

Bandness

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Just as contemporary art absorbs objects and cultural phenomena that are *not yet art* into its orbit, so too has rock and pop music become increasingly omnivorous at its definitional borders. Core to these analogous developments is the mythologization of the figure of the “band” as a creative agent and “world-maker.” These shared absorptive capacities in art and music bring us the question at the heart of this essay: What does a rock band have in common with a work of contemporary art? Although this might initially appear to be a rather odd line of enquiry, we found this question sufficiently intriguing to actually “form” a band—named the Ghosts of Nothing—to perform an artist function within the “artworld.”¹ And it is with this particular collaborative mutation of the artistic function in mind that we will attempt to tease out the slippery notion of “bandness.”

Although the ontology of music—including popular and rock music—has, in general terms, been the focus of much scholarly activity in recent decades, the ontology of bandness as a specific topic within this expansive field has received surprisingly little attention.² As John Andrew Fisher observes, there is an ontological complexity to rock music—which he distinguishes from both popular and classical music—that arises from “whole domains of aesthetic interest” that are not necessarily as evident in other musical genres.³ Fisher, Gracyk, and others have identified the centrality of recordings to any proper account of the ontology of rock music.⁴ We suggest that the elusive quality of bandness also features prominently in this ontological landscape and is important for both rock and other forms of popular music. Our aim, in what follows, is not to develop a systematic account of all the relevant issues, but rather to offer a preliminary sketch of the implications of pursuing one particular line of thought in what turns out to be an intriguingly multi-faceted problem.

Let us open with the following proposition: Although a band might produce material artifacts and sensorial affects, its perceived existence is predicated upon a

consensually recognized, although not uniformly projected, immaterial fiction somewhere in space and time. At first glance, “immaterial,” “virtual,” or “fictional” bands are the exceptions that prove the rule. Imaginary creative works can only be experienced when we imagine their effect in the world. Yet how do we transmit these imaginary effects from one mind to another? The (impossible, real-world) existence of a non-existent band frustrates this as we attempt to imagine effects designed to preclude the imagining of effects. However, a nagging doubt persists. Are fictional bands—or, indeed, immaterial works of art more generally—ever really immaterial? Just as digital works require physical networks, hardware devices, and electricity to be physically perceivable, concepts require physical organic structures to be conceived, borne in mind, and communicated to others. Today, as a consequence of this unequivocal fact, it is generally accepted that the dematerialization of conceptual art was never actually possible. By contrast, contemporary “postconceptual art,” as is usefully described by Peter Osborne, is understood in terms of a dynamic mutual insufficiency of conceptual and aesthetic dimensions activated through processes of fictionalization.⁵ So, in what kinds of ways then, might our fictional band the Ghosts of Nothing, actually “exist?”

The flawed suggestion that a creative work might be immaterial has been put forward by several thinkers over the last century.⁶ Notwithstanding the fallacy underpinning this claim, when distilled to its central premise, it nevertheless serves to highlight the way in which interpretation of any physical artifact or gesture is always highly dependent upon an invisible informational backstory. The depth of that backstory inevitably varies between different individuals and groups. For champions of this view, the aesthetic procedure involves artist and audience jointly realizing certain mental states, and as a consequence, art is fundamentally expression.⁷ This expression is then individually decoded in light of an intersubjectively agreed context, that is, culture, which is constantly changing, fragmenting, recombining, and mutating. Consequently, as this argument goes, a work of art is not an artifact at all, just as a song doesn't need to be played or written down in order to exist in a mind—as an imaginary thing—and nowhere else. The actual making of the tune is therefore the physical creation of an imaginary tune. However, as cognitive neuroscience reveals, even an entirely imaginary melody is still associated with neuronal traces in specific

areas of the brain, and is therefore irredeemably physical, at least in some small part.⁸ And herein lies the Achilles' heel of any proposition which claims that works of art—or indeed bands—can ever be absolutely and completely immaterial.

The idea that art exists in the space of ideas, feelings, values, and associations formed around certain things or events seems to make sense, and can readily be accepted, up to a point. However, as Jeffrey Strayer demonstrated in his 2007 book *Subjects and Objects*,⁹ even the most immaterial works at the outermost limits of abstraction/conceptualism still invariably require something that is irreducibly material—a “public perceptual object” to use Strayer’s term—which “points,” possibly through a sequential chain of multiple intervening immaterial imaginings, to the intended conceptual endpoint. Such material beginnings may well be very slight indeed, perhaps just a few words or a sketchy image inked on a page or pixelated on a physical computer screen, but nevertheless, material they stubbornly remain. How the intended conceptual or immaterial endpoint of these material beginnings is interpreted—whether as artwork, band, or something else—depends, in turn, on the cultural context(s) in which the material object(s) is considered, by a perceiving audience, to have the potential to be meaningfully interpreted in certain ways and under certain conditions. To simplify his meticulous analysis, Strayer shows us that, minimally, even the most abstracted and dematerialized work of art depends on:

- At least one public perceptual object
- At least one perceiving subject
- The subject’s appreciation of an artworld¹⁰ context in which the object is interpreted

Mindful of Strayer’s analysis, we will now attempt to demonstrate that an analogous proposition holds for our elusive socio-cultural category of bandness.

So, what are the minimum ingredients for a band? What evidence is required in order to accept that a band actually exists? “Live” performances are clearly not mandatory, as exemplified by bands such as the Monkees (initially), the Dukes of Stratosphear (an alter ego of XTC), or even the Beatles, who famously ceased touring altogether but certainly did not cease to exist as a band. A lack of recordings is also no obstacle,

as the existence of countless garage bands will attest. Virtual performances, including those by parodic or fictional bands, are evidently one means of coming into being as a band—as exemplified by Spinal Tap, Flight of the Conchords, and the Rutles. So, it might appear that some kind of musical performance is essential, whether filmed, televised, virtual, or live. The fact that each of these fictional bands eventually went on to also perform live concerts and release records, just like “real” bands, might be interpreted as *prima facie* evidence that some form of perceivable *music* is indeed essential. However, to show that this is not the case, consider the case of completely fictional bands that have never played a note of music, live or otherwise, and possibly never will.

