

Twenty-one Theses on The Tenementals

1. The Tenementals is an intergenerational group of academics, musicians and artists who have recorded a series of songs which creates a transmedia history of their native Glasgow. This transmedia history includes songs, music videos, podcasts, blogposts, band artwork, conference presentations, academic essays, band ephemera, press articles, photographs, installation, website – everything that the band produces is part of this history. The Tenementals' work is informed by insights from a range of disciplines (including Politics, History, Popular Music Studies, Critical Theory, Feminist Studies, Film Studies, Cultural Studies and Theatre and Performance Studies). While always already working within an 'indisciplinary' framework (Rancière) the project's main intervention lies in the intersection between Music and History, particularly in ongoing debates taking place in journals such as *Rethinking History*. These debates build on theoretical interventions by writers such as Hayden White and Keith Jenkins on the status of the discipline itself. The project also has resonance in Popular Music where the studies thus far of pop music and historiography, exemplified by *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music History and Heritage* (Baker et al, 2020), focus on the history of pop music rather than thinking of the possibilities of pop music as history. In the spirit of Simon Frith's *Taking Popular Music Seriously* (2007), The Tenementals explore the extent to which songs might be regarded as an instance of 'making history' a perspective which sees song-making as an expanded notion of History. The central research question is fundamentally about the ontology of epistemology: "What would History look, sound and feel if it were created by a band?"
2. The Tenementals is a Wild Research project. The Tenementals has one foot in the university sector and one foot in Glasgow's vibrant music scene. The Tenementals moves to its own beat. It runs on the logics of a rock band, not the metricised logics of the neoliberal

university. That is the only way that it can be alive. We are interested in exploring where we can find hope in what Richard Hall has described as The Hopeless University. We think that learning and researching can be fun, and having a good time is essential to what we do. To carve out spaces of pleasure in an alienated environment is in itself a radical act.

3. In the current climate, of precarious working conditions, difficult career prospects for early career researchers and potential job losses across a range of institutions, we align ourselves with students, workers and trades unionists who are fighting for better working and learning conditions.
4. The Tenementals' History is Messy, Unfinished, Rhizomatic, Writerly in a Barthesian sense, Auto-theoretical, Poetic, Affective. And more.
5. We are not parochial. Although we sing songs about Glasgow, we have also released two covers. Archived in Germany. And our song, A Passion Flower's Lament, was recently housed in The Virtual Museum of The Spanish Civil War. It was dedicated to Bob Smillie, a University of Glasgow Chemistry student who died in Spain in 1938. Here's the opening.
6. Artistic versus academic research (Henk Borgdorff)

“ If someone doesn't want to contextualise their work, then it is not research but it is still art practice. It doesn't say anything about the quality of the art practice, it says something about the intention. Once you intend it as research, you inscribe it in discursive playing fields where you have to deal with questions about context, methods, relevance etc”

The Tenementals practice as research operates in a range of contexts - some of which still remain to be unearthed. In some cases these research contexts may be identified and communicated

retrospectively - for example there may be the potential for *“substantial new insights effectively shared”* if the production and recording process is analysed and reflected upon from a research perspective and using research methodologies. Robin Nelson invites the creative practitioner/researcher to *“attend differently”* to their work in order to bring out its research credentials.

Perhaps we might wish to consider the deeper meaning of this phrase - attending differently. *“Where a product [ergo The Tenementals] is the outcome, the research inquiry of the process leading to it may be masked. That is why I invite practitioner researchers to attend differently to their practice when asking for it to be considered as research in an academic context.”*

Nelson goes on to state *“The challenge for advocates of practice as research then, is to develop methods within a methodology, and to frame knowing on a basis different from, but nevertheless equivalent in rigour to, other paradigms.”*

7. Perhaps one signifier that artworks might be understood as academic work is the contribution that they make to debates and discussion in the academic community. Our album has received the following responses.

“a band that exemplifies the exuberation of collective action ... this collection of their songs is a joy.” - Simon Frith, International Association for the Study of Popular Music Studies Journal

“The album is a novel and apt way to engage with Glasgow’s radical history ... it also presents an alternative entry point for scholars like me researching Glasgow and its history for the first time” Hannah Spruce Journal of Media, Education and Practice

And Jane Pettegree, writing in the leading journal, Popular Music, very kindly described The Owl of Minerva as ‘an absolute banger delivered with

the verve of the best of the first-wave protest-punk bands of the 1980s' which is very pleasing to read. But more importantly, from the point of view of assessing the album's academic credentials, made this point: 'Recent academic books that have discussed the place of popular music in Scottish contemporary culture have not fully grappled with the social politics at work here, and in this respect, The Tenementals are making a new contribution to the debate.'

