

GRUNGE

INCLUDED

INTERNATIONAL

2026

YORK, UK

CONFERENCE!

7 SEPTEMBER 2026

10:00

Registration & Welcome

Arrivals, Registration & Refreshments

10:30

Opening Remarks & Conference Introduction

A word from Kristine & Sintija Brence (founders of Grunge Included)

11:00

Sintija Brence

Silencing The Alternative America: Parents Music Resource Centre and Grunge Politics

11:20

James How

"Load Up On Guns": violence, authenticity, and protest in the making of Nirvana's Nevermind

11:40

John Moores

Humour and Satire in Nirvana and Mudhoney

12:00

Kristine Brence

Visual Protest and Ideology: Art Chantry, Grunge Design, and American Political Culture

12:20

Klaudia Rachubińska

Neither Baby nor a Doll, Neither Riot nor a Girl: Courtney Love's Troubling Feminism

12:40

Michael Ayokunle Osagie

Voices of Resistance: From Grunge to Afrobeat and the Politics of Protest Music in Africa

13:00

Lunch Break

14:00

In Conversation with Gordon Raphael

Seattle native and acclaimed record producer, best known for producing The Strokes ground breaking debut EP The Modern Age and their landmark albums Is This It and Room on Fire, helping to define the sound of the 2000s garage rock revival. Live Q&A panel with Grunge Included.

15:00

Comfort Break

15:20

Joi Katskee

Live Through This: Comparing Coco Chanel to Cobain's Cardigan: Why Grunge Fashion will always be in Style

15:40

Amy McCarthy

'Seattle was my beacon and muse, but it was never really mine': Reimagining the Pacific Northwest music scene in Carrie Brownstein's Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl and Kathleen Hanna's Rebel Girl

16:00

Grace Elizabeth Emerson

The Tumblr Generation: How 2010 Emo Culture Reimagined Grunge

16:20

Zana Bayley

Before I Had the Language: Grunge, Neurodivergent Difference and Alternative Music as Teenage Refuge

16:40

Closing Remarks & Networking

Conference closure at 17:00

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SINTIJA BRENCÉ

11:00

Sintija Brence is a PhD researcher at York St John University whose research focuses on American protest music, soft and structural censorship, sociomusicology, and grunge music. Building on her MA thesis, she published her first book, *From Seattle to the System: Grunge as Political Expression* (2025), which explores grunge as a form of political and cultural resistance. She also publishes research, essays, and artist interviews through her blog: *Grunge Included*. Her interviewees include The Strokes producer Gordon Raphael, Dave Krusen of Pearl Jam and Candlebox, Jan Gregor of Variant Cause, Bobby Nerves of Bad Nerves, Chris Estey of Tooth & Nail Records, and Steve Perry of Cherry Poppin' Daddies. Alongside her sister, she created the documentary interview series *Close Focus*, which explores photography, visual culture, and the relationship between artistic practice, politics, and society. The series has featured conversations with photographers including Jim Herrington, Pat Blashill, and Randi Lynn Beach.

Silencing The Alternative America: Parents Music Resource Centre and Grunge Politics

This paper examines the role of the Parents Music Resource Centre as an elitist organisation that worked alongside governmental interests to promote censorship within popular music. I argue that PMRC sought to restrict the visibility of prominent and independent musical voices whose messages challenged political, social, and cultural norms, thereby limiting their access to mainstream platforms and preserving the established social order. Rather than functioning solely as a body concerned with protecting young audiences, the paper considers the Parents Music Resource Centre within the wider context of moral regulation, political influence, and the policing of artistic expression. The presentation will explore the political dimensions of grunge music by analysing the activism, public interventions, and protest movements associated with key figures within the genre. It will examine how grunge musicians engaged with issues such as censorship, gender equality, reproductive rights, LGBTQ plus rights, anti corporatism, and broader critiques of political and economic power. By situating these artists within the political landscape of the late twentieth century, the paper demonstrates that grunge was not simply a musical style but also a significant form of political and cultural resistance. Ultimately, this paper argues that attempts by organisations such as the Parents Music Resource Centre to regulate popular music reflected broader efforts to suppress dissenting voices that challenged dominant ideologies. Through an examination of censorship, political activism, and the relationship between music and power, the presentation highlights the importance of popular music as a site of resistance and political engagement.

