

## 2.4. Participation and role in the Northern soul scene

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### Abstract

This article uses the current northern soul scene as a case study to explore the mythologising process of “self-documentation” evident in the practices of music fans in DIY cultures. By focusing on the construction of scene histories, we offer the idea of myth-making as a useful frame through which to explore music cultures that demonstrate DIY elements as central scene practices. Through this paper we offer two different approaches to understanding the northern soul scene, both of which frame origin stories as myth and make use of our distinct personal experience as scene insiders. The analysis presents the northern soul scene as a DIY culture, draws upon ideas of myth from anthropology and cultural studies, and uses an innovative collaborative approach. By working together as a critical, self-reflexive inter-generational team we offer new insights into northern soul and provide some potential models for the study of other music scenes.

**Keywords:** DIY culture, myth, Northern soul.

### 1. Self-documenting and DIY cultures

Northern soul is a DIY culture. Like other DIY cultures, participants on the northern soul scene are involved in intensive self-documentation, a practice often associated with accounting for the origins and past of the scene. As we will show, northern soul scene participants have a tendency to mythologise their own past. Using the northern soul scene as a case study we propose that this practice is a characteristic of DIY cultures more generally. From our relative positions within the scene we are able to offer distinct generational conceptualisations of scene insider and outsider. In addition, we explore the mythologizing role that certain central aspects of DIY practices, and scene self-documentation in particular, play in the inter-related ideological construction of notions of scene boundaries and narratives of scene history. We identify a central origin myth as significant in a range of mediations of the scene produced by both scene insiders and outsiders, as well as in the academic writers who have attempted to theorise and explain the scene. As very differently positioned academics and scene participants, we have direct access to these mythologizing processes: in the journalistic mythologizing of *Blues & Soul* journalists who documented the original scene; and ways in which current scene participants position themselves within these mythologies to demonstrate their insider status.

#### 1.1. The northern soul scene

Northern soul is the product of a distinctive music scene which started in the UK in the 1970s, and continues today across the world. The scene is built around distinctive styles of mostly 1960s and 1970s African American records played at events for dancing. Scene participants take on key roles of dancers, DJs and record collectors. In the 1970s the geographical distance between the American music and industrial cultures that had produced the music and the UK scene participants who selected and consumed the music created a distinctly British incorporation of these records into the leisure and identity politics of urban youngsters. The northern soul aficionados who

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danced, played or collected these records knew very little about their origin or context of production, and overlaid the records with a meaningful set of practices abstracted from their original creation. What they meant in the metropolitan areas of England was far more important than their place in the racial politics of the USA. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the preferred sounds of the northern soul scene were ironically more associated with the dance cultures of the early 1960s, than the later soul music linked to a distinct black American identity.

This paper considers the shared stories of some of these scene participants that aim to explain where the scene came from, how insider membership is forged, and critiques the role of researchers in engaging with these stories. Rather than considering stories of the scene's past as representing shared cultural memories (see, for instance, Bennett & Rogers, 2016), cultural archives or personal histories, we argue that calling upon mythology as a theoretical frame for analysis provides researchers with a means to critically engage with music scene origin stories, allows us to avoid shallow replication or the perpetuation of unchallenged assumptions, and enables us to identify the roles played by key scene practices in this process of mythologizing.

## **1.2. Northern soul as a DIY, insider culture**

Set in strict opposition to the "mainstream", northern soul is considered by its participants to be an underground scene, with most members arguing that mainstream media coverage should be avoided at all cost. This avoidance of mainstream music cultural practices is also evident in the temporary venues of northern soul events; most often hosted in working men's clubs, town halls and sport facilities rather than bars or clubs, and in the central DJ rule of OVO — Original Vinyl Only — employed at the vast majority of events. As alternatives to earlier, "outsider" mediations of the scene, over the last few decades scene participants have begun to represent their scene engagement through film and new media productions, problematising the earlier strict division of scene / inside and media / out. However such engagements still divide scene opinion and are the focus of much critical insider debate.

