

British Indie Music In The 1990s:
Public Spheres, Media and Exclusion

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Abstract

Developing existing theories of public and counterpublic spheres, this thesis moves beyond theoretical ideals to formulate a working model of the cultural counterpublic sphere in which British indie music is understood, legitimated and ascribed value. This 'indie public' is then interrogated with the central aim of understanding the continued discrepancy in levels of male and female participation in British indie music at every level during the 1990s. Given the centrality of the media to contemporary, geographically dispersed publics it is through a discursive analysis of the British music press, particularly the *NME* and the *Melody Maker*, that the masculine constitution of the indie public is revealed. The music press is viewed as not just representing or reflecting the indie scene, but as central to its construction as a genre and the discursive production of privileged subject positions therein.

The empirical research analyses how discourses of gender, and to a lesser extent race, class and sexuality, inform the key themes and concepts through which the music press both constructs and evaluates artists and audiences in the indie public. The bulk of the analysis focuses the extended coverage of four prominent 90s' indie bands; Suede, Elastica, Oasis, and Echobelly. The findings are presented thematically in four main areas; the construction of authenticity and 'the artist', the construction of stars and the bases of their appeal, the importance of British national identity during the 'Britpop' era of the mid-1990s and the production of fans and audiences in the indie public. The research proposes that these themes are interlinked, intrinsically gendered and productive of a profoundly male homosocial sphere from which women are largely excluded.

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British indie music in the 1990s: Public spheres, media and exclusion

Introduction

‘Writing about music is like dancing about architecture’

Elvis Costello [attributed].¹

Writing about music is important. It can be fun and inspiring. It can introduce you to great new bands you’d never heard of. It can educate you about great old bands you never knew existed. It can make you go out and buy a concert ticket, or a record, or a guitar. It can help you learn about who you are or who you might be. It could even prompt you to write a thesis. It is not like dancing about architecture.

On the other hand, writing about music is never just about music (can you imagine how tedious that would be?). Certainly, it’s impossible to codify the sounds of music in writing, but to suggest that writing about music is pointless because music can ‘speak for itself’, in fact does a great disservice to writing about music. It’s about giving music meaning, exploring its uses, deifying its impossibly cool producers. It is not like dancing about architecture.

In this thesis I will not be writing about music but rather writing about writing about music, specifically that which was written about indie music between 1993 and 1998. This thesis is about why more of that writing is not about women, or written by women, or read by women. It will attempt to explain why writing about music is not like dancing about architecture...

What is indie?

The British indie music scene in 1993 was the product of certain developments in guitar-based rock/pop over the previous fifteen to twenty years. As a genre indie is a far from unified concept, however its roots are most often traced back to the punk era of the late-1970s and the birth of independent record labels. Whilst the earliest independent singles might have been issued as promotional tools designed to catch the eye of the major labels (Harris, 2003:5), by the early 1980s independent labels had taken on a more explicit ideological mantle. Labels such as Rough Trade, Factory and Creation rejected

¹ Cited in DeCurtis, 1999:vii.

the profit-driven music industry with its multinational major labels, and embraced business practices such as splitting any profits 50/50 with artists, allowing bands to retain ownership of their material, refusing to mail journalists and DJs promotional copies of records and abolishing industry guest lists at their artists' gigs. Above all, the indie ethic became characterised by what John Harris (2003) describes as, 'a belief that love of music should always take precedence over the balance sheet' (p8). In its politics of production indie embodied one of the key 'political' facets of popular culture identified by Street (1997). While the politics of an indie record's production cannot, 'be read directly off the text or the uses to which it is put or the intentions of the artist' (1997:40), they are evident in the alternative criteria used to make decisions about which artists' music is recorded and distributed. Thus, where the decisions and processes of the major labels would, as Street argues, 'result in a culture which replicates what has gone before, reworking familiar formulae' (1997:41), indie, in its early days at least, attempted to represent a new, oppositional approach to cultural production, and was defined not by musical criteria, but through its political economy.

However, the purity of this arrangement did not last long, if it ever existed at all. The separation between indie and major labels was soon blurred as independents worked with major distributors, or allowed major labels to assist them financially. Former indie bands signed to major labels, while they established 'faux-indie' off-shoots to attract indie talent. However, the 1980s saw indie culture coalesce in other ways. As Bennett (2001) notes, 'the question thus becomes not one of the "commercial versus non-commercial", a debate that in any case quickly founders, but rather how things are accepted or rejected as components of indie-guitar culture' (p51). The culture that grew around independent records offered those participating in it an insular world where one's taste in music dictated and directed not only one's identity, but one's entire outlook on life. John Harris dubs it a, 'warm kind of sanctuary' (2003:9) and describes the mid to late 80s' indie culture as one where,

Fans of independent music could forget about the mainstream and simply focus their attention on the fortunes of a select coterie of groups... the pronouncements of its figureheads – Morrissey was joined by the likes of James' Tim Booth and The Wedding Present's David Gedge – ensured that the indie world oriented itself around much more than music. In addition, one could detect a mixture of political dissent, "right-on" attitudes, and a spurning of the traditional totems of rock 'n' roll: long hair, leather trousers, drugs and the hoary musical rudiments that were rooted in the blues (p9).