James How completed his PhD in English Literature at Edinburgh University. His book *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter Writing from the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson's 'Clarissa'* has been republished recently by Routledge. James has published articles in *Rock Music Studies* on Hole's 1991 album *Pretty on the Inside* (in 2023) and Courtney Love's 2004 album *America's Sweetheart* (in 2026). James has presented papers on grunge music at the Punk Scholars Network's conference at Buckinghamshire New University in 2023, the Northeast Popular Culture Association Fall Conference 2024, and the Royal Musical Association Annual Conference at Southampton University in 2025.

"Load Up On Guns": violence, authenticity, and protest in the making of Nirvana's Nevermind

When Nirvana's second album, *Nevermind*, was released in 1991 it sent a shockwave of anger and smiley faced t-shirts across the culture. Thirty-five years later, in the age of President Trump and an encroaching manosphere, the progressive values the band embodied are under attack as never before. Making use of the many recent grunge memoirs, this paper takes a new look at how and why the band's success happened, what impact it had at the time, and what that means for us today. The paper traces Nirvana's origins in punk and links with the riot grrrl scene showing how, in contrast to the supposed "outsiders" of today's MAGA movement, to be punk at the time meant to place oneself in opposition to macho and conservative values. The paper looks at the reasons for the band's initial success in the UK, showing how the media focus on Nirvana as uneducated but authentic rednecks both obscured their progressive values and problematised the move to a more "corporate" sound on *Nevermind*. Making use of Caroline Fraser's 2025 book *Murderland*, the paper focusses on the impact of the extraordinary levels of violence prevalent in the Pacific Northwest at the time, not least an unprecedented spate of serial killings in Tacoma, Seattle, and Olympia by Ted Bundy, Gary Ridgway, Gerald Friend, and others. As Fraser argues, this violence was linked to massive lead and arsenic poisoning brought about by the despoliation of the Pacific Northwest. This paper will posit that, just as this poisoning led to violence by lowering inhibitions, it also contributed to the extraordinary creative outpouring of grunge and the drug-troubled lives of the musicians. Through analysis of Nirvana's tactics of protest, the paper offers a fuller understanding of *Nevermind* as a key work of opposition, more relevant now than ever.

Dr John Moores is the author of *Electric Wizards: A Tapestry of Heavy Music, 1968 to the Present* and *Off The Ground: Paul McCartney in the 1990s*. He writes for *The Quietus*, *Record Collector*, and other websites and publications. He has taught music journalism at BIMM in Manchester and the University of Huddersfield. *Off the Ground: Paul McCartney in the 1990s*, published by Reaktion Books, was described by Bob Stanley as "the best, and most enjoyable, book on McCartney I've ever read." *Electric Wizards: A Tapestry of Heavy Music, 1968 to the Present* was praised by *Record Collector* as "an enthrallingly funny read, and one that's hard to put down despite its girth," while *The Wire* declared, "Someone get *Electric Wizards* on the national music curriculum now." *Echoes & Dust* called it "an endlessly entertaining book," *Shindig Magazine* praised its "impressive scope and rich detail," and *Classic Rock* described it as "a deafening success."

Humour and Satire in Nirvana and Mudhoney

"Grunge was so f***ing negative and depressing," claimed the proponents of the first wave of Britpop. As the writer and radio host Stuart Maconie has insisted, "[Grunge bands] looked like they'd come to creosote your fence and they had nothing to say for themselves." As for the Britpop bands Maconie and others championed to supersede those scruffy Americans, "They seemed to have a certain British perspective. For want of better words: irony, sexiness, cleverness, maybe even a certain sense of self-deprecation." Evidently critics as Maconie hadn't delved very deeply into the grunge universe, which is rich in all those named qualities. While it was overshadowed by the premature fates of several stars, humour was a fundamental aspect of grunge and it continues to be for the acts who survive. This paper will explore some of the satirical merits and intents of grunge by focussing on the output of two cases in point: Nirvana and Mudhoney. In doing it so, it will be argued that *In Utero* was not the soul-bearing howl of pain it has been portrayed as since the end of Nirvana. Rather, the trio's final album was one of the funniest and most ironic albums in the grunge canon. The discussion will then go on to compare and contrast the words, outlooks and fates of Kurt Cobain and grunge's greatest living satirist: Mark Arm.

