

Every Record, Everywhere, Is Playing Our Song Right Now

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Originally published in exhibition catalog *The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl*

Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University

2010

To fully grasp the beauty of the vinyl record we must first understand it is as a material. And that story began with a sunrise millions of years ago, and has continued with each sunrise since. The sun shone down on billions upon billions of prehistoric life forms - algae, plants, and animals. Those life forms converted that solar energy into the energy of life. When they died and floated to the bottom of the ocean or were buried under the slow accumulation of layer upon layer of sediment, the energy of the Earth itself took over. In slowly compressing and cooking these tiny bodies over eons, our planet produced the substance we can thank for ushering in modernity itself: petroleum. Every time we burn this fossil fuel we are releasing energy from the sun that shone a million years ago. It is alchemy at its core: the transmutation of matter into a higher state. In this case “black gold” instead of solid gold.

One of the by-products of petroleum is vinyl. With the introduction of the vinyl record, we created a beautiful metaphor about the fleetingness of human time and life without ever realizing it. Every time a new groove is cut into a vinyl record, we are literally carving our history, our hopes and dreams of today, onto the chest of life of the distant past. Depending on how deeply you are willing to peer into those grooves you can hear our recent human story or the story of the Earth itself. What’s so humbling is the discrepancy between the mind-boggling vastness of time that it took to create the raw material of the record and the oh-so-brief time we’ve had to record our story. 132 years. 132 years of recording technology is but a drop in that bottomless wave of

time that has soaked up so many songs and voices. And yet, as avid a listener of the past as I may be, I will never hear every song contained in that single drop. But the record holds them just in case.

And then it comes time to actually *play* the record. By playing it we convert that ancient energy yet again; this time into an ephemeral sound wave that quickly vanishes if our ears and brains are not there to pick it up and interpret it into love or loss, political action or escapism. The record *needs* us like we need it. Every time we play a song from a record we are participating in a multimillion-year transference of energy, from the life giving light of the sun to the heartbreaking sound waves of any number of singers. By playing it we unleash another round of life and death.