: 16) notes that the digitalisation of music and culture, perhaps paradoxically, might be seen as a 'process in which the reconfiguration of the relationship between materiality and culture leads to a renewed role played by material objects in people's life and activities' (Maguadda 2011: 16). A such, our approach to the development of *Riffs*, to my mind at least, might be seen as an outcome of such reconfigurations – a refocusing on the material meanings of things *in relation to* (as opposed to in opposition to) their digital counterparts.

And so, in February 2017, the inaugural edition of *Riffs: Experimental Writing on Popular Music* was launched, with physical copies going into physical hands at our physical launch event in Birmingham City University's Parkside building. *Riffs* had become a *thing*. And, as Ingold reminds us in the above quote, the thing about *things* is that they are best understood as 'goings-on', or better 'a place where several goings on become entwined' (2010: 96).





*Riffs: Experimental Writing on Popular Music*, Volume 1, Issue 1. Published February 2017

The framing of *Riffs* as a 'place where several goings on become entwined' is an apt one. Across the journal's existence, its materiality has been a core (if generally unexamined) aspect of the *Riffs* project. Inspired by DIY arts and activist practices, we set up 'zine-making workshops, working with festival attendees, conference goers and students alike to materialise their musical ideas, experiences and ambitions in the form of short-run printed fanzines. The first such activity, a 'zine-in-a-day workshop at *Surge in Spring II* festival in 2016, prompted a whole host of 'zine-making activities and events. From the special risographed 'zine edition of the journal drawn from the work of attendees of the 2018 *Crosstown Traffic* IASPM conference, to 2019's collaboration with the *Home of Metal* project on the *To Break a Wall* 'zine, which explored heavy metal in Cold War era Eastern Europe, these short-scale projects, aimed at materialising knowledge and experience, became a core part of our practice, and came to shape the form, format, and identity of *Riffs* as a publication, as a team, and as a *thing*. While the journal undeniably exists as (and is, for the most part,

consumed as) an online, digitalised publication, its meaning is also produced and shaped through its materialisation via corporeal practices within physical spaces - forms of 'hybrid arrangements between old and new', each with its own 'dynamic of cross-fertilization' (Bartmanski and Woodward 2015: 165).



*Create / Review / Print – A Special IASPM Edition of Riffs*. Published September 2018

So, when I was asked to take on editorship of the journal for this special issue, the decision to focus on materiality seemed a similarly forgone conclusion. Coming to the end of a book project on *Media Materialities*, and off the back of a post-doctoral project on *Material Reflections*, as well as a series of publications on the spatial materiality of live music spaces (co-authored with *Riffs* co-managing editor Sarah Raine, and former co-managing editor Craig Hamilton) I found myself starting to suspect that my own thinking on the materiality of music and media was at risk of becoming rigid and solidified – standing still, complete in itself, like Ingold's *fait accompli*. What better way to reinvigorate and activate that sense of curiosity about the material world than by curating a range of new perspectives, and bringing them together in a place where each as a 'going-on' can become newly entwined?

To my delight, the call was met with a torrent of enthusiasm and an abundance of vibrant, innovative and creative takes on the nature of popular music's materiality – so much so, in fact, that rather than choose between them, we've opted for this to be the first of a special double-issue on Popular Music Materialities. As Hoder (2012) notes, the material meanings of things are never fixed or final, as these things themselves are constantly in motion. The contributions that make up this issue first issue are very much representative of the polysemy and flux of materiality as a concept that Hoder describes, and the breadth and plurality of musical materialities which constitute music as a thing in the corporeal world. We open with Philip Arneill's account of communal listening to Japanese jazz in East Belfast, a reflection on the materiality of music listening spaces, recorded music objects, and indeed the spatial-geography of cities as shaping our relationship with musical moments and media. Next, Ian Sinnett reflects upon the material memory of hip-hop, offering an analysis of the ways in which cultural memory is both stored within and objectified by popular music forms and formats. Niccolò Galliano offers us a thoughtful provocation as to the material and musical meanings of a vinyl record without sound in his reflection on the unconventional 2015 reissue of Francisco López's *La Selva* album. Meanwhile, Tyler Sonnichsen explores the psycho-geography of listening in his playlist-accompanied photo essay overlaying Suede's *Singles* atop of a biographic journey around Madrid. Erin Cory and Bo Reimer's ethnography of 'Too Cute to Puke' – a 'strictly female-fronted dance party' based in Malmö, Sweden – outlines the role of vinyl records as boundary objects which materialise the socio-cultural values inherent to the scene's participants. Finally, Yorgos Paschos' contribution considers the materiality of heritage in grassroots venues, reflecting upon the materiality of the venue as a space comes to act as a living archive of popular cultural heritage.

This issue, then, becomes a place where these article as *things*, or goings-on, become usefully and idiosyncratically entwined. It also comes, perhaps serendipitously, at a moment where the editorial team are in the process of reflecting upon the future shape and form of *Riffs*. The decentralisation of the journal from the BCMCR in Birmingham, and the migration of the editorial team to new cities, countries, and careers, brings about material change to the processes and practices through which *Riffs* is produced. Likewise, the resulting emergence of a truly international team located across the UK, Europe, Australasia and North America, coupled with a sensitivity around the impact of the printing and shipping on our carbon footprint, confronts us with the reality that *Riffs*' materiality as a physical printed *thing* is increasingly impractical and incompatible with the internationalised aspirations of the editorial team.

As such, the debates and explorations of the materiality of music and culture contained within this special issue act also as a reflection upon the ongoing changes to the form, format, and materiality of *Riffs*. If you find yourself reading this, and thinking that you might be interested in shaping the materiality of this next phase of *Riffs* as a *thing* then do, please, reach out.

Because the thing about *things* is that they are constantly in motion.

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## References

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