Such amusical bands can and do nevertheless exist as memes in popular culture. There are numerous examples. Take, for instance, Bennie and the Jets, the subjects of the song of the same name from Elton John’s *Yellow Brick Road* (1973) album. Or if not fully-fledged memes, at least as literary references well-enough known in certain quarters; here we could point to Billy Barf and the Vomitones (from Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland* (1990)) or the Blow Goes (from Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)). What about the suggestion that a band is a uniplural descriptor, and should therefore have at least two members, if not more? This criterion is quickly negated through the example of one-member bands such as Nine Inch Nails (really Trent Reznor). Many bands have also meaningfully existed for extended periods with only one member. Dave Grohl, for example, was effectively the only member of the Foo Fighters during the recording of their first studio album. Similarly, Billy Corgan has been the only member of Smashing Pumpkins since 2009. Marina of Marina and the Diamonds is now simply referred to as Marina. Our list could go on.

This gloss of variations than run close to the minimal limits of bandness demonstrates that, if it is indeed a coherent cultural category (as common usage would suggest), then all the usual attributes—music, performance, individually identifiable members, and so on—*may* be present in reality. But it would seem that none of these attributes are finally absolutely essential for a band to be considered to exist. This much is apparent from the examples of the fictional bands cited above, whose existence depends merely on being *named*, in a book, song lyric, or film, and nothing more. No

music has ever been, nor ever needs to be, played by these bands. No photos or interviews exist nor need ever exist. No members need to be identified. All that is required in these cases is: (1) at least one—but possibly no more than one—public perceptual object (e.g., a name) able to be experienced (in a book, recording, or film), by (2) a single perceiving subject, in (3) a cultural context that allows for the *possibility* of inferring the existence of a band from perceptual experience only. In other words, the minimal limits of bandness are just as Strayer concludes for art at the outermost minimal limits of abstraction.

It might be argued that fictional bands do not qualify as proper bands. However, the examples of Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band and the Dukes of Stratosphear remind us that the boundaries between fiction and reality can be very blurred indeed. Moreover, any demarcation along these lines is vulnerable to sudden reversal in light of subsequent developments. Take again, for example, the transformation of Spinal Tap from parodic fictional film band to touring live band with “follow-up” albums no longer linked directly with the original film. Or to cite another example, the animated band Gorillaz have also played live in concert as holographic projections alongside actual physical appearances from guest performers such as De La Soul, and Mick Jones and Paul Simonon of the Clash.

It would seem that the threads of categorical continuity can be stretched very thin indeed and yet, somehow, not entirely break. Consider the appropriation of the name Heaven 17—another fictional band first presented in Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*—by a real band formed in 1980 by two departing members of the Human League. While disambiguation may be important in certain contexts, it would seem that, at a higher level of abstraction, Heaven 17 can be legitimately used as a band name which refers to a cultural category that is large enough to contain both Burgess' fictional band and the real synth-pop band of the same name. More tenuously, consider the list of bands whose names came from book titles with no obvious association with music; think Belle & Sebastian, Soft Machine, Steppenwolf, and the Doors (to name just some). The more we multiply examples, the more we find that the accrual of newly-sedimented layers of meaning over time is not the exception but rather the rule of bandness. Our first observation is that whatever else a band may be, it is an inherently

dynamic category, fundamentally a temporal *process*, subject to continual changes—even major discontinuities—in any of its constituent parts and ontological dimensions.¹¹

Perhaps, we might suppose (in desperation), the *only* mandatory constant is the *name*. But once again, we don't have to look very hard for examples that throw even this into doubt. Shihad, for example—originally named after a term used in David Lynch's 1984 film *Dune* (based on a Frank Herbert novel)—renamed their band as Pacifier following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In an amusing press release issued on the same day as Shihad's name change, punk band Frenzal Rhomb mockingly announced that they would thereafter claim the name Shihad. Later, regretting their decision, Pacifier would change their name back to Shihad in 2004. (Here, we are also amusingly reminded of the Monty Python sketch about a band that continuously changed its name.) Name changes are certainly not uncommon events in the history of bands. Famously, the Silver Beetles became the Silver Beatles, and then finally the Beatles in mid-1960, but perhaps few would insist that these names don't all (more or less) refer to the band we would accept as the real Beatles, albeit in their earliest days. Other complications can also muddy the waters without totally undermining the resilience of a band name in common use. For example, Ringo Starr, arguably pivotal to any mainstream understanding of what “the Beatles” connotes as a band, only joined the group in mid-1962. And when the Beatles performed in Australia with a replacement drummer (Jimmy Nicol) because Ringo was unavailable due to illness, audiences still accepted that they were legitimately witnessing the Beatles play live. Evidently, individual members can come and go, while a band as a particular socio-cultural entity carries on.

Are we then to conclude that there are no absolutely *essential* characteristics of bandness whatsoever? Perhaps we have been too hasty in dismissing any requirement for some minimal association of bandness with music? To be sure, the examples already cited demonstrate that a band need not ever produce any music, real or imaginary. However, this is not quite the same as saying that bandness does not imply the *possibility*, or perhaps even the expectation, that any entity which qualifies as a band, fictional or otherwise, has the *potential* to produce music, even if that music has

never been heard, may never be heard, and indeed may never be made. In principle, all the examples of bands that we have presented above could—or even should—be able to make music, even if we can’t be sure what that music might sound like, or even if it has not yet been made. Indeed, we are unable to think of any examples of bands, real or fictional, which are fundamentally and permanently removed from the *possibility* of making music.¹² In other words, it seems to us that—at least at this point in history—the possibility of bandness in a given context also equates to the *possibility* of music-making.

Based on this brief discussion, and adapting Strayer’s analysis presented above, we might tentatively conclude that the *minimal* requirements of bandness are:

- At least one public perceptual object (not necessarily musical)
- At least one perceiving subject
- The subject’s awareness of a socio-cultural context that suggests or allows the possibility of interpreting the public perceptual object in terms of bandness, which at least includes the possibility that the band could make music

At this point, we could also ask what things look like at the opposite extreme. Is there perhaps an upper limit to how much extra-musical content can be funnelled into the concept of a given band before the category of bandness collapses under the weight of its non-musical overburden? Without labouring the argument, a couple of examples suggest that, if there is indeed any upper limit, it is probably constrained by practical considerations and human limitations rather than any *a priori* theoretical determinations. Certainly, the band category of the Beatles, to return to this example, at the zenith of its popularity, seemed effortlessly able to accommodate an extraordinarily rich array of additional non-musical public perceptual objects—ranging from dolls, to films, to cartoons, to plastic wigs, to fanzines, and well-publicised events with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Lennon and Yoko Ono, and much more besides—without depleting their bandness and, more to our point, potentially amplifying what their bandness might mean at a particular point in history. This example suggests that, if there is any upper limit at all, it is a distant prospect. The same could be said of many other heavily merchandised “super bands” at the height of their popularity, such as Kiss, Abba, or One Direction.