For many professed northern soul enthusiasts, scene participation is a "way of life" and viewed as a total culture, influencing not only one's weekends but also most of the days in-between. Regular participation at events, and the knowledgeable and competent public demonstration of scene practices (see Wall, 2006), are central to the development of insider membership, with all aspects of scene participation set apart from not only the mainstream, but other music cultures. Through such participant discourses, the northern soul scene is positioned to be a distinct cultural form, indelibly linked to very particular cultural, economic, political and geographical foundations.

Although the term (or even the concept) "DIY" is not used on the northern soul scene, its culture and economy demonstrates a central DIY ethic, with the key practices and busy event schedule under the direct control of its participants. Events are organised by most commonly by DJs from the earlier decades of the scene, and promoted from within the scene through flyers at events or on social media platforms. Established DJs and other influential scene members continue the tradition of importing records from America, selling them to other scene insiders. Social media and scene websites are now an important space for a range of scene-related activities. From events posted on Facebook to the online archiving of memories, photographs and records, the news and events of the scene are communicated outside mainstream media avenues, and actively controlled by group administrators and critical online voices (see Long & Collins, 2016 for an account of these activities). Equally, its participants write the history of northern soul with a scene audience in mind: a process we define as "self-documenting".

The self-documenting nature of the northern soul scene and, we argue, other DIY cultures is a key element within a mythologising process, and central to participant engagement with this insider culture: the fact that the origins of northern soul are historically and geographically contemporary means that they can be personally claimed as a demonstration of inside membership. The replication of these mythologised histories within one's own narrative (be they oral and personal, or publically in print) offers participants a means through which to demonstrate their position as

an insider. Because of this, the histories and current conceptualisations of the scene have developed a pattern, with specific people, places and events forming the central backbone of the historic, and indeed contemporary, scene, placed in heroic distance from other mainstream and “subcultural” experiences. As some of the scene criticisms of mediations of the scene have shown, major deviations from these shared constructions of the scene past are considered to represent a lack of scene knowledge or insider experience, further legitimising this dominant version of the scene past. As we will highlight later, these central and related practices of mythologizing self-documentation and performance of the insider positions the northern soul scene within a specific geographical, cultural and socio-economic history.

### 1.3. The insider academic

Studying an underground “insider” scene raises important questions about the academic, their relationship to the scene, and to those people they are studying. As well as asking who they are, we need to ask who we are and how our different positions of participant and researcher relate to our academic engagement with the scene. As we negotiate these overlapping positions, we must consider the role of insider academic and question the ways in which we engage with the things we see, hear and experience.

As well as academics authoring this analysis, we are both insiders to the scene we study. However, we entered the scene at different times, identify ourselves differently; and we come to the study from different disciplines. We are positioned differently within the scene: one as an “original” member of the 1970s scene, and the other a member of “third” generation of participants in their late twenties and early thirties. One of us is a male dancer, record collector and former DJ in a scene dominated by white, middle-aged male DJs, the other a younger woman who engages primarily through dancing. These differential insider positions are in turn placed within a wider network of academic relationships: as co-authors and co-editors of academic papers; as supervisor and student; as researchers of different, and sometimes combative, generations of the same music scene. We have found that these differences have created a productive and stimulating relationship. Through our experiences as both scene insiders and academic researchers, we have been able to interrogate the existing literature in a self-conscious way, and to critically question each other’s self-narration. This has been particularly productive when considering generational experiences, with each of us demonstrating to the other the meaningful ways in which our generation engages with the scene. By engaging critically with each other *and* the northern soul scene, we have questioned our assumptions as both insider participants and analytical researchers; our differential positions within the scene and academic life have provided a deep and scene-specific arena for the testing of ideas.

## 2. Myths of origins and belonging

Through this paper we argue that by framing music scene histories as origin myths, we can reveal important insight into both the scene and the academics who study them. By myth, we mean the stories we tell ourselves to explain who we are and how our culture is meaningful; origin myths explain where the scene comes from and how one can become an insider. While stories may differ from person to person in terms of particular details, such as the comparative importance of specific people and places, these shared stories of scene origin and membership act to provide a sense of community (Eder, 2009), stability (see Sahlins 1981, 1985) and separation from other music scenes and, importantly, the mainstream against which northern soul is positioned. In viewing these stories as myths, we do not seek to simplistically question their truth, but rather consider the role of these stories in the past and present northern soul scene.