Indie could literally become a way of life for the artists, journalists, DJs, promoters, record companies, specialist record shop owners, and of course, fans who embraced it. Not only did indie reject the mainstream, but for the most part the mainstream ignored it. Aside from a handful of popular indie acts, notably The Smiths and later the Happy Mondays and the Stone Roses, pop institutions such as the Top 40 and *Top Of The Pops* were largely undisturbed by the miserabilist janglings of indie bands.

Indie culture is defined by its alternative sensibilities (Bennett, 2001:49), and its 'otherness'. In his discussion of the role of the guitar in indie Bennett identifies several features that distinguish indie. To start with its live music scene is based around low-key, small-scale gigs taking place in the back rooms of pubs such as the Bull & Gate in Kentish Town and the Falcon in Camden and hundreds of others throughout the land. Affectionately referred to as the 'toilet circuit' these localised gatherings were privileged because they fostered a, 'sense of community between bands and their audiences' (2001:45). Such events are characterised by a conscious rejection of the showiness of stadium rock with its light shows and ostentatious costume changes, and accompanied by a similarly 'pure' approach to making music itself. The endless guitar solos and technical effects employed by virtuoso guitarists working within rock or metal genres were regarded in indie as a, 'distraction from 'real' music making' (p50). Indie also embraced a lo-fi or DIY ethic in relation to recording so that, as Bennett notes, 'groups and singer-songwriters, equipped in many cases with little more than a tape recorder, microphone, electric guitar and bass, simple drum kit and/or drum machine, have recorded complete CD or cassette albums' (p51). Building on the DIY approach popularised by punk, indie was able to de-professionalise music production making it more accessible, democratic and to those involved, more authentic.

Gendering Indie

Indie's opposition to both rock and pop is also played out in the ways gender is articulated in the scene. For example, indie's eschewal of the guitar hero removes the genre from the phallogocentric connotations of 'cock rock' (Frith and McRobbie, 1990) that characterise other genres. Bennett notes that,

The use of the guitar in rock and heavy metal is in stark contrast to its role in indie-guitar music where the guitar is viewed as a centrally defining aspect of indie-guitar's 'back to basics', alternative image rather than as a symbol of male dominance and power (2001:55).

However, it is not just indie's use of the guitar that is less macho and less sexualised than rock's. Indie lyrics, bands and fans are also frequently associated with what Fonarow (1997) describes as, 'imagery that is sexually muted or androgenous [sic]' (p360). Laura Lee Davies' (1995) account of being a female indie fan notes that indie songs, 'weren't peopled by hairy old rock stars and their lovely lay-deez,' and that the culture itself, 'had a softer gang mentality than the bikers, the mods, and those sad tossers who walked around in wedge haircuts' (p124-5). Meanwhile, Simon Reynolds (1989) articulates indie's alternativeness in terms of its rejection of the highly gendered and sexualised nature of pop, soul and r'n'b as well. He argues that where those genres privilege a fit, desirable body ('vigorous, healthy, suntanned, muscled for men, curvaceous for women' (p251)), indie embraces a wimpy, pale ideal. Bodies in indie are also not normatively gendered. Indie style, for example, allows for more flexible and potentially liberatory

gender identities for both boys and girls. In his history of 'streetstyle' Ted Polhemus (1994) describes the key elements of indie chic as 'over- or undersized items bought second-hand in charity shops, graphically distinctive T-shirts which indicate interest in some seriously obscure indie band, battered denim jeans (for girls, often worn cut off with stripy leggings), army surplus garments and big, shiny Dr Marten boots' (p122). Not only is this dress code 'affordable and flexible' as Davies puts it (1995:124), but as Reynolds argues,

What is remarkable about the style is that it doesn't accentuate the figure: it conceals the signs of physical maturity/sexual difference. Indeed to look cool in this indie style it helps to be small as well as thin... For women, dressing within the terms of conventional sexiness – tight clothing, make-up, high heels – runs the risk of 'responsibility' for unwanted sexual attention. So there's a feminist impulse behind this style – lesbian feminists have been dressing like this for years (1989:251).