Reviews of our work have been commissioned in an additional ten academic journals, in the disciplines of History, Sociology, Communication Studies and Music.

8. Let's play a video. The Owl of Minerva is a song, which responds to the aphorism 'The Owl of Minerva takes flight at dusk', long associated with the philosopher Hegel. The song features the Finnieston Crane, one of the four titan cranes which sits on the banks of the Clyde and is at the foot of Minerva Street, and sees the Owl as a resident of the crane who flies across the city commenting on what she sees and posing a series of questions about the philosophy of history.
9. We try to tell a radical history of a radical city in a radical way. Our debut album, 'Glasgow: A History (Vol I of VI)', of nine original songs and was released on Strength in Numbers Records in November 2024 to extensive critical acclaim. The album weaves together diverse narratives, from men who died fighting fascism in the Spanish Civil War to militant Suffragettes of the early 20th century. It explores the 1820 Radical War, Glasgow's complex relationship with Empire and slavery, and celebrates the city's culture of pleasure and excess. The songs focus on fragments of the city's radical past, operating as thought bombs and provocations to think and act in a radical way. This is not a nostalgic trip down memory lane, but rather a bold attempt to seize moments of Glasgow's radical past and blast them into the future.

10. The importance of La Chunky, the recording studio in Finnieston, owned and managed by Ronan.

Michel Foucault postulated the concept of heterotopia to describe spaces that are strange or ambivalent places – places that defy the normal logic of ordering. Perhaps the recording studio can be considered as one of these spaces. A recording studio's functional processes are shrouded in technological mysticism – a source of fascination to all music-lovers but also a place guarded by inscrutable gate-keepers. To quote from Goldman et.al. "A Connected History and Geography of Studios". Like museums and libraries, studios often exhibit a will to *'enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes'*, or in other words, to constitute *'a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages'*. Goldman et.al continue in the same vein stating that these spaces of creativity and production could be considered as platforms of inquiry and subsequently archival platforms. Perhaps, I quote *"becoming an archive, an educational space, or even a shrine to the real, imagined or mythological past is part of the life-cycle of a studio"*.

We find this to be an interesting position on the function of a recording studio but we also consider this position to be entirely misanthropic. A recording studio is a place of action and its processes exist entirely in the present. A song recorded in a studio is a malleable artefact that can be continuously revisited, reimagined and, if necessary, completely re-recorded. A song, or a piece of music is a living thing that evolves and requires nurturing. The recording studio is its nursery.

Alternatively, the studio could be considered as a *"laboratory of the arts"* (Hennion).

11. We are not neutral when it comes to Genocide.

12. As a kit drummer performing popular music, I never felt that I had a creative practice worthy of being researched. The notion that the drummer is inferior to other musicians is pervasive in Western culture. This assumption is bound up in both the way that the drummer's role within a musical ensemble developed in the early part of the 20th Century, and the fact that the drum kit is an instrument of indefinite pitch. The culture of Western art music has been prejudiced against unpitched instruments.

However, it is possible to view the drummer's role within a popular music project, such as The Tenementals, as being creative, in the sense of playing what is required to make the music work. If the drummer does this, without the composer(s) knowing it was even required, then they could be considered an invisible composer. This highlights the collaborative and unseen nature of a drummer's creative practice.

13. There are many research methods that can be applied to practice-based research, including fieldwork, autoethnography, videography, music analysis, interviews, artefact analysis, among others. However, Wolf-Georg Zaddach argues that "these methods can be limiting and predetermining. In artistic music research, specific facets of the practice, such as a performance, lyrics writing, or sound design and production, can function as method. Important to acknowledge is that the practice, the process of doing, is fluid, non-linear and driven by self-reflexivity."

14. Popular music studies is often focused on culture and the study of audiences and reception, rather than the music itself. In the field of art music research, a score or a recording is an accepted form of practice-based research. The skills and processes for producing popular music are not necessarily any less than those required for producing art music. It is therefore appropriate (and natural) that popular music research should be published in audio form.

15. How can a band like The Tenementals working from within Glasgow's music scene use popular music as a means of engaging with, challenging, and contributing to the city's cultural memory and historical narrative?
16. What is music production? What is the role of the music producer?

Music Production: As expected, scholarly discourse on music production is cross-disciplinary and encompasses musicology, history, sociology, psychology, human geography, engineering and technology. What other disciplines may play a part?