The myths we want to explore are those stories that are told on the scene about how the scene originated and who can make claim to be a member. We follow these central scene origin myths

as mediated through the recent *Northern Soul* (2014) film, self-documenting fan publications, and (importantly) academic research, and offer two different ways in which myths can be studied. By engaging critically with the origin stories people told, we were able to more usefully consider the role played by *Blues & Soul* journalist Dave Godin in the geographical positioning of the scene, and to explore the ways in which younger northern soul participants engage within an internally retrospective scene.

### 2.1. The North of northern soul

Northern soul, as the name suggests, has been associated with a specific geographic location in the UK: most often the northwest of England. This association is not only made through the labeling of the scene as “northern soul”, but also through prominent clubs such as The Twisted Wheel in Manchester, the Blackpool Mecca and perhaps best known, Wigan Casino. Northern soul enthusiasts in the 1970s actually attended events across the United Kingdom, yet it is through the names, places, sounds and individuals of these key clubs that the current scene locates itself.

Any reference to a map of the United Kingdom will demonstrate that this naming represents the complexities of the geopolitics of the UK, rather than an accurate geographical positioning of the scene. London has been, and arguably continues to be, ideologically the power center of the UK, and within the countries of the UK England is considered to be the focal and dominant part. From this perspective anywhere north of the South East is therefore considered to be “The North”. This cultural and geopolitical positioning also frames the scene within specific social spaces and cultural discourses, locating the scene and its participants within the mythologized “Land of the Working-Class” (Shields, 1991), adding a class-based dimension to the separation of northern soul from the music and practices of the “mainstream”.

### 2.2. Mediating northern soul origin myths

The northern soul scene has been the setting for various mainstream mediations, from documentaries to music videos, adverts to full-length films. The earliest and most reviled within the scene is arguably Tony Palmer’s 1978 Granada documentary *Wigan Casino*, viewed by scene critics as an outsider’s misunderstanding of the scene and the north of England in general. In more contemporary mediations, scene insiders have taken advantage of the rise of social media and the opportunities of independent British cinema production to offer alternative perspectives. The most recent example is Elaine Constantine’s *Northern Soul*. As an active and well-connected participant on the scene since the 1980s, Constantine’s insider experience is evident in her decision to organize dance sessions for two years before filming, to work with a range of scene participants to train dancers and develop the wardrobe, and to host a premiere in Blackburn before the official date in London. However, as an analysis of the film will show, insider knowledge does not necessarily mean that mediations will deviate from common expectations of what the northern soul scene is and who might be found on the dance floor.

Constantine’s *Northern Soul* is structured by, and represents, some of the key scene origin myths, following the experiences of two young, white, working-class men from the north of England in a coming-of-age narrative. They express their masculinity through a spectacular dancing style, captured by camera shots across the upper torsos of the dancers, rather than documenting the footwork, central to the scene dancing style (see Wall, 2006), and dream of getting to America, the spiritual fatherland of northern soul music and the home of imagined working-class black American musicians, singers and producers.

Placed in comparison to the collective Wikipedia definition, several elements evident within *Northern Soul* are replicated:

(...) a music and dance movement that emerged from the British mod scene, initially in northern England in the late 1960s.

(...) dancing became more athletic, somewhat resembling the later dance styles of disco and break dancing. Featuring spins, flips, and backdrops, club dancing styles were often inspired by the stage performances of visiting American soul acts.

(...) mainly consists of a particular style of black American soul music based on the heavy beat and fast tempo of the mid-1960s Tamla Motown sound.

Wikipedia entry for "Northern Soul"

This Wikipedia summary of the scene offers a collective definition of northern soul, as geographically positioned in the north of England, focused around a range of practices which include a spectacular dancing form, and owing its genre to a Black Soul Music heritage of the US. The archetypal northern soulies of Constantine's *Northern Soul* are placed within two mythologised scene origins: the working-class, masculine "North" of their 1970s England existence; and the "black America" (Cosgrove, 1982) of their dreams, full of warehouses and records. The same myths are reproduced in a growing body of publications, written by DJs and enthusiasts alike for insiders in the scene:

Teenager Dave Scutt felt the pull and the passion of black music from the minute he first saw old black-and-white TV clips of jazz and blues artists strutting their stuff in smokey inner-city bars. 'There was something about the way they looked and they way they moved their feet'

(...)