KRISTĪNE BRENCĒ

12:00

Kristīne Brence is a PhD researcher at York St. John University whose research explores the relationship between music, politics, national identity, and sociomusicology. Originally from Latvia, she researches the rock music cultures of the Baltic States from the 1990s through the 2010s, exploring their artistic development and cultural significance. Kristīne is the author of *The Cult of Grunge: Politics, Design and Identity* (2025), which explores the political, visual, and cultural legacy of the grunge movement. She previously completed an MRes examining the graphic design of grunge design pioneer Art Chantry and the visual culture of the 1990s United States Pacific Northwest grunge movement. She also holds a BA in Film and Television Production, and specialises as a video and audio editor. Her portfolio includes interviews with musicians and cultural practitioners including Skyforger, Metsatöll, Vauxdeville, Tim Mikkola of The Vantages, Blood Feather, Jānis Bukums, Dzelzs Vilks, and Juska Salminen of H.I.M., as well as punk photographers Pat Blashill and Jim Herrington, and record producer Gordon Raphael. Her research interests include popular music studies, graphic design history, visual culture, subcultures, political & national identity.

Visual Protest and Ideology: Art Chantry, Grunge Design, and American Political Culture.

Grunge graphic design emerged as more than a commercial aesthetic, reflecting the social, political, and cultural values of alternative communities in the United States during the late twentieth century. Although closely associated with the music industry, its visual language extended beyond promotion by communicating ideas of authenticity, anti-establishment sentiment, and resistance to mainstream consumer culture. This paper examines how grunge graphic design functioned as a form of cultural expression that challenged dominant visual and ideological conventions. The discussion focuses on the poster designs of Art Chantry, analysing *Night Gallery* (1991), produced for the Center on Contemporary Art in Seattle, *Tartuffe* (1983), and *Give Peace A Dance* (1988). Through these works, the paper explores how Chantry employed distressed typography, vernacular imagery, collage, and unconventional layouts to reject the polished aesthetic of corporate design while communicating broader political and cultural messages. The analysis considers themes including media hypocrisy and televangelism in *Tartuffe*, the use of postmodern collage and visual satire, and anti nuclear protest and opposition to the Reagan administration in *Give Peace A Dance*. Together, these posters demonstrate how graphic design articulated the identities, concerns, and values of the communities for which it was produced. Rather than functioning solely as commercial advertising, Chantry's posters reveal graphic design as a significant form of visual culture capable of documenting and shaping the historical conditions of its time.

Film and visual culture scholar, graduate of the Faculty of Psychology and the Faculty of Polish Studies, University of Warsaw. Affiliated with the Department of Film Studies, Audiovisual Arts and Anthropology of Culture at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Editor of the academic film journal *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, former editor of the Polish film quarterly *Pleograf*. *Kwartalnik Akademii Polskiego Filmu*, member of the Polish Society for Film and Media Studies. Winner of the XXIII Krzysztof Mętrak Competition for young film critics. She currently works on her PhD thesis on the images of women in popular music.

Neither Baby nor a Doll, Neither Riot nor a Girl: Courtney Love's Troubling Feminism