Indeed, today, this capacity for superabundance in almost any imaginable category of extra-musical merchandising has been taken to hyperbolic extremes by the “K-Pop” (short for Korean pop) industry—as exemplified by the seven-member global “boy band” sensation BTS. For many fans, the BTS universe that winds through the band’s musical and extra-musical merchandising output has become a convincing and all-encompassing alternate reality which has contributed to the staggering October 2020 valuation of BTS’s management company Big Hit Entertainment at KRW 8.7 trillion (US\$7.6 billion).¹³ For another upper limit example of extra-musical materialization, consider the French electronic band M83 (nowadays also essentially a one-person group), named after the galaxy Messier 83 (or M83), and thereby effortlessly absorbing a far distant extra-terrestrial dimension into its conceptual orbit. Indeed, no connection to any previously unrelated categories seems to be unassailably out of bounds, as the example of *Depressizona exorum*, a snail named after Dutch post-punk band the Ex, demonstrates.¹⁴

Here, our own extra-musical explorations as the fictional band cum artistic collaboration the Ghosts of Nothing is also relevant. Our band (like any band) exists within a mutually insufficient relationship between the vehicular function of physical artifacts/events and immaterial projections of thought. Consequently, we conspicuously exploit the fact that aesthetic experience exists both within and beyond direct sense perception. As discussed earlier, one obvious example of this play of sensory and extra-sensory elements is found in our partly fictional and partly physically realized work *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode: World Tour* (2014–18), presented in three consecutive acts. Figure 1, for example, is a full-page advertisement that we placed in issue 45 of the Italian art magazine *Mousse* (October–November 2014) “promoting” the first act, *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode: World Tour of Abandoned Music Venues* (2014–15). Here, a closer reading of the detailed text reveals that many of the listed performances on this “tour” occur at historically significant music venues which are either abandoned, no longer exist, or have been decommissioned. Although there is very little else to go on, this single advertisement, even if considered in hypothetically perfect isolation from any and all other material traces, clues, and pointers, nevertheless manages to achieve a singular feat: it asserts,

and thereby brings into being, the conceptual existence of a band—perhaps fictional, perhaps not—but a band nevertheless, known as the Ghosts of Nothing.

INSERT: Figure 1. Advertisement for In Memory of Johnny B. Goode: World Tour of Abandoned Music Venues 2014–15 as published the Italian art magazine Mousse 45, (October–November 2014): 261.

Significantly, this world tour included dates that were nothing other than an act of conceptual nomination—by virtue of a line in a printed advertisement—in the minds of our audience. Yet perhaps even more significantly, our tour also included dates on which specific events did actually occur on the dates and in the locations specified.¹⁵ Clearly, both the “gigs” in which something actually happened and the ones that were simply “built in the mind” add something to our story and the expanding conceptual architecture of our band cum artwork. As is the case with other partly fictionalized works of art and artistic collectives (such as Walid Raad’s *Atlas Group* [1989–2004]), it is also at least in part our intention that our fictionalizations might invite speculation upon the nature of fictions more generally.

Looking back through the highly mythologized histories of both art and rock ‘n’ roll, it is tempting to ponder if some historically significant performances or exhibitions actually took place at the time and place upon which their respective mythologies are built. But does this ultimately matter? Surely, the partly or wholly fictionalized nature of these performances or exhibitions does not necessarily diminish the weight or significance of their historical impact. The important thing is that they ultimately influenced or effected far more people than could possibly have been physically present. Although most of us did not directly experience the infamous performances of some of the seminal rock bands that underpin our understanding of rock ‘n’ roll’s mythologies, we are nevertheless able to build something of them in our minds. We might have seen some film footage, perhaps a single image, or perhaps we simply heard a second-hand anecdotal account. Over time and space, these mythologies have proliferated as memes. We might know something of Iggy Pop cutting himself on stage or Ozzy Osbourne “doing a line” of ants. We also, consciously or subconsciously, channel the impact of such memes whenever we directly experience performances by derivative artists in the same genre.

To what extent and in what ways does it really matter whether or not an audience directly witnesses a supposedly originary event, or for that matter, whether or not any documentary account of such an event—such as a photograph—can be “trusted” as a legitimate record of what allegedly took place? Notwithstanding the well-established fact that a photograph—or a video or sound recording—is necessarily fragmentary and therefore fundamentally incapable of wholly indexing or accounting for the reality it purports to index, the document can also become an important materialization within the expanded world of the work capable of offering an alternative entry portal. Moreover, when considered together with other material and narrative elements, documentation helps to performatively extend the identity of a given work in the minds of audiences potentially located elsewhere in space in time. Conversely, any elision of narrative elements highlights the basic synchronicity of the photograph—for it effectively stops time and reifies the nominated scene as image. Yet an image is a bounded representation (unavoidably edited and very possibly altered or enhanced) of a fleeting instant in time. Its meaning is always contingent upon context and viewers’ presuppositions for its interpretation.¹⁶ Thus, there is an inescapable under-specification associated with all images and all fragments (no matter how monumental or vast). As we discuss further below, this under-specification was especially foregrounded in the aesthetics of Romanticism and its present continuations. These fundamentally unavoidable connective chains only further reinforce the mutual insufficiency of concept and material. Importantly, this essential connection can be activated via any number of supplementary structures—such as captioning, a beholder’s pre-existing knowledge of the artist or event, and any other images and paratexts that might surround a “primary” presentation.

For Amelia Jones, writing on the relationship between performance art and photography, just as the “art event *needs* the photograph to confirm its having happened; the photograph *needs* the body art event as an ontological ‘anchor’ of its indexicality.”¹⁷ Importantly, not only does this mutual interdependence of performance and documentation challenge the status and deification of the originary event, it actually affirms the status of documentation as a key point of access to the work. Philip Auslander takes this line of argument further. For Auslander, “we cannot

dismiss studio fabrications of one sort or another from the category of performance art because they were not performed for a physically present audience.”¹⁸ Drawing upon the historical example of a substantially altered photomontage by Shunk-Kender of an original performance by French artist Yves Klein at Rue Gentil-Bernard, Fontenay-aux-Roses titled *Le Saut dans le vide (Leap into the Void)* (1960), Auslander claims that,

to argue that Klein's leap was not a performance because it took place only within photographic space would be equivalent to arguing that the Beatles did not perform the music on their *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album because that performance exists only in the space of the recording.¹⁹

Notwithstanding the necessity of at least one public perceptual object to activate audience recognition of the existence of a work, we can conclude that at least part of the aesthetic experience of a work of art—or a rock band—is built in the minds of its suitably predisposed audience, through layers of documentation and a mix of actual events presented in conjunction with layers of active fictionalization. In the case of the Ghosts of Nothing, our process of conceptually marking a world tour of *In Memory of Johnny B Goode* involved superimposing new objects over the already established historical record of each of the listed venues. For our audience, despite the fact that much of this tour remained beyond the realm of direct experience, and the fact that only a selection the advertised dates would ultimately correspond with an actual live performance, we still provided an aesthetic experience made apparent via an exercise of orientation—and orienteering—of thought.