When he heard the mid-60s rhythm and blues and soul, it was the beginning of a love affair that would last a lifetime. Dave, then a 16-year-old living in Southport, Lancashire, found a circle of friends who were dancing to and collecting Tamla Motown, Atlantic and Stax current releases (Nowell, 1999).

The myths of the scene not only offer a definition of what the northern soul scene is and who is part of it, but provides a means to position oneself as an insider through a demonstration of scene knowledge: the telling of these shared stories and (more importantly) a positioning of self within them. While personal experience may indeed deviate from these common pathways, divergence from scene origin myths indicates a lack of scene knowledge or experience. Through these books, the authors are publically locating themselves as key cultural gatekeepers in the documenting of scene history, and in acting as witnesses to these many events, an undisputable member of the inside. In replicating the myths of scene, the writers document a communally agreed scene history and are in turn accepted as knowledgeable insiders<sup>3</sup>.

Taking into consideration the central role of scene knowledge in the public demonstration of insider participation, the reasons for participant replication (albeit individually negotiated and embellished) are obvious. How, then, have previous researchers into the scene negotiated these origin myths?

### 2.3. Scene myths in academic texts

A review of the extant research on the northern soul scene highlights the reproduction of key origin myths, albeit in more theoretic form. The scene is once again positioned in the north of England (Hollows & Milestone, 1998) and, by a theorized extension through an empathetic relationship through shared music and imagined common experiences of disenfranchisement, the industrial cities of the U.S. (Nicholson, 2012; Hollows & Milestone, 1998), evident in the iconography of northern soul which echoes the black power movement of the 1960s (see Wall, 2006 for a critical analysis of this proposition). The scene as a masculine and competitive space

<sup>3</sup> This practice of self-documenting is key to the mythologizing of the scene, and will be explored in more detail in our forthcoming chapter in *The Northern Soul Scene* (Wall & Raine, 2018).

permeates the focus of research, with dancing (Doyle, 2005) and scene style (Nicholson, 2012) considered as an assertion of masculinity, the dominant voices emerging those of male participants (Smith, 2012) and the male writers of fan publications (such as Nowell, 1999). It is important to note that by citing these published self-documented histories as evidence of the realities of the field, academics have not only reinserted the patriarchal voice of the scene male hierarchy, but also used the product of self-documentation as a fact. This reproduction of scene myth values, and indeed makes heroic, certain voices, places and events, certain ways of viewing and remembering the scene, merely reiterating the mythologised boundaries of the northern soul scene.

What then is the role of the academic in engaging with an insider scene? And in considering this, how is the work of an academic distinct from the cultural practices that of the fan? Hesmondhalgh (2005, p. 29) has argued that the academic distinguishes and defines the cultural boundaries of the group s/he is studying, capturing these through their analysis. Much of the extant research on the northern soul scene has done this primarily through replicating an idealised and mythologized construction of the scene, rather than interrogated the processes of construction and the politics involved in the creation of an insider identity, particularly for those who engage on the discursive peripheries of the scene.

In contrast, we offer two case studies taken from our own engagement with the scene as insider academics that aim to investigate, rather than merely reproduce, the myths of a scene.

### 3. Approaches to mythography

In setting out these two alternative approaches to mythography, we move from the collective authorship “we” we have used in this article so far, to the single authorship “I” as a way of narrating the processes of research practice rooted in our own insider position and experience, each reflecting our scholarly backgrounds in media analysis and ethnography.

Although written with the single personal pronoun, the analyses were developed through a critical and reflexive collaboration between two insider academics who position themselves, and are positioned by others, in relationships of: original male and new scene female member; media and cultural academic and anthropologist; and supervisor and student. We return to the collective authorial “we” in the conclusion to make more general reflections and raise questions for the wider community of popular music scholars.