The 'pale' bodily ideal in indie also serves to reinforce the overwhelming whiteness of the genre. The racial homogeneity of indie is not only evident in the fact that almost all indie bands, fans and behind-the-scenes personnel are white, but also in its influences. Indie music grew out of the equally white youth cultures of punk and rock, and specifically from the era of the late-60s when rock moved away from its roots in early Black forms of rock 'n' roll. Reynolds observes that indie abandoned these influences for, 'strictly albino roots like the Velvet Underground, Television, Byrds, psychedelia, folk, country' (1989:246). Indie is also distinguished from Black pop genres such as soul, r'n'b and disco, styles that revolve around, 'the primacy of the dance beat' (p246). In contrast, Reynolds notes that, 'what's striking about the indiepop of the last four years is its undanceability,' and that the 'correct' response to indie is passive, bodily contemplation – indie is a 'head culture' (p246). The 'otherness' that characterises indie is therefore a particular form of *white* otherness, i.e., one emanating from within a section of society that more normally constitutes the 'one' against which others are 'othered'. While the progressive politics espoused within the indie scene include, indeed prioritise, anti-racism, artists articulating the same sentiments in underground dance or rap genres are not typically included under the rubric of indie music. The inherent whiteness of indie's constitution through both musical and non-musical factors clearly informs its character, however, the equal absence of both non-white male and female artists from the genre not only suggest that Black and Asian youth are participating in other music-based cultures, but also throws the disparity between white male and female participation in indie into greater relief. The whiteness of indie may limit its scope and appeal, but is not entirely surprising. Its maleness, on the other hand, is.

It is impossible to provide a definitive account of all the sounds, ethics and styles that characterise indie because these signifiers are never permanently fixed. However, the sketch of the indie scene outlined above illustrates its general characteristics. Most salient to this research is the fact that indie is largely defined by extra-musical criteria, for

example its relation to the music industry, its sensibility of 'otherness' and its gender norms. What is, perhaps, most important to note is indie's position in popular music *between* the worlds of pop and rock. It cannot adequately be described as either, indeed it is frequently tagged both 'indie-pop' and 'indie-rock' although the terms refer to the same scene. Therefore, indie has the potential to subvert the hierarchised, gendered value discourses attached to pop and rock, for example, those outlined by Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie in their seminal account of gender in popular music, 'Rock and Sexuality' (1978, reprinted 1990). Frith and McRobbie argue that sexuality in pop/rock is located in male performers' stereotyped sexual poses. On one side 'masculine sexuality' is expressed as 'cock rock' wherein,

performers are aggressive, dominating, and boastful, and they constantly seek to remind the audience of their prowess, their control... The cock rock image is the rampant destructive male traveler, smashing hotels and groupies alike (1990:374).

Cock rock is also primarily consumed by males, as opposed to the (male) teenybop star who, 'plays on notions of female sexuality' (p375), in order to appeal to a female audience. The teenybop idol's image is, 'based on self-pity, vulnerability, and need. The image is of the young boy next door: sad, thoughtful, pretty, and puppylike' (p375). The polarised schema constructed by Frith and McRobbie may seem somewhat stark², however it still effectively summarises the rock/pop divide in terms of how it is gendered and who is presumed to participate in which genres and how. Indie, however, confuses this binary system. Indie is not characterised by the overt masculinity of (cock) rock, and yet, as Davies wisely observes, 'despite the seemingly feminine, or certainly less macho nature of so much of indie music's lyrical content, almost all of the genre's leading "scenes" have, over the years, been quite male-dominated, if not laddish' (1995:128). Bennett also notes this contradiction stating that while indie attempts to de-masculinise its approach to the guitar, 'the fact remains that, like rock and heavy metal, indie-guitar is primarily a male concern' (2001:55). Indie shares similarities with both its older brother rock, and with feminised pop.

Indie also subverts the traditional characteristics of subcultures, and I have refrained from describing it as such for precisely this reason. Feminist critiques of spectacular subcultures from Skinheads, to Mods to Punk have emphasised the marginal position of women within these groupings. This marginality is attributed partially to the role of 'the street' in subculture and the attendant dangers for women therein. As Angela McRobbie (1991) notes,

it has always been on the street that most subcultural activity takes place... it both proclaims the publicisation of the group and at the same time ensures its male dominance. For the street remains in some ways taboo for women (think of the unambiguous connotations of the term 'streetwalker') (p29).

² Even by 1985 Simon Frith was describing 'Rock and Sexuality' as, 'not very profound' (1990:420).

Women's absence from the street is also attributable to their centrality in the home, and this is where their cultural 'teenybopper' activity takes place (McRobbie & Garber, 1976:211-213). What is significant about indie is that, like teenybopperdom, it is also a 'bedroom culture'. While the live scene in indie is, admittedly, important it is by no means necessary for participation, especially for those living beyond the reach of even localised venues. Listening to indie records, and even recording one's own indie music, can be successfully accomplished within the home. As Reynolds has noted, indie records are notoriously 'undanceable' and this further de-emphasises the centrality of clubs or discos in indie so that, 'the prime scene of consumption is the bedroom' (1989:246). Thus indie offers modes of participation which are potentially more accessible for women.