One would be hard-pressed to consider Courtney Love a feminist role model. While she consistently self-identified as a feminist throughout her career, her confrontational and self-assured public image was marked by deep contradictions. Although she explicitly – if abrasively – articulated a feminist politics in her music, performance, and interviews, her ongoing conflicts with other women, particularly within the Seattle grunge scene and the riot grrrl movement, made her a contentious figure in both the 1990s alternative rock circles and feminist discourse. Not only is Love's feminism "troubling" in the sense of being problematic, it also tends to trouble feminism itself. In my paper, I examine Love's ambivalent gender performance with a particular focus on the "kinderwhore" image as a strategic misuse of femininity. I argue that Love's deliberate and exaggerated performance of a "failure" of normative femininity allows her to weaponize gender norms and expectations instead of just rejecting them. Not only does this strategy provoke conservative backlash, it also challenges the more sanitized, liberal feminist discourse, resulting in attempts at corrective violence from both. Love's antagonist stance toward the riot grrrl movement and her explicit dismissal of their politics – a testament to the defiant attitude characteristic of the grunge culture as a whole – undermined the assumed self-evidence of the Olympia scene ethos. By highlighting themes of contradiction and ambivalence, I argue that Courtney Love's employment of a troubled and troubling feminism in her work and image provokes a broader discussion on performing feminist politics in popular music. As Love's embodiment of sexual, emotional, and aesthetic excess makes her difficult to incorporate into feminist narratives and raises questions regarding the risks of aligning feminism with respectability or coherence, it allows for rethinking feminism itself as not necessarily ethically consistent, but inherently marked by conflict, instability, and disruptive potential.

MICHAEL AYOKUNLE OSAGIE

12:40

Michael Ayokunle Osagie is a researcher and MRes Humanities candidate at York St John University, UK. His work focuses on governance, accountability, and social resilience in Africa. A former Assistant Chief Investigation Officer with Nigeria's Public Complaints Commission, he studies how people use culture, policy, and activism to demand fair treatment and good governance.

Voices of Resistance: From Grunge to Afrobeat and the Politics of Protest Music in Africa

This paper looks at how music becomes a way for people to speak out when they feel ignored by those in power. Grunge music, which started in the United States in the early 1990s, gave a generation of young people a voice to express frustration and anger at political and social systems that had failed them. In the same way, African musicians have long used sound and performance as tools of protest. In Nigeria, Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat challenged military rule and government corruption, turning his songs into messages of freedom and resistance. More recent artists such as Falz and Burna Boy continue this tradition through music that calls out injustice, police brutality, and social inequality. This paper connects the rebellious energy of grunge with Africa's own protest music, showing that both movements come from a shared desire for accountability and change. When formal systems of redress, such as the ombudsman or government institutions, are too weak to respond, music becomes the people's voice. It argues that protest music is not just entertainment but a form of civic action helping citizens express anger, hope, and the demand for justice.

GORDON RAPHAEL

14:00

Gordon Raphael is an acclaimed record producer, engineer, musician, and author whose work helped define the sound of 21st-century alternative rock. Best known for producing the groundbreaking early albums by The Strokes, including *Is This It* and *Room on Fire*, Raphael has spent more than three decades discovering and developing artists with raw originality and uncompromising creative vision. He began his career in the Pacific Northwest during the rise of the grunge movement, producing songs on Green River's *Dry As a Bone* (1987), one of the landmark releases by a band widely considered among the pioneers of grunge. As grunge grew from Seattle to international prominence, Raphael's own bands *Mental Mannequin*, *Colour Twigs*, and *Sky Cries Mary* became equally popular throughout Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. His production style is celebrated for capturing authentic performances, preserving the energy of live recordings, and helping artists develop a distinctive sonic identity rather than following commercial trends. Beyond the studio, Raphael is an accomplished keyboardist, songwriter, educator, and the author of *The World Is Going to Love This*, an insider's account of producing some of the most influential rock records of the modern era. Today, he continues to produce artists around the world while sharing his expertise through lectures, workshops, and masterclasses on music production and creativity.

In Conversation with Gordon Raphael: Live Q&A Session

Step behind the studio door with Gordon Raphael as he shares unforgettable memories from the artists, recordings, and defining moments that shaped alternative rock. From the creative energy of the Pacific Northwest and the enduring influence of grunge to the emergence of a new generation of guitar bands, Raphael offers a rare, behind-the-scenes perspective on the personalities, challenges, and happy accidents that became music history. Filled with personal stories, reflections, and lessons learned from decades in the recording studio, this session celebrates the spirit of independent music, artistic authenticity, and the friendships that fuel creativity. Whether you're a lifelong grunge fan, an aspiring producer, or simply curious about the stories behind iconic recordings, Raphael's memories promise an inspiring and entertaining journey through rock history.