#### 3.1. Approach 1: The naming myth and Tim’s origins in the 1970s scene

Weiner has argued that “the bestowing of place names constitutes (a culture’s) existential space out of a blank environment’ (1991, p. 32). One of the most powerful of popular music mythologies relates to the naming of a culture as place. This is not, as Weiner’s quote reminds us, a practice restricted to music culture. The northern soul scene has at its heart a powerful naming myth of its own that is widely told across all the media we studied, and always associated with a single heroic figure, Dave Godin, then a London-based journalist for *Blues & Soul* magazine and record shop owner. It sometimes seems fitting that Godin’s name calls forth the idea of an everyday English man who takes the form of supernatural being worshiped for his control of an important aspect of life.

In the northern soul origin myth Godin most often officially names the scene in 1971 in his column in *Blues & Soul* magazine. This myth is elaborated upon through other versions of the naming story in which the term is first seen to emerge when Godin organises records in his London “Soul City” shop to cater for the increasing number soul enthusiasts in pursuit of records with a particular sound.

Of course, this central role for external mediators naming music genres or scenes is not specific to the northern soul scene alone, but perhaps an uber-myth for popular music in general. As Sarah Thornton notes, “[j]ournalists and photographers do not invent subcultures, but shape them, mark

their core and reify their borders' (1995, p. 160). In the origin myth of northern soul, the power of naming attributed to Godin, reifies borders, of shapes and marks a core, positioning the scene within a specific place, and the wider cultural, economic, social and political semiotics of this place.

### Insider archives

In exploring this naming myth, we should return to the original source referred to by the narrative of the scene's past: *Blues & Soul* magazine. *Blues & Soul* was, and continues to be, available for public consumption, to be bought in high street shops or subscribed to for postal delivery. However, the volumes necessary for an examination of Dave Godin's mythologised act of naming are now forty-five years old and in a magazine rarely publically archived. While some articles have been scanned and uploaded to scene-related websites, these fragments do not provide the wider context for a detailed and immersive piece of archival interpretation.

As an insider, as part of my fan practices, I collected *Blues & Soul* magazine, generating a full set of volumes published during the 1970s. These personal acts of collecting allow me an access that few others have to the original copies of the magazine, and in particular those published in 1971, the date of the "naming of northern soul". These artifacts undoubtedly trigger a personal sense of place within the scene, along with memories of learning about the scene in adolescence. But as a participant in the contemporary scene, such possessions are also a way of demonstrating one's ability to connect to the scene's origins and claim a place of authenticity within scene culture.

Such cultural positioning provides a major motivation to align these possessions, memories and status advantages with the naming myth itself. And yet, rereading the articles Godin wrote in his 1971 columns, the most striking thing is that he does not name the scene as "northern soul" in any of these issues. The term only gains currency in the magazine in 1973, and then only in adverts for records and mobile discos. On this evidence, Godin's role seems incidental at best. As an academic, rather than participant, such access provides a door to the past through which certain aspects of the original culture can be glimpsed.

Simply refuting the myth, though, does not explain why and how Godin's columns have taken on the significance in the story of origin that they have. What is much more interesting (and never discussed in histories of the scene) is that Godin is the first to mythologise the scene in print. Rather than a character in the myth of origin, close attention to Godin's columns reveal that he is the original mythologiser for the scene, and that he made a significant departure from his usual journalistic practices to take on this role.

Godin's twice-weekly columns in 1970 and 1971 issues of the magazine are mostly a list of records and his commentary on their aesthetic and cultural value. Prominent in his discourse is the evocation of soul as an intangible spirit and the hard division between the records he discusses and the mainstream pop of British culture he derides. In issues 36 and 37 he creates a distinctly different column and turns for the first time to lists of records played in clubs in the North of England. While the term "northern soul" is never used, Godin does talk about the scene in the north of England as different to that in the south. In issue 50, Godin makes a dramatic change in his writing and subject, adopting a style some way between an ethnographic account and what was then called new journalism, to chronicle his trip to Manchester to visit one of the mythologised founding clubs of northern soul: The Twisted Wheel. Something of the flavour of his mythologizing can be found in two extracts. The column opens with the construction of a romanticized northern-ness: rhetorically so different from his own London. If northern soul as a concept is born here, it is defined by someone from the south of England, and built upon a sense of the exotic "other". In his account he meets the scene's participants and is temporarily allowed an "inside" view of its culture. Godin constructs the scene as literally underground, hidden from the normal world outside: the north is not (to Londoners at least) what it seems at first view:

Somewhere out in that black dim night gloom in this city of what looked like perpetual night there was an oasis known as The Wheel. It was as if all the life energy of the great city was

channeled into this spot and hidden away under the ground for fear of disturbing the 'respectable' citizenry, because looking out of the cab windows on this dank and murky night, Manchester looked like a ghost town. How wrong first impressions can be was to be shown by later events and happenings (Godin, 1971).

As his account unfolds what have become the core myths of the scene are set out. Godin codifies the dancing and the relationship of the scene to the US. For the London columnist, this UK scene is not the England we usually think of, "rigid and armoured", and he identifies "the soul clap" (today part of the dance mythology) as symbolising a community spirit that Godin had often evoked in his discussion of soul records in his columns. Here, of course, Godin is mystifying this scene at the very point he defines it, and he does so from outside and for reasons of his own. Like the mythical being he has become, he determines a place and a group of people from another place and exoticises them:

The dancing is without a doubt the highest and the finest I have ever seen outside of the USA in fact I never thought I'd live to see the day where people could so relate the rhythmic content of Soul music to bodily movement to such a skilled degree in these rigid and armoured Isles! And, unbelievable as it seems, everybody there was an expert in Soul clapping! In the right places, and with a clipped sharp quality that only adds an extra something to appreciation of Soul music (Godin, 1971).

Dave Godin is heralded as a central character in the mythologized history of northern soul, his outsider generational and geographical attributes neutralized through the role of an honorary member, a benevolent (and, it has to be said, at times belligerent) god-father. This heroic identity was taken up by members of the scene and made their own, its meanings reimaged through the mythologies of its origins.

### **3.2. Approach 2: Origin myths and the scene inside and Sarah's ethnography of new generation scene members**

The origin myths of the northern soul scene position the insider in terms of British geography, gender and time of participation. They are from the North of England. They are male. And they attended events at the key mythologised venues during the 1970s. Being able to discursively position oneself within these ways of seeing the scene provides ways of constructing and performing an insider identity. Through these myths, the "original" members who populate the extant research conform to these archetypes, their experiences of attendance at particular venues in the 1970s used in their authenticating narrative of insider membership, pursued and documented by academics.

In addition to constructing an archetypal northern soulie at the center of the inside, these myths also position those who do not conform on the periphery. As the northern soul scene finds new enthusiasts in different countries and younger generations, those who wish to claim to be an insider must find new ways to engage with the mythologies of the scene and to prove they belong. The reality of the current scene problematizes the mythologized boundaries of inside and out, the realities of who attends and the dissonance between actual participation and mythologised participant. In order to distinguish and define the increasingly "hazy" boundaries (Hesmondhalgh 2005, p. 29) of the northern soul scene, we must explore the individual engagements of not only those who fit, but those who must find new ways to demonstrate their membership. By using the frame of myth, we can view these boundaries as culturally constructed through stories of scene origins, as sites of struggle and individual negotiations. Through such a framing, new insights into scene boundaries become apparent.

#### **An ethnographic study**

My research focuses on the younger generation of the northern soul scene. A second wave of scene participation developed in the 1980s, based upon individuals who had not been part of the



original culture mythologized by Godin. In the next two decades, a third and fourth generation of scene participants emerged, positioned by themselves, and by older participants, as “younger” members of the scene. My ethnography reveals that the boundaries of the scene and the people who can make claim to membership are delimited by the origin myths we have discussed so far, and yet the reality of contemporary scene engagement both challenge and highlight these boundaries.

As an active participant on the scene before my research began, I was able to engage with an insider society and test the assumptions reproduced in the extant literature. By framing the common scene histories as myths offered me a more flexible approach that valued individual voices and different engagements with the scene, rather than a search for an “authentic” Soulie; a common pursuit in much of the extant research.