There are numerous historical examples of artists that have used thought projections as a primary element in their work. Two examples that push at the outer limits of such an approach are Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin's non-specific column of air over Oxfordshire in 1967, and the moment of 1:36pm, June 15, 1969 in which Robert Barry nominated: *All the Things I Know but of Which I Am Not at the Moment Thinking*. In both of these cases, it is still clear that a minimal vehicular support was required (i.e., a declaration made public in words) in order to transmit the work to an audience.

So, as we have shown, any attempt to create art—or a band—which is entirely immaterial and conceptual in nature is doomed to fail. Likewise, there can be no such thing as a work of art—or a band—that is completely material, that is, completely devoid of conceptual content. Without conceptual content, the kinds of materializations that we recognize as a work of art—or a band—would be incapable of transcending arbitrariness or ordinariness within the continuum of everything else that is not already socioculturally considered to be a work of art, or a band. This, put simply, is an inevitable consequence of the mutually insufficient dimensions of concept and aesthetic that Osborne identified as requisite ingredients of a work of art.²⁰

To briefly take stock before proceeding further, it seems apparent that the conceptual complex of any given band is potentially able to accommodate a hypothetically infinite constellation of existent objects, real or imagined, without negating its continuing state of bandness. Therefore, as we tentatively conclude, there is no finite maximal upper limit awaiting nomination.

It is at this juncture that we begin to suspect that we may have become somewhat ensnared in the impasses of either/or thinking, searching for hard and fast limits or permanent definitional dimensions where, in all probability, none exist. While we have sketched out some apparently minimal requirements of bandness above, a general suspicion lingers that these are, at best, tenuous and transient, subject to revision as the socially accepted parameters of bandness as a conceptual category continue to evolve in time. Even the potential for music-making, which we have salvaged as a vestigial minimum criterion of bandness as generally understood today, may not be immune to revision at some point in the future, for example, as the definition of “music” itself escapes into unexpected territories. This is an open definition. Just as Jean-Jacques Nattiez has argued that “the border between music and noise is always culturally defined,”²¹ we might by extension assert that the border between band and non-band is also necessarily culturally defined. It seems that all we can safely conclude is that bandness is a concept, and concepts are processes, inherently fuzzy and subject to change. To be sure, the concept of bandness is

evidently a generously accommodating one, even omnivorously so, while at the same time highly tolerant of the circumstantial absence—or deliberate avoidance—of virtually all of its available ontological dimensions. This confluence of omnivorous accommodation and tolerance of extreme minimalism is what makes the terrain of bandness such an appealing field for our artistic exploration.

Countless other cultural objects can be problematized along similar lines. It is for this reason that creative works can be implicitly critically valued as fictions insofar as they reveal something about the nature of fictions more broadly. A multinational corporation, for example, can turn over all of its employees, executive board, geographical locations, physical infrastructures, change its name and line of products, or in some cases even its entire line of business, and all the while be regarded as meaningfully and continuously existing as a single entity with a connected and traceable history. Perhaps the only thing that will deem a corporation as effectively non-existent is a consensually recognized legal determination and subsequent liquidation of its assets. Similarly, perhaps the only thing that will deem a band to be effectively non-existent is a publicly recognized declaration that it has officially broken-up. This status, however, especially given the future prospect of a reformation tour or album, is also potentially indefinite. In some cases, former band-members have formed rival reformation versions of the same band, each competing for perceived authenticity. To cite just two examples, there have at various points in time been more than one Beach Boys or Dead Kennedys in existence. It is also worth noting that long after some bands have broken-up, new fan-bases can introduce radically divergent interpretations of their respective conceptual universes. In many cases, sincere appreciation can evolve into ironic appreciation, and vice versa. In any event, it is certainly clear that the conceptual universe of bandness can continue to mutate long after the officially declared demise of the band itself.

Historically, there are a variety of different ways to theorize the seeming impossibility of definitively pinning down a creative work in exclusive or specific relation to any single object or symbolic configuration. Broadly speaking, however, it is clear that in the case of a work of art, as Martin Heidegger puts it, “something other is brought together with the thing that is made.”²² And conversely, as Strayer usefully reminds

us, even seemingly immaterial works still require something that is irreducibly material—that is, a *public perceptual object*—which points, in concert with various immaterial imaginings, to the intended identity of the work. For the Ghosts of Nothing, the artistic potential for multiplying this curious quality across multiple layers and cultural spaces using specific, material, artifactual devices is a primary motivation. This is evidenced, for example, in our novel presentation of a concept that now and hereafter effectively merges the two formerly independent fictional worlds—the alienated artist/clown historically known as Pierrot²³ and the fictional pop culture icon of Johnny B. Goode²⁴—to form the transmedia “story” that is our rock album cum work of art, *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode*. In this case, this juxtaposition of two fictional characters and their respective worlds—being the confluence of an invented rock-star and a nineteenth century tragic clown—was used to develop a radically materially and spatially distributed work of art. Meanwhile, at the time of writing, another series of largely underappreciated yet strongly resonant connections between nineteenth and early twentieth century poets and artists with late twentieth and early twenty-first century surf culture are being made in our second major project, *Sounds of Unridden Waves* (2021–). This work, which sits somewhere between a reimagining of late Romantic era musings upon the ineffable power of the ocean and the vernacular aesthetics of late twentieth century surf culture, will be presented as the world’s first feature length surf film not to have any human surfers, and set to an original instrumental soundtrack. Accompanying the core film and soundtrack components, we are also developing a related series of materially diverse exhibition and publishing outcomes.