Joi Katskee is a multidisciplinary artist, designer, music curator, writer and DIY radio show producer living in Omaha, Nebraska. She obtained her BFA in Fashion Design from the International Academy of Design and Technology of Chicago. Since 2001, Joi has participated in various art shows and events. Her work has been displayed in The Joslyn Art Museum, Millwork Commons, Benson Film Festival and The Cadillac Theater. She has received art awards from General Motors Company and Amplify Arts and appeared in various publications such as Ellements magazine and Omaha Magazine. All of her art is inspired by music.

Live Through This: Comparing Coco Chanel to Cobain's Cardigan: Why Grunge Fashion will always be in Style

Fashion is often a reflection of what is happening in the economy. The 1990s is a decade that most associate with the grunge movement and the fashion that emerged out of the Seattle music scene. However, grunge fashion showed up decades before it became a designer trend. Practical and durable clothing such as denim jeans and workwear that was worn during the grunge movement share similarities of the innovative designs that derived from times of war and economic distress in the early 1900s. If there is one garment that grunge music was known for it was distressed denim jeans. During World War II, women joined the work force and took the jobs of men who were sent off to war. In the 1930s, women wearing denim was considered inappropriate and any women who dared to wear jeans was considered "edgy". Women were taking on men's roles in the field which created a need for women's workwear. In 1934, Levi Strauss was the first fashion company to design denim for women and it quickly became an in demand item. The grunge movement was an anti-fashion movement that derived from thrift stores and was bought out of necessity and practicality. Before grunge became a fashion trend, designers like Coco Chanel rejected fashion norms. She began incorporating material used for undergarments and jersey in her designs to create more practical womens clothing. A Chanel suit may not look grunge but her design aesthetic is not that different from the oversized cardigan sweaters donned by Kurt Cobain. Other items worn during the grunge era consisted of Doc Marten boots, utility shirts and babydoll dresses. Fashion designers like Anna Sui and Marc Jacobs created grunge-inspired looks that graced the runways and high-fashion magazines. The grunge movement may never return in its original form but its fashion continues to be an influence to this day.

AMY MCCARTHY

15:40

Amy McCarthy is a PhD student at York St John University researching women's indie music memoirs. She completed her Master's degree at the University of Sheffield in 2018, where she wrote her dissertation on the female body in women's music memoirs. In 2018, she won the Wilko Johnson Writing Award. Her work appears in *Venue Stories* (Equinox; 2023), *Women's Rock Memoirs* (Oxford University Press; 2023), *Turntable Stories* (Equinox; forthcoming) and *Interrogating Female Pop Star Documentaries* (Bloomsbury; forthcoming).

**'Seattle was my beacon and muse, but it was never really mine':
Reimagining the Pacific Northwest music scene in Carrie Brownstein's
Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl and Kathleen Hanna's *Rebel Girl*.**

This paper explores the remythologising of the Pacific Northwest music scenes in music memoir writing through a psychogeographical lens. Using Carrie Brownstein's *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* (2015) and Kathleen Hanna's *Rebel Girl* (2024), this paper highlights how indie women's music memoirs offer an alternative history of the Pacific Northwest music scene. From 2010 to 2025, a small influx of music memoirs written by women have been published. Five of these memoirs contain the word 'girl', which includes Brownstein's and Hanna's memoirs. Through the parameters of their personal narratives, Brownstein and Hanna dissect how the scenes they inhabit mould the idea of girlhood in alternative music. The politics of being a woman in a band is a recurring theme in women's music memoirs from the 2010s onwards and the music memoir is a space for women in rock to deliver a critical account of the scenes they occupy/occupied. In Brownstein and Hanna's memoirs, this includes critical reflections on grunge, Riot Grrrl and indie music. Transitioning from Seattle suburbs, to the Olympia alternative scene, to Portland, Brownstein's identity is shaped by the musical spaces and their limitations. In *Rebel Girl*, Hanna navigates the Olympia music scene and redefines the gigging space. In both the memoirs discussed in this paper, Brownstein and Hanna redefine the Pacific Northwest music landscape and reclaim the alternative rock narrative by given space to female voices in the scene. Rather than presenting Olympia and other areas of the Pacific Northwest as a beacon or romanticised space, Brownstein and Hanna rewrite these places as lonely cities in which they carve their own histories.