Approaching the research

It is indie's capacity to allow for a re-negotiation of the gendering of pop and rock which led me to undertake this research. Indie seems to promise women a more accessible and less alienating form of music-based culture. Given this, the central question of my research is to ask why more women don't participate in indie. Why, at every level of indie culture, are women outnumbered by men? Why are there fewer female artists, DJs, journalists, promoters and fans? When indie seems to offer not only a greater opportunity for female participation, but a culture that will allow women to explore alternative, positive and meaningful female identities, why do women stay away in droves? That women are the minority in indie is an unfortunate, but undisputed reality. However, what makes the lack of female participation in indie even more problematic is the fact that over the last ten to fifteen years women have made very little progress in terms of overcoming the male dominance of the scene, and herein lies a second major question to be addressed in this research; why hasn't the feminist progress that has brought significant changes to other walks of women's political, social and cultural lives extended to their involvement in indie?

The continuing gender asymmetry in indie runs counter to some early 1990s accounts which foresaw a more equal future. At the end of her article on indie Laura Lee Davies points to the rise of riot grrrl (still the only ever female-oriented/dominated indie scene) and the emergence of bands like Elastica and Echobelly in 1993-4 as indicators of women's increasing presence in indie. She notes that, 'I see more women at gigs now, which is great. Perhaps the world of indie is a more equal place...at least now we don't just have the faded black and whites of The Raincoats to look back on' (p133-4). Similarly in her excellent study of women's participation as musicians in pop/rock culture, *Frock Rock* (1998), Mavis Bayton acknowledges women's marginal position, but also admits, 'there have, of course, always been exceptions and these have become more frequent over the last two decades, but the pattern is only slowly beginning to change' (p1, see also p208) – even if it is 'slow', change is definitely on the agenda.

Bayton's study starts from the same position as this research, she asks, 'why is there such an imbalance between men and women's involvement' (p1) in music scenes. However, through a series of interviews with female musicians operating in the indie/rock sphere during the late 1980s to mid 1990s at various levels of professionalism/success, she takes as her object of study the material and economic barriers facing women who choose to become musicians. Bayton is concerned with their experiences as women and how they negotiate various male-dominated spheres, from acquiring equipment and learning instruments to gigging and signing a record deal. Whilst rigorous and illuminating, Bayton's approach only partially accounts for women's negligible progress in redressing their under-representation and marginalisation in the rock sphere. Unlike Bayton, my interest is not in how women become (indie) musicians, but how and with what terms and conditions women participate in music scenes at all levels – as musicians and fans and their position in indie culture in general. In order to study these elements of indie culture one needs to look to the one vital element missing from the discussion thus far, the music press.

The description of indie I have mapped out doesn't mention the music press by name, but its influence haunts every detail. The very name 'indie' was coined in its pages as a shortened term for the independent record labels chart (Harris, 2003:9). Independent record labels might have been based on alternative ethics and a new relationship between art and commerce, but as Harris argues,

one could not discern such thinking by simply listening to the records. Throughout the 80s, though none of the now-dominant British music monthlies existed, there were no less than four weeklies: the pre-eminent *NME*, along with *Melody Maker*, *Sounds* and *Record Mirror*. They quizzed, dissected and contextualised rock groups to the point that rhetoric occasionally seemed to take precedence over the music. Those bands allied with independent labels were among the most pored over; thus, through the pages of the press, labels, musicians and sympathetic journalists could pass the message on (2003:8).

Thus, the music press is where the 'components of indie-guitar culture' that Bennett mentions are 'accepted or rejected' (2001:51). It is where the 'right-on' pronouncements of the prominent artists Harris refers to are made. It is how you know the record you're listening to has been authentically made following DIY ethics, and moreover, validates those qualities in the first place. A third major question for this research, then is to ask how, through the discussion and delineation of certain artists, styles and ethics, the music press discursively constructs the genre of indie. In order to pose this question more fully what follows is a brief history of the rock/pop music press in Britain, its relation to indie, and its role in the mediation of music.

The British music press

The music press in Britain dates from the early 1950s and the birth of pop and rock 'n' roll. Until that time the *Melody Maker* (originally founded in 1926) was primarily a jazz paper and it wasn't until the establishment of the *New Musical Express (NME)* in 1952 that both publications began to reflect the burgeoning popular music industry. At this time the BBC's monopoly on broadcasting meant pop was yet to hit the airwaves, so the filtering and promotional role fulfilled by radio in the United States was performed by the music press in Britain (McLeod, 2001:48). During the 1950s the UK's music press was, as Simon Frith (1983) observes, 'uncomplicatedly a facet of the music industry' (p166). This was symbolised by the charts printed in both the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* of the best selling records of the week, charts which effected stocking and promotional policies of record companies and retailers. The coverage of the *NME* reflected what was in the chart – Frith states that,

music press 'news' was news of the latest recording stars, the latest entrants to the charts; all such stars were equally important and their importance lasted precisely as long as their chart success...[the paper's] success was entirely dependent on their readers' interest in the stars they covered: the *NME* sold more than *Melody Maker* in the 1950s because it provided better news of the current chart stars (p166-7).

During this period the papers assessed records in purely commercial terms – what was popular was good.

However, with the ascendancy of counterculture and rock during the 1960s records began to be judged by non-commercial criteria as an 'ideology of rock' and an attendant 'ideology of rock criticism' was enshrined (Gudmundsson et al, 2002). The 'ideology of rock' emerged through the countercultural idea that rock was an authentic and complex art form and an expression of generational and subcultural identity. The 'rock community' comprised both artists and audience who shared an understanding of rock as a political form distinct from (and superior to) other forms of popular music (McLeod, 2001:49). In Britain the music press was slow to pick up on the new rock aesthetic, however, a massive sea change in 1972/3 saw the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* give the new discourse of rock a matching style of journalism (Toynbee, 1992:290). Writers such as Charles Shaar Murray were recruited from the underground press to import an intelligent 'New Journalism' style into the music press. Murray and his contemporaries combined the techniques of literary and film criticism with genre analysis with the aim of defending 'feeling' from 'commercial besmirchment and vacuous bombast' (Toynbee, 1993:291). This enshrined a structuring opposition between art and commerce within rock criticism, and allowed legitimacy to be conferred on any genre provided it was neither too cheesy nor too commercial.

Until the late 1970s the serious music press followed this model while teeny-bop titles served the pop audiences abandoned in the shift to a more progressive, hipper, album-buying readership. The arrival of punk in 1976 effectively ended this arrangement.

Toynbee (1993) explains the significance of this development to the music press;

punk collapsed musical taste into subculture so that fandom and lifestyle, which had drifted apart since the high summer of the counter culture, became inextricably, and, as it now turns out, permanently intertwined (p291).

Unlike in the 1960s the discourse of punk was generated through the established music press rather than in underground fanzines. The music press was quick to recruit punk's ideologues (in 1976 the *NME* famously enlisted both Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons through its 'two hip, young, gunslingers wanted' advert (Forde, 2001:25)) and Toynbee believes that the punk era remains a 'founding moment of a new community of taste' (1993:291). It is, however, the shifts in the music press in the post-punk era that are most salient to the research here.

During the mid-80s the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* began to focus their coverage on the emergent indie scene. Shuker (2001) notes that the *NME* in particular is, 'indispensable for those wanting to keep up with this scene and invaluable for those performers and labels working within it' (p91). In 1990 the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* were joined by *Select* a monthly indie/rock title covering much the same scene. While all three publications featured a mix of news, interviews and reviews of records and gigs, there are some differences between the titles. The weekly publication of the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* gave their coverage an immediacy and up-to-the-minute feel. Their ability to report almost instantly on gigs, weekly single releases and the very latest news is reflected in their emphasis on those elements. Meanwhile *Select* offered fewer live reviews and longer interviews with more lavish picture sections, a result of their higher quality paper and full-colour format. In the early 1990s the monthly music magazine *Vox*, formerly a more traditional rock organ also oriented its coverage towards the indie scene and in 1996 was retooled as a monthly version of the *NME*.

The ability of these publications, especially the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* to concentrate so intensely on indie is due partly to the growth in indie's popularity, and partly to changes in the music press market. From the mid 1980s this market experienced both fragmentation and decline and the consolidation of what Forde (2001) terms a 'publishing duopoly' in the field comprising IPC and EMAP (p26).³ The fragmentation of the market reflects publishers' desire to exploit niche markets for their advertisers who demand large, yet specific readerships (Forde, 2001:27). Théberge (1991) suggests this is a trend which has been in place since the mid-1970s. He states that,

³ IPC publish(ed) *NME*, *Melody Maker*, *Vox* and *Uncut* as well as the men's magazine *Loaded*. EMAP publish(ed) *Select*, *Q*, *Mojo* and the style magazines *The Face* and *Sky Magazine*.

while the idea of specialized publications is not itself new, the degree of specialization is. The trend in the magazine industry has apparently been one away from the earlier battle with television for mass-market advertising dollars towards a reliance on more specific advertising markets (p273).