The origin myths of the scene position the insider in terms of British geography, gender and time of participation. As we have already established: they are from the North of England; they are male; and they attended events at the key mythologised venues during the 1970s. Being able to discursively position oneself within these ways of seeing the scene provides ways of constructing and performing an insider identity. However, the young people that I talk to as part of my research cannot claim to be an insider through stories of original participation. How do they engage with the mythologies of the scene? How do they prove that they belong as part of the scene?

Through an analysis of what these individuals do and what they say in terms of their engagement, it is evident that younger participants actively work to position themselves within the scene’s past. For example, the younger members increasingly adopt a vintage style, wearing clothes from predominantly the 1960s and 1970s. However, in explaining and justifying these stylistic choices, the participants within my study go beyond the founding structures of the 1970s scene and use their engagement with the material culture of the past to both demonstrate knowledge of two mythologised origins: 1970s England and 1960s America.

They position themselves within these two pasts through the rejection of the present and the declaration of “finding true self”. Through individual narrative processes, the scene is discursively positioned within these two mythologized pasts, an arena of “authenticity” within which individuals position themselves as scene insiders. They highlight practices such as listening to vinyl on a record player in terms of imagined past sociability, aligning themselves with the discourses and memories of the older participants of the scene. To engage with the scene inside, the younger members of the scene must engage with these the mythologised scene past through the means available to them.

By considering how the younger members of the northern soul scene engage with the origin myths and associated expectations of the archetypal insider, certain aspects of the scene’s boundaries became evident. As with many music scenes, the scene inside is placed in opposition to the commercial “mainstream”, yet these engagements demonstrate that the boundaries between inside and out within the northern soul scene include temporal dimensions. Northern soul is not simply placed in opposition to the commercial mainstream, but in opposition to the present.

#### **4. Conclusions and questions**

The neat narrative construction of the origins of music scenes are not unique to northern soul, but pervasive to popular music culture. For those who study popular music the long, hot summer and stinking dustbins of the punk-mythologised year 1975, or the revolutionary records of Elvis Presley that merge black and white music into 1950s rock ‘n’ roll are standard parts of the story of pop. Each of these mythologised stories is built by a combination of insider and outsider chroniclers, and features their own heros. Perhaps DIY music cultures, with their strong insider identities, require even stronger origin myths to provide a common sense of belonging. Accordingly, we would argue that academics studying these cultures, especially those who are participants themselves, face a strong temptation to simply reproduce the assumptions and myths of the scenes.

This raises a question for us as academics, then: how can we use our insider knowledge to better explore such mythologies and the importance they have for other insiders, and how can such a study aid the understanding of outsiders?

By using a case study of the northern soul scene and our engagement with it as insider academics, we have demonstrated the potential insights offered by critical academic frames of mythologizing histories, especially in the DIY practices of “self-documentation”. Certainly, the northern soul scene has not been considered as either a DIY culture or mythologised scene by participants or previous researchers, yet it clearly exhibits elements of both. By reframing of scene histories as scene mythologies we are able to offer new insight into the myth-making role of one important *Blues & Soul* journalist and the contemporary engagement of individuals who find themselves, because of the challenge of connecting themselves to the origin myth of the scene, on the discursive boundaries of its insider culture.

We end by proposing a question to other students of DIY scenes.

Would a study of other subcultures in terms of their tendency as insider cultures to mythologise provide new insights? How might research into punk, for example, benefit through a framing of the scene as an insider culture? How would frames of origin myth, the naming of music and scene, the self-conscious discourse of the DIY ethos, and roles of different generations of participants transform our understanding of these important social movements?

We have also demonstrated how a critical reinterpretation can be achieved through a reflexive engagement between insider academics of two different generations of participants. This is especially so as the replication of scene myths within individual narratives is a key demonstration of experienced scene membership.

We have shown how, in their negotiation of the scene inside as ethnographic researchers, many researchers within the field have adopted and reproduced origin myths as a demonstration of their scene knowledge. In contrast, we offer our inter-generational analysis as a model for critical ethnographic engagement in multigenerational music-scenes.

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