GRACE ELIZABETH EMERSON

16:00

Grace Elizabeth Emerson is an MA graduate in Religion and Society who currently works in education while continuing to pursue her passion for research and writing. Her academic interests focus on film, television and popular culture, particularly their intersections with religion, philosophy and gender.

The Tumblr Generation: How 2010 Emo Culture Reminagined Grunge

This work explores how the 2010 Tumblr era reshaped the Grunge movement for a new generation of teenagers. Tumblr became a cultural space where music, fashion, and identity converged. By comparing the values, fashion, and music associated with 1990s grunge culture and 2010 emo culture, we observe many similarities but also several differences. This demonstrates how online platforms can transform cultural movements, preserving their visual identity while altering their original meanings. Tumblr centred around numerous personalities that helped shape this culture, notably YouTubers Dan and Phil, who played a significant role in influencing youth culture online during the 2010s, and the band My Chemical Romance, which provided emotional and stylistic influences that many resonated with, whilst also maintaining a strong emo aesthetic. The original grunge movement, originating in Seattle's alternative music scene, emphasised anti-consumerism, authenticity, and rejection of mainstream fashion. Tumblr users, however, selectively embraced its visual style and blended it with influences from emo, indie, and other aspects of the alternative internet culture. This fusion created a unique aesthetic characterised by flannel shirts, oversized jumpers, distressed denim, and infamously black skinny jeans. By comparing the values, fashion, and music associated with 1990s grunge and 2010s emo culture, this article argues that Tumblr played a pivotal role in redefining grunge for a digital-era audience. In doing so, it illustrates how online platforms can influence cultural movements, maintain their visual identity while modifying their original significance.

Dr Zana Bayley is a qualitative health researcher whose work focuses on lived experience, identity and meaning-making in health and social care. This paper reflects a long-standing personal interest in alternative music culture and brings together her expertise in autoethnographic reflection, narrative inquiry and cultural analysis to explore grunge, neurodivergent difference and music as a source of refuge and belonging.

Before I Had the Language: Grunge, Neurodivergent Difference and Alternative Music as Teenage Refuge

This paper uses autoethnographic reflection to consider grunge as one example of how alternative music cultures can offer refuge, recognition and belonging for young people who feel socially out of place. Drawing on my own adolescence and early adulthood in late-1980s and early-1990s Britain, I explore how music helped me survive bullying, ostracism and the unstructured social spaces of school and college: breaktimes, lunchtimes, corridors, journeys to and from home, and the broader experience of never quite fitting in. At the time, I did not have the language of neurodivergence, autism, sensory overwhelm or masking. I only knew that I felt awkward, different and socially illegible. Grunge, alongside adjacent alternative cultures including indie, shoegaze, fanzines, late-night radio, record collecting and DIY labels, offered an alternative emotional and cultural vocabulary. Its rawness, anti-polish, anger, vulnerability and refusal of mainstream aspiration made room for forms of teenage difference that were quiet rather than visibly rebellious: social withdrawal, sensory discomfort, loneliness, self-consciousness, depression, and the exhausting work of trying to conform educationally while failing to fit socially. The paper also considers late-night radio as mediated connection. For an undiagnosed autistic teenager, the radio DJ offered a form of human contact without the demands of face-to-face interaction: no eye contact, no conversational turn-taking, no immediate risk of social failure. John Peel's voice felt calm, friendly and companionable, while opening a world of knowledge, discovery and shared appreciation for grunge music that my peers did not understand. Although grounded in personal memory, this paper is not primarily nostalgic. Instead, it uses grunge as an exemplar of how alternative music cultures continue to offer young people ways to name, perform and survive difference through sound, lyrics, aesthetics, scenes, imagined communities and safer forms of belonging.