In Britain the establishment of new pop titles such as *Smash Hits* in 1978 and *Top of the Pops* magazine in 1995 on the one hand, and more adult-oriented rock publications such as *Q* (1986), *Uncut* (1997) and *Mojo* (1993) dedicated to classic artists and their contemporary heirs on the other allowed the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* to narrow their scope to indie. Although the market declined towards the end of the 1990s with *Melody Maker*, *Select* and *Vox* ceasing publication during 1999/2000, for most of the decade the indie scene was able to support its two weekly and two monthly publications.

Theorising the music press

Within the field of popular music studies there is a small, but growing, literature on the music press. Brief considerations of the music press are routinely included in more general works on pop, for example Simon Frith's *Sound Effects* (1983), and Roy Shuker's *Understanding Popular Music* (2001), but it was not until 2002 that the first full volume dedicated to the music press, Steve Jones' edited collection *Pop Music and the Press*, was published. This work, buttressed by a small selection of articles published during the 1990s and early 2000s⁴, tends to theorise the music press in terms of the roles rock criticism plays both within the music industry and for the audience. It questions whether the music press operates as PR for record companies, and to what extent it is or has become purely a guide to consumption. It also works to create a taxonomy of music press types, coding publications as 'serious', 'ideological' or for 'collectors', and commenting on historical shifts in the coverage offered by different papers and the increasing degree to which magazines are aimed at niche audiences. However, it is Frith's early framework which still structures much of the critical work on rock criticism, in particular his notion of the music press as an 'ideological gatekeeper' (1983:165).

The music press's 'gatekeeping' is theorised in two main ways; firstly it acts as a filter between music producers and the audience, and secondly it constructs discourses of value around certain artists and genres. Scott (1999) falls into the former group when he argues that,

the very consideration of any given cultural product by the media has the effect of selecting that product out from the generality, highlighting it (even if only to condemn it) and generally suggesting that you, the consumer, should take note of it... If the product in question – and product can be extended to mean whole genres of work – does not get past these cultural gatekeepers, it is all but excluded from the pathways that lead onwards (p47).

⁴ See for example Théberge (1991), Toynbee (1993), Forde (2001).

In this interpretation of media gatekeeping the crucial factor is the presence or absence of coverage which determines levels of public awareness (Hirsch, 1990:131). This awareness can also effect whether or not the product in question is adopted by retailers. For small scale indie labels with only limited funds to spend on direct advertising the importance of getting by these gatekeepers and gaining media coverage is increased (Toynbee, 1993:297).

The music press is thus thought to act as a kind of filter through which bands must pass in order to get their records more widely heard and distributed and thus to continue with their careers. Although poor quality or quantity of music press coverage alone may not be enough to scupper a band's chances, McLeod (2001) notes that, 'commercial failure combined with a critical reception that is less than enthusiastic might result in a band being dropped from a label' (p51). The music press is also used by record companies frequently as part of their promotional strategies for bands, both in the attempt to attract radio or television coverage or to market products directly to the public (McLeod, 2001:57). This may take the form of press adverts featuring quotes from glowing reviews, or in some cases press quotes are printed on stickers stuck on the covers of CDs in the shops (see Frith, 2002). Record companies also include previous good reviews an artist has received in the 'press packs' they send out with promotional copies of their forthcoming releases. In his book on the role of theatre critics, Shrum (1996) discusses the use of excerpts from reviews to further publicize plays and performances. He argues that, 'these legitimate the critic – often no more than a journalist or layperson – as an authority, as someone whose opinions should be taken seriously (p58). The same function is performed for music critics and this practice confers an 'expert' status on the music press. It also advertises records as of interest to anyone who reads and identifies themselves with the paper the quote on the advert is extracted from. However, as Shrum also notes 'there is something peculiar about believing critical excerpts when they are selected by persons directly interested in your ticket purchase' (1996:58).

Rock critics are not only considered to be 'experts', but also opinion leaders. Hirsch (1991) argues that for cultural producers,

the crucial target audience for promotional campaigns consists of autonomous gatekeepers, or "surrogate consumers" such a disc jockeys, film critics, and book reviewers, employed by mass media organizations to serve as fashion experts and opinion leaders for their respective constituencies (1991:132).

What Hirsch is saying is that critics to some extent influence not only the products that appear in the media, but the opinions of their readers. Frith (1983) further argues that those readers' opinions are equally influential, and that, 'music papers, indeed, are important even for those people who don't buy them – their readers act as the opinion leaders, the rock interpreters, the ideological gatekeepers for everyone else' (p165). Not only do critics represent their 'respective constituencies' but they also perform the role of

'investment counselors' (Shrum, 1996:57). Shrum notes that because of the vast volume of cultural products available in modern times, critics have become intimately tied to the music industry's consumerist drive, thus the critic's role is as much about recommending products for purchase than about assessing what they have seen (1996:57).

This version of 'gatekeeping' is relevant to my research questions in as far as it suggests the significance of the lack of coverage of female indie artists in the music press. The logical conclusion of this model is that if artists are not written about, the public will be unaware of them, they won't sell as many records and ultimately be dropped by their record labels. Gatekeeping in this form privileges individual, autonomous critic's opinions, the strength of which can predicate the success or failure of an artist. The limitation of this approach to the music press is that the emphasis on the presence (or absence) of media coverage can say little about the content or character of that coverage. Hirsch, for example, states that although it is easy to predict *how many* products will receive media attention, predicting *which* ones will be selected by the critics for attention is more problematic (1991:132). Although both he and Scott (1999) are right to highlight this aspect of gatekeeping, the literature on the discursive construction of rock criticism, particularly in relation to gender, has fundamentally challenged the ways in which the music press is theorised. Such analyses can show that the products highlighted by the media are not an unknowable factor, they are not selected randomly by publications with no particular preference towards specific sorts of cultural products. Rather, the process of highlighting or neglecting certain artists/genres by the media will follow distinct patterns. Identifying those patterns is a vital aim of this research, because it will illuminate the bases of the music press' critical judgements.

Value discourses in rock criticism

This second form of ideological gatekeeping performed by the music press concerns the question of how they attach value to the products they allow through their 'gates'. Most obviously the music press establishes both musical and extra-musical criteria that constitute 'good' music, for example qualities such as originality, authenticity and sincerity may contribute to a record's goodness. On top of this the music press also constructs notions of the 'good' or worthy artist as well as enshrining a history and canon of the most important moments/artists in rock. In other words, the music press constructs the discourses through which popular music is described, celebrated, understood and ascribed meaning and value (McLeod, 2001:51). However, these discourses are not uniform throughout the spectrum of music titles and different types of music magazine employ different criteria of evaluation when it comes to assessing an artist's worth. A journalist in, say, *Smash Hits*, may value the commercial or 'cheesy' qualities of a record, while the same elements would undoubtedly be derided by Charles Shaar Murray and his

ilk at the *NME* of the 1970s. This point has two important consequences for studying the role of the music press in women's participation in the British indie scene. Firstly it suggests that different sections of the music press apply different standards and values to artists which depend on the type or genre of music they are concerned with, and secondly, that music critics' discourse addresses a specific audience, i.e., one that shares their concepts of value.

This is particularly prescient in the case of the serious rock press, of which the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* are/were a key element in Britain. Simon Frith makes this clear when he states that it,

also provides information about and pictures of the musicians whom its readers are known to like; it, too, confirms taste, offers a sense of hip community. In this respect the music press specialises in serving up particular markets (just like radio). But the consumers of up-market rock press make other demands of their magazines. They don't just want to know what they do like, they also want to know what they might like and even what they ought to like. For them a consumer guide is a guide to rock value.

I've been assuming that rock writers are opinion leaders, that both record-sellers and record-buyers take notice of them, put some trust in their judgements. Their position only works, though, if their values do represent those of their readers: there may be disagreements about particular records, but reviewer and reader must share an account of what rock means, have the same criteria of rock worth (1983:175-6).

While Frith has little to say about the content of the discourses shared by critics and their audience, he highlights the music press's role as gatekeepers for certain communities of taste. Not only is this taste articulated between music press writers and their audience, but it is also shared by other interconnected actors in the rock sphere. McLeod points out that many people working either as publicists, DJs, A&R people, label owners, journalists or even artists, have in their careers performed two or more of these roles, thus the 'ideology of rock criticism' tends to be shared by all (2001:58). Additionally, rock critic discourse frequently appears outside the pages of the music press – successful music journalists author books or have their work published in anthologies⁵, while McLeod notes that it 'also spills over into the academy, helping to shape the canon of "respectable" artists worthy of scholarly study' (2001:58)⁶, thus rock critics' discourse has a very direct effect on the way popular music history is recorded.

⁵ For example, J. Savage & H. Kureshi (eds) *The Faber Book of Pop* (1995), and B. Hoskyns (ed) *The Sound and the Fury, a Rock's Backpages Reader: 40 Years of Classic Rock Journalism* (2003).

⁶ The interconnectedness and wide reach of rock critics' discourse is certainly evident in the cast of journalists whose work is analysed in this research. Among them are John Robb (also an author, member of the band Gold Blade, and producer of bands including Blessed Ethel), Steve Lamacq (who was presenter of Radio One's *Evening Session* for much of the 1990s, has authored a book and part-owned Deceptive Records, the indie label that signed Elastica), Simon Reynolds (the author of both popular and academic books on popular music and culture), John Harris (the journalist and former editor of *Select* is now an author, political commentator and occasionally appears on BBC2's *Newsnight Review*. He also produced and presented a programme for the BBC on Britpop, broadcast in August 2005), Everett True (has authored several books and

The importance of rock critics' discourse at multiple levels reaffirms the appropriateness of studying indie through its mediation in the music press. My research will be especially concerned with analysing those discourses of value articulated in the music press in relation to indie, but equally concerned with how they intersect with discourses of gender, and to a lesser extent, class, race, sexuality and nationality. Despite the fascinating, not to mention highly political, nature of this kind of analysis, there exists only a limited, recent (post-2000⁷) and largely U.S.-centric literature on the subject of *what* is actually written in the music press's hallowed pages, and *how* that discourse is constructed. A substantial part of that literature specifically concerns the (under) representation of women in the music press. For example, in his article "'★½": A critique of rock criticism in North America', McLeod (2001) asks how the music press's discourse, 'can reproduce and maintain structured systems of inequality' (p48) in the music industry. Given the continued unequal levels of women's participation in indie this is a very relevant question for this research. Helen Davies (2001) goes further into the details of women's marginalisation. She asks, 'how the music press constructs concepts of credibility and authenticity that work to exclude women...from the world of serious music' (p302). Again, this is a pressing issue in indie, and points towards the ways in which male and female artists, and Davies argues, fans are written about, and ascribed value, differently in the music press.

Such studies illustrate the fruitfulness of analysing the music press's discourse in terms of how it perpetuates gender inequality in music cultures, and my research is indebted to them. However, the approach taken by McLeod and Davies is ultimately inadequate for the task of understanding the role of the music press in indie in the 1990s and women's participation in that genre. Even though these writers attend to the construction of discourse, they still adhere to a model of the press as an 'ideological gatekeeper' in which the media functions as a negative filter, weeding out all but a few female artists, and representing them as anomalies (Kruse, 2002:138), their gender overwhelmingly marking them as inferior (Feigenbaum, 2005:38). While this explains the position of the music press on some levels, it is based on the presumption that there is something, 'rock' or 'pop', that exists beyond the music press's representation of it – a pure sphere untainted by the media's selective filtering and sexist discourses. However, the analysis of the media's role in subcultures presented by Sarah Thornton in her work *Club Cultures* (1995) radically challenges just this supposition. She argues that the role of niche media like the music press is far more fundamental than commonly thought because they,

categorize social groups, arrange sounds, itemize attire and label everything.
They baptize scenes and generate the self-consciousness required to maintain

occasionally performs as The Legend), and Stuart Maconie (who has also authored several books and regularly appears on TV as a cultural commentator).

⁷ For example, McLeod (2001), Davies (2001), Kruse (2002) and Feigenbaum (2005).

cultural distinctions. They give definition to vague cultural formations, pull together and reify the disparate materials which become subcultural homologues. The music and style press are crucial to our conceptions of British youth, they do not just cover subcultures, they help construct them (p151).

Approaching the media in this way opens up new possibilities for theorising the music press, especially with regard to their role in the formation of genres and their attendant cultures. In particular, it offers a framework which is particularly appropriate for studying indie, especially given the way the music press not only coined the term 'indie' but created an alternative world of artists, fans, attitudes, styles and beliefs out of a disparate and aesthetically diverse group of independent records. The music press is also responsible for 'baptising' the vast majority of indie sub-genres over the past fifteen years, from 'C86' which was named after a cassette available from the *NME* (Davies, 1995:128) to 'Madchester' to 'Britpop'.

Adopting the view that indie as a genre is constructed through its media, namely the *NME*, the *Melody Maker* and *Select*, allows specific questions to be asked about the nature of that genre: How is indie defined and distinguished in relation to other genres? What characterises an 'indie' artist or record? How are gender, race, class, sexuality and nationality articulated within the construction of indie? The answers to these questions can be found in the way the music press organises its discourse. Treating the music press this way means that it cannot be analysed as something which reflects 'reality'. The music press is frequently used as evidence of, 'the psychic states of audiences and of material changes in the social and cultural world' (Thornton, 1990:91), by scholars and pop historians alike.⁸ Viewing the music press as constructing, not representing or reflecting, music scenes and stars can also be extended to the construction of fans and audiences, so that it becomes possible to ask, for example: How is the indie audience constructed through the music press's address? The academic literature on audiences and fans generally fails to consider the media in this role as it tends to focus entirely on fan-texts (zines, fanfic, fan-art etc) or the texts that constitute the object of fandom (films, records etc) even as many writers implicitly refer to music press types texts in their discussions of fandom – Dyer to the role of newspaper stories, critics and commentaries in the construction of stars (1998:1 and 63), Jenkins to Science-