There are, at least hypothetically, an unlimited range of objects and concepts that a work of art or rock band might draw into its network of relations to form what Osborne describes as the “space” of a “singular, though internally multitudinous work.”²⁵ Somehow, both a work of contemporary art and a band are capable of maintaining a sufficient degree of referential identity and unity, which, despite potential changes and evolutions, remain “irreducibly relational” across “the totality of its multiple material instantiations.”²⁶ The apparently permeable nature of these definitional boundaries brings us to analogize contemporary postconceptual art with the absorptive world-making capacity of bands, which we refer to as bandness.

Strangely, although it is relatively easy to recognize this unity, the “edges” of bandness are profoundly indeterminate and seemingly impossible to neatly demarcate. Intriguingly, when some non-musical things are intentionally or circumstantially brought into conceptual proximity with a rock band, a strange ontological transformation can take place. Here, much like the legacy of the Duchampian readymade, certain objects or events can, under certain conditions, assume a dual ontological status. They are recognizable both as everyday experiences and as part of a narrower complex of materializations that are also understood to contribute to the identity of a band.

Historically, it is apparent that many otherwise non-musical objects, locations and actions have become synonymous with specific rock band mythologies. Take, for example, Liverpool or the Cavern, geographical locations now forever woven into the definitional universe of the Beatles. Consider also the ways in which certain haircuts, fashions, hotels, venues, memorabilia, drugs, myths, and lifestyle choices have become synonymous with specific band-related “worlds.” As we will seek to demonstrate, this peculiarly absorptive quality can be illuminated by adapting frameworks already well established for discussing contemporary postconceptual art. Like a band, many contemporary works of art are not necessarily presented as a singular object, image, location, or event. And, like a band, many artworks can be experienced by their respective audiences in numerous ways, both directly and mediated, and importantly, as an aggregate of elements. As already noted, we see these shared qualities as productive examples of the dynamic mutual insufficiency of *conceptual* and *aesthetic* dimensions, as activated through processes of fictionalization, and which Osborne has identified as defining features of contemporary postconceptual art. Within Osborne’s account, contemporary art can be characterized as part of a turn towards a transcategorical infinity of possible material means.²⁷ Here he is referring to the almost ubiquitously accepted way in which virtually anything can now effectively function or be repurposed as art, and the way that art can now be more or less embedded in any other way of life.²⁸ This mutually absorptive quality is also described using the split ontology and material exuberance which German art theorist Jörg Heiser brings to his formulation of “Romantic conceptualism.”²⁹ Considered together, we see these theoretical models as a useful

way to analogize the relational space between fact, fiction, and materiality in both contemporary art and rock music.

With these questions and formulations in mind, we present the Ghosts of Nothing's particular version of bandness as existing in a quixotically expanded aesthetic realm. In this realm, we have consciously foregrounded our own conspicuous physical absence as human band members (in terms of avoiding traditionally branded public presence or photographs). Importantly, the marked absence of such conventional prompts and indices is intended to encourage audiences to look beyond our commercially released musical works. For we seek to offer experiences of an intermedial almost-band-like package (but, perhaps ambiguously, not quite) that appear to operate more like a work of art than a conventional music industry product. Accordingly, we have sought both actively to problematize clear distinctions between exhibited artifacts and band merchandise in our physical exhibitions, and, by extension, use these two distinct ontologies—of music industry and artworld—as part of a strategy of continuous deferment. In our 2018 solo exhibitions at the Lock-Up in Newcastle³⁰ and Contemporary Art Tasmania in Hobart,³¹ for example, visitors could purchase tour T-shirts and CDs but not the exhibited “art,” which consisted of a transient installation and large wall areas papered over with tour posters. At the Lock-Up exhibition, our “merch” table was extended to include tea towels, tote bags, books, postcards, art prints, and even a special limited-edition artist's multiple. We also made it clear that our musical synchronization rights were for sale. Similar plans are in place for forthcoming exhibitions of *Sounds of Unridden Waves*. Somewhat brazenly, perhaps, we see this doubled ontology as a two-way street—while our merch is a self-reflective part of our exhibition of art, the exhibition also served as a promotional vehicle for our band's “brand” of music.

For the Ghosts of Nothing, the production and presentation of a materially exuberant constellation of artifacts, merchandise, and various documentary forms also serves to help build a credible—albeit often circumstantial—evidentiary base which suggests the public existence of our band, at least to audiences who have prior experience and knowledge of bands in popular culture. In this sense we expect that if we continue to do what bands do, we are more likely to be recognized publicly and mythologized as

a real band. Historically, as we have already noted, rock bands have long embroidered the fabric of their mythic identity by introducing a range of extramusical elements. In the case of the Ghosts of Nothing, the languages of symbolic accouterment, hyperbolic performative gesture, and merchandise both problematize the definitional borders of our world and exemplify the way in which a band, like a work of postconceptual art, is an inherently dynamic and porous entity. *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode*, for example, could be described as exemplifying what Italian philosopher and novelist Umberto Eco termed an “open work.”³² Initially presented as a recorded quasi-rock-opera *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode* was slowly thematically expanded around an allegorical repurposing of Johnny B. Goode anachronistically re-cast as a contemporary emblem of Pierrot. This episodic series of radically expanded and virtually unrecognizable cover versions of otherwise well-known popular songs was then shapeshifted into a radio play and then a global tour of abandoned music venues, remote wildernesses, and abandoned jailhouses in three acts, all performed in mime by collaborating performers at each location.³³

Similarly, our latest project at the time of writing—the aforementioned “surf film” *Sounds of Unridden Waves*—is also an expanding work. Once again, this project orbits around a commercially released instrumental soundtrack, this time a triple album, recorded and produced by the band the Ghosts of Nothing.³⁴ This original soundtrack is then set to a feature length surf film without human surfers developed in collaboration with ten renowned surf film makers and artists.³⁵ As this still unfolding project begins to mutate into a larger materially distributed work encapsulating a diverse range of objects and activities—which will include public exhibitions of images related to the project, collaborations with vocalists,³⁶ video essays, and academic essays such as this present text—it will also exemplify two characteristics which have emerged as hallmarks of much contemporary postconceptual art. First, it reaffirms a principle forcefully made explicit in twentieth century conceptualism, that is, that certain creative works can resist being understood as singularly exhibited materializations with clear definitional boundaries. Secondly, and somewhat quixotically, it illustrates an interestingly novel phenomenon: That it is eminently feasible to maintain—even if only tenuously—a cohesive, coherent, and recognizable public identity of artwork and artist, despite being indexically constituted through a

physically and temporally distributed aggregate of medial elements. This second phenomenon still manages to assert itself in a postconceptually post-millennial world in which authorship and production processes are often deeply intertwined and indistinguishable (and sometimes partly or wholly pseudonymous or anonymous).