"A record producer is responsible for the sound shape of what comes out" (George Martin cited in Lewishon, 2000).

Hennion (1989) and Pinch and Bijsterveld (2004) identify music producers and engineers as *"cultural intermediaries"* and *"gatekeepers"* which resonates with our previous description of recording studios as a heterotopic space. The concept of emotional labour is at the heart of the relationship between producers and musicians - Gibson (2005) in *Recording Studios: Relational Spaces of Creativity in the City* notes that *"...recorded music is not just a product of musician's creativity, but an emotive performance produced in particular spaces and through affective relations between musicians, producers, engineers and technologies."*

On a more prosaic level the music producer brings musicians and songwriters together into a controlled studio environment and enables these musicians and songwriters to perform their music in such a way that it can be packaged as a commodity within a defined budget. Burgess's (2013) typology of music producers would define this working mode as facilitative, enablative or consultative. This is how commercial record companies may view the music producer - a hired hand getting the job done.

Robin Nelson on Practice as Research (again) *“Where a product is the outcome, the research inquiry of the process leading to it may be masked. That is why I invite practitioner researchers to attend differently to their practice when asking for it to be considered as research in an academic context.”* We return to the Tenementals product and the role of producers.

Question: How does the music producer adapt to fit a project with one foot in the academy and the other in the music scene?

We are still seeking answers

Does a unique project require a unique collaborative process?? One producer in the academy, one in both the academy and practice, one solely in practice? Archibald, Breslin, Smillie as listed on the album credits. What are our roles?

Can we look to Edward Kealy’s seminal paper from 1979 in the journal “Sociology of Work and Occupations”? “From Craft to Art: The Case of Sound Mixers and Popular Music” - craft-union mode, entrepreneurial mode or art mode? Or Richard Burgess’s 2013 typology of music producers which ranges from the artist/auteur producer to the entirely business focussed consultative producer?

These are questions that we are currently exploring within the unique music production paradigm that underpins the sound of The Tenementals.

17. How does the use of the cello within The Tenementals’ band challenge genre expectations and function as a form of sonic resistance?
18. How can instrumental performance beyond lyrics and vocal act as a narrative force in popular music? Drawing on Allan Moore’s work on timbre and Eric Clarke’s ecological model of listening, how might The

Tenementals' use of specific sonic textures-like brush-strokes cello in *Pentimento*, the unvarnished tone in *PBS*, or the Spanish guitar gestures in *A Passion Flower's Lament*-convey affective, political, or historical meaning?

19. "The essence of music lies not in musical works but in taking part in performance, in social action. Music is thus not so much a noun as a verb, 'to music'. To music is to take part in any capacity in a musical performance, and the meaning of musicking lies in the relationships that are established between the participants by the performance. Musicking is part of that iconic, gestural process of giving and receiving information about relationships which unites the living world, and it is in fact a ritual by means of which the participants not only learn about, but directly experience, their concepts of how they relate, and how they ought to relate, to other human beings and to the rest of the world. These ideal relationships are often extremely complex, too complex to be articulated in words, but they are articulated effortlessly by the musical performance, enabling the participants to explore, affirm and celebrate them. Musicking is thus as central in importance to our humanness as is taking part in speech acts, and all normally endowed human beings are born capable of taking part in it, not just of understanding the gestures but of making their own." So, in what ways do The Tenementals as a band, use the act of musicking to communicate ideas, emotions, and histories that go beyond the lyrics alone?

20. Some of these theses are presented as questions. This might disturb convention in that academics are tasked with answering the questions which they pose. We are not afraid to pose questions which we are still addressing. Henk Bordorff suggests that what separates artistic research from academic research is that the former involves what he describes as 'unfinished thinking.' We are unconvinced by Henk's binaries. We are interested in exploring the affordances which might emerge when presenting work in a state of incompleteness, whether that be a song which has not yet been

recorded, or a presentation, in which we are still exploring the questions we are addressing. The closure of much academic work is connected to following the generic conventions of academic writing. These conventions are historically and socially constituted.

21. The Tenementals explore not what art means but what art can do. The academic forms which became dominant in what is now routinely called 'The Global North', and were imposed on 'The Global South', erased forms of knowledge production in these territories. There is a connection, then, between artistic research and decolonising the academy, but in decolonising the academy in form. Moreover, forms of knowledge production were also erased in the Global North, and artistic forms of research reveal not only what art can do by creating alternative forms of knowledge and highlight the limitations of hegemonic forms.