There is one question which persistently arises within this collaborative venture that is simultaneously applicable to both a work of postconceptual art and to our conception of bandness: If we are indeed a band, what determines the outermost limits of this band? Or, what kinds of activities, events, and artifacts can be meaningfully included within the uncertain borders of our particular instance of bandness while at the same time maintaining a meaningfully identifiable sense of unity? Here, we note that there are already numerous instances of mixed ontologies across the creative arts that appear relatively similar. Specifically, we could briefly turn to some of the many examples of visual artists, novelists, and filmmakers working along blurred lines of definition despite maintaining a sense of identity and unity that we might reasonably expect of a discreetly recognizable creative work.

One enduring example is found in the work of the late German author W. G. Sebald. Sebald's books are notable for their broadly idiosyncratic mixture of actual and seeming historical fact, recollection, and fiction interspersed with photographs that serve a suggestive or supplemental, as opposed to illustrative, function. Another comparable analogue for this approach is found in some of the work of British artist Tacita Dean (who has acknowledged her debt to Sebald), who works primarily in analogue film, a medium now largely obsolete. However, in creating *Event for a Stage* at Carriageworks in Sydney in 2014, Dean worked with actor Stephen Dillane to produce a self-reflective work of live theater which she then meticulously cut into both a film version and an adaptation for radio. And, as already noted, Walid Raad's historically reflective "counter-archive" in the form of the fictional collective cum artwork the *Atlas Group* (1989–2004) also exemplifies this tendency.

Like these examples, our fictionalized and radically transmedial recasting of Johnny B. Goode as Pierrot in *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode* also contains much that is non-

fictional, together with uncanny hybrids of repurposed reality and invention. It is here that the Ghosts of Nothing seek to inhabit the layered ontologies that we have described above. Significantly, our open works are at once imaginary mythologized projections of the kinds of things that bands do, infused with traces of a real-world entity that actually does many of the things that bands typically do (such as making and releasing commercial albums, touring, and making music videos).

Yet at the same time, some of the extra-musical elements located in the respective universes of *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode* and *Sounds of Unridden Waves*, unless specifically pointed to, could easily remain unnoticed by a casual observer. Consequently, we require a range of additional supporting materials, such as this essay, to make some of the more obscure connections publicly visible. Moreover, many of these supplementary or paratextual elements, especially if considered in isolation from the core elements of each project, are clearly incapable of producing anything resembling a “full picture.” Similarly, some of the extramusical and expanded artistic elements surrounding the still expanding world of *Sounds of Unridden Waves* by the Ghosts of Nothing are sufficiently removed from a connection between a band and an album made by a band, that, if encountered in contextual isolation, would most likely be read as standalone works of contemporary visual art.³⁷ One example of a visually-centered publicly exhibited variation of *Sounds of Unridden Waves* is our ongoing collaborative series of fictionalized “film stills.” Several of these heavily cropped “remixed” images of waves are at least loosely thematically related to footage being used to produce the feature length film component. They are based on various source photographs, some of which were indeed taken by collaborators working on the film itself, but some sourced from an extended network of other project participants. Importantly, many of these stills were not actually captured from the film itself. To date, some of these fictionalized film stills have been presented in exhibitions in New York and Pingyao, China³⁸ and in a photo-essay published in a peer reviewed academic journal.³⁹ In these contexts, it is highly likely that—without explicit prompting—even a discerning viewer would probably not consider these photographs as meaningfully connected to the work of a rock band. In another still developing iteration for an artworld audience, a series of overpainted photographs, titled *Paintings on Unridden Waves* will also be attributable

to the collective artist moniker “the Ghosts of Nothing.” Perhaps, in such instances, we might suggest that both low- and high-frequency connections to the idea of bandness are potentially apparent.

INSERT: Figure 2. The Ghosts of Nothing and Chris Lowry, *Storyboard Still #1* from *Sounds of Unridden Waves*, 2020, camera by Chris Lowry, image remix by the Ghosts of Nothing, digital image, dimensions variable.

INSERT: Figure 3. The Ghosts of Nothing and Simone Douglas, *Storyboard Still #2* from *Sounds of Unridden Waves* (work in progress), 2020, camera by Simone Douglas, image remix by the Ghosts of Nothing, digital image, dimensions variable.

In yet another still developing artworld iteration of the broader musical and cinematic project titled *Sounds of Unridden Waves*, selected fragments of text referring to the ocean—taken from the work of nineteenth and twentieth century writers, poets, and artists—are presented using uncanny, slightly dehumanized, “natural” digitized voices which are overlaid with selected music and video from the feature-length version of the film. This targeted artworld variation of the larger work is even further removed from the broader popular culture and surf-world context in which the feature length film and commercial album release will also be promoted. To date, one version of this still developing spoken-voice iteration has been presented at an academic conference.⁴⁰

We believe that the historical Romantic idea of the fragment continues to resonate with the eclectic material exuberance exemplified in some forms of postconceptual art and intertextual relationality in certain forms of contemporary literature. In historical Romanticism, the fragment is presented as a finite part of an infinite whole that is not entirely present. Accordingly, Romanticism emphasized the active role of the imagination in moving beyond the confines of immediate perception to build a work in the mind. For the Ghosts of Nothing, such Dionysian qualities can also be experienced when listening to a good rock album.

The Ghosts of Nothing are keenly aware that *Sounds of Unridden Waves* may also be encountered far from any supporting ontologies of contemporary art or rock music. New audiences might just as easily be found through commercial TV streaming

services or in surfing subcultures. Importantly, in any such contexts, different kinds of evidentiary credibility will invariably be required to establish legitimacy with new audiences. Although the overall conceptual architecture and final production of both *Sounds of Unridden Waves* and *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode* rests with the Ghosts of Nothing, we see these open works as omnibus vehicles capacious enough to accommodate collaborative creative input from diverse and even unanticipated sources. Our world tour of *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode*, for example, featured contributions from numerous collaborating artists, dancers, and theater makers. And wherever appropriate, we stress that any collaboratively developed components within these projects are clearly listed as co-authored by the Ghosts of Nothing and the respective collaborators. Consequently, these expanded worlds might be understood as existing simultaneously inside and outside our dominion of authorship. In contemporary visual art, this is familiar territory. It is also something that rock bands have long intuitively recognized. Even in the pre-digital era, for example, physical distribution in the form of vinyl records spawned album cover art as a new genre, one which was enthusiastically embraced by bands and visual artists alike. Meanwhile, the definitional limits of the world of a band can keep expanding in the hands of fans, satirists, bootleggers, deejays, official and unofficial remixers, and (more recently) internet meme culture, well after the operational demise of the band itself.

In summary, we use our “works”—which we bring into existence through acts of world-making⁴¹—to establish new relationships. These novel connections come into being by virtue of a creative intention and action on our part. Once this action has occurred, and provided that it is accepted as culturally meaningful by a qualified audience, it cannot thereafter be unmade. The creative act therefore serves as the minimal connection, a kind of metonymy if you like, contingent to a greater or lesser degree on chance and circumstance. The connection is strengthened if there are other resonances and parallels to be perceived—that is, something beyond a seemingly arbitrary juxtaposition or accident of collage. The Ghosts of Nothing strengthen this connection by projecting bandness as a conceptual overlay binding together an array of disparate elements and presences, both real and virtual. And in projecting our bandness, we produce a diverse range of what Jeffrey Strayer usefully calls public

perceptual objects. Importantly, both *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode* and *Sounds of Unridden Waves* consist of literal things and activities in the world that are both obliquely and explicitly framed as both the products of a band, and as works of contemporary visual art.

¹ Arthur C. Danto's highly influential description of an "Artworld" (as a capitalised proper noun) appeared to take its exclusiveness for granted. For Danto, there could be no "artworks without the theories and the histories of the Artworld." Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 581. Today, however, it is increasingly commonplace to speak of multiple and distinctly configured and contested artworlds. Meanwhile, Pamela M. Lee acknowledges the impossibility of "ignoring or standing outside it [the artworld], as if one could lay claim to a space beyond its imperial reach by wandering just far enough afield." Her response is to shift the focus of analysis and critical discussion from the "global art world" itself to the *work of art's world*. She explains that "to speak of 'the work of art's world' is to retain a sense of the activity performed by the object as utterly continuous with the world it at once inhabits and creates: a world Möbius-like in its indivisibility and circularity, a seemingly endless horizon." Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Art World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 2, 8.

² Various excellent essays in the growing literature on the ontology of rock music do not consider the ontology of bandness. See, for example, Andrew Kania, "Making Tracks: The Ontology of Rock Music," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 6, (2006): 401–14; Dan Burkett, "One Song, Many Works: A Pluralist Ontology of Rock," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (2015): 13, accessed December 15, 2020, <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=722>.

³ John Andrew Fisher, "Rock 'n' Recording," in *Musical Worlds: New Directions in the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip A. Alperson (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 109.

⁴ See Fisher, "Rock 'n' Recording," 109; Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Christopher Bartel, "Music Without Metaphysics?," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no. 4 (2011): 383–98.

⁵ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (New York and London: Verso, 2013).

⁶ The idea that a work of art is immaterial was suggested by Benedetto Croce, principally developed in his books *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale* (1902), translated by Douglas Ainslie into *Aesthetic: As Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, rev. ed. (New York: Noonday Press, 1922); and *Breviario di estetica* (1912), translated by Douglas Ainslie into *The Essence of Aesthetic* (London: Heinemann, 1921). Croce claimed that all we know can be reduced to either logical or imaginative knowledge, such as art, and that all thought is based in part on imaginative knowledge. In other words, for Croce, imaginative thought precedes all other thought. See for example, Croce,

Aesthetic: As Science, 1. For a useful discussion of Croce's aesthetic theory see the chapter "Benedetto Croce: Art and Intuition" in Paolo Euron, *Aesthetics, Theory and Interpretation of the Literary Work* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2019), 129–32. Croce's thesis was given a modernist interpretation by R. G. Collingwood, when he asserted that not all people could perceive a Cézanne even when looking at it. This idea has elitist overtones which might make us uneasy today. R. G. Collingwood's key writings on the philosophy of art are *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* (1925), *The Principles of Art* (1938), and the posthumous collection *Essays in the Philosophy of Art* (1964).

⁷ This point is made eloquently in E.H. Gombrich's classic book, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1960).

⁸ See, for example, Robert J. Zatorre and Andrea R. Halpern, "Mental Concerts: Musical Imagery and Auditory Cortex," *Neuron* 47, no. 1 (2005): 9–1; Sybille C. Herholz, Andrea R. Halpern, and Robert J. Zatorre, "Neuronal Correlates of Perception, Imagery, and Memory for Familiar Tunes," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 24, no. 6 (2012): 1382–97.

⁹ Jeffrey Strayer, *Subjects and Objects: Art, Essentialism, and Abstraction* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

¹⁰ In her book *Forgetting the Art World* (2012), Pamela M. Lee argues that the idea of an "art world" as historically conceived is in eclipse. While she may well be right, we use the term here not to ignore the changes that Lee identifies, but as a reminder that some form of contextualising sociocultural information is required in order for a perceiving subject to understand that something has the potential to be understood as art.

¹¹ These examples all suggest parallels to a process-oriented ontology of concepts, which draws on a long tradition in Western philosophy, via Hegel back to the pre-Socratics. In essence, this philosophical tradition maintains that all concepts are processes, in a state of perpetual flux yet, paradoxically, somehow stable enough to act as the reliable currency of human discourse. For an excellent discussion of concept as process, see Andy Blunden, *Concepts: A Critical Approach* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). This topic is discussed at length by one of the authors of this text in Ilmar Taimre, "An Interpretive Model for Conceptual Music" (PhD diss., University of Newcastle, 2018), <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1385390>.

¹² Music is itself a socio-cultural category, subject to continual redefinition and evolution over time.

¹³ See Ben Dooley, "BTS Management's Stock Has a Lively First Day of Trading," *New York Times*, October 15, 2020, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/15/business/bts-stock.html>.

¹⁴ See D. L. Geiger, "Phylogenetic Assessment of Characters Proposed for the Generic Classification of Recent Scissurellidae (Gastropoda: Vetigastropoda) With a Description of One New Genus and Six New Species From Easter Island and Australia," *Molluscan Research* 23, (2003): 21–83. See Mark Isaac, "Curiosities of Biological Nomenclature," Curious Taxonomy, accessed June 26, 2021, <http://www.curiooustaxonomy.net/>. Here, many other examples of biological names linked to bands can be found.

¹⁵ See full page advertisements for "In Memory of Johnny B. Goode: World Tour 2014–18," in *Mousse*

45 (October–November 2014): 261; *Mousse* 51 (December 2015): 305; *Mousse* 55 (October–November 2016): 179.

¹⁶ Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 204–44.

¹⁷ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1998), 35, 37.

¹⁸ Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (2006): 7.

¹⁹ Auslander, “Performativity of Performance Documentation,” 7–8.

²⁰ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 1–2.

²¹ Jean-Jaques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 48, 55.

²² Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: HarperPerennial, 2008), 145–6.

²³ The Pierrot tradition, now largely forgotten except by historians of art and culture, traces its origins to the Italian *commedia dell’arte* of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It enjoyed huge popularity in the early twentieth century, as witnessed by the mass of references and allusions in the art, literature, and music of the time. The standard studies include: Martin Green and John Swain, *The Triumph of Pierrot: The Commedia dell’Arte and the Modern Imagination* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); Robert F. Storey, *Pierrot: A Critical History of a Mask* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Robert F. Storey, *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire: Nineteenth Century French Literary Artists and the Comic Pantomime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Lynne Lawner, *Harlequin on the Moon: Commedia dell’Arte and the Visual Arts* (New York: Abrams, 1998).

²⁴ “Johnny B. Goode” is the eponymous guitar-player in the famous rock-and-roll song of the same name, written and first recorded by Chuck Berry in 1958. The song lyrics make occasional references to Berry’s own real-life circumstances, suggesting that the presumed fictional character is at least partly autobiographical.

²⁵ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 110.

²⁶ Peter Osborne, “Contemporary Art is Post-Conceptual Art” (transcript of public lecture, Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Villa Sucota, Como, July 9, 2010): 11, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://fondazioneratti.org/projects/contemporary-art-is-post-conceptual-art>.

²⁷ Osborne, “Contemporary Art is Post-Conceptual,” 11.

²⁸ Osborne, 10–11.

²⁹ See, for example, Jörg Heiser, *Romantischer Konzeptualismus* (Vienna: Kunsthalle Nürnberg, 2007), exhibition catalog.

³⁰ The Ghosts of Nothing, *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode: World Tour 2014–18*, July 7–August 19, 2018, exhibition, the Lock-Up, Newcastle, Australia.

³¹ The Ghosts of Nothing, *Three Scenes from In Memory of Johnny B. Goode: World Tour* (2014–17),

featuring Laura Purcell, January 18–February 25, 2018, exhibition, presented by MofO, Contemporary Art Tasmania, Hobart, Australia.

³² Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

³³ The Ghosts of Nothing, *Johnny's Departure*, featuring Laura Purcell and Zackari Watt, July 7, 2018, performance, the Lock-Up, Newcastle, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Suicide*, featuring Laura Purcell, November 18, 2017, performance, the Tench, Hobart, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Black Butterflies*, featuring Laura Purcell, November 18, 2017, performance, the Tench, Hobart, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Absinthe*, featuring Zoë Tuffin, July 22, 2017, performance, Boggo Road Gaol, Brisbane, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Johnny Robber*, featuring Zackari Watt, May 6, 2017, performance, the Lock-Up, Newcastle, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Johnny on Ice*, featuring Frank J. Miles, November 12, 2016, performance on the trail connector to the Appalachian trail, and associated exhibition Plato's Cave at EIDIA House, New York, United States of America; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Children of the Moon*, featuring Coleman Grehan, September 3, 2016, performance, Raygun Projects, Tabletop Mountain (summit), Toowoomba, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *The Mirror*, featuring Laura Purcell, March 19, 2016, performance, Contemporary Art Tasmania, Newhaven Track, Tasmania, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Intoxicated by the Moon*, featuring Lee Devaney, August 31, 2015, performance, between Tromsø and Lofoten, Norway; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Madonna of Hysterias*, featuring Zoë Tuffin, April 25, 2015, performance, Brisbane, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *An Impossible Question*, featuring Lyndall Johnston, April 18, 2015, performance, Newcastle, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *Betrayal*, featuring Charles Famous, April 11, 2015, performance, Sydney, Australia; The Ghosts of Nothing, *This is Johnny*, featuring Frank J. Miles, December 6, 2014, performance outside former CBGBs venue, New York, United States of America.

³⁴ *Sounds of Unridden Waves: The Ambient Mixes*, composed by the Ghosts of Nothing, Perfect Pitch, 2020, album, Spotify and Apple Music; *Sounds of Unridden Waves: Original Soundtrack*, composed by the Ghosts of Nothing, Perfect Pitch, 2020, album, Spotify and Apple Music; *Sounds of Unridden Waves: Original Soundtrack Part II*, composed by the Ghosts of Nothing, Perfect Pitch, 2020, Spotify and Apple Music.

³⁵ At the time of writing, the list of contributors to *Sounds of Unridden Waves* includes: Ashley Beer, Simone Douglas, Albert Falzon, Ishka Folkwell, Jon Frank, Phillip George, Nathan Henshaw, Greg Huglin, Nathan Oldfield, and Monty Webber.

³⁶ In another variant of the project currently in the early stages of development, a supplementary album titled *Songs of Unridden Waves* will be produced, in which singer songwriter Sunny Kim will respond to the existing instrumental soundtrack.

³⁷ Paradoxically, as Peter Osborne has noted, “photography only gained generalized institutional recognition as an artistic practice after the destruction of the ontological significance of medium in the 1960s—a destruction to which photography itself made a distinctive contribution, primarily via its roles in the documentation of performance and within conceptual art practice.” Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 127.

³⁸ See the Ghosts of Nothing, “Stills from the Breakers: Sounds of Unridden Waves,” featuring Albert Falzon (2018), in *At the Edge of the Universe*, curated by Simone Douglas, Pingyao International Photography Festival (Winner of the Foreign Photographer Award), September 19–25, 2019, Pingyao, China. Also shown in *All the Rivers Run*, curated by Simone Douglas, October 2019–March 2020, Monash Room, the Australian Consulate, New York, United States of America.

³⁹ Sean Lowry and Ilmar Taimre, “Sounds of Unridden Waves and the Aesthetics of Late Romanticism: A Photo-Essay,” *Journal of Asia-Pacific Pop Culture*, 6, no.1 (2021): 13–78.

⁴⁰ Sean Lowry and Ilmar Taimre, “Sounds of Unridden Waves” (presentation at Dark Eden: The Sixth International Conference on Transdisciplinary Imaging at the Intersections between Art, Science and Culture, Artspace, Sydney, Australia, November 6–8, 2020).

⁴¹ Discussed further in Taimre, “An Interpretive Model,” 349–91, 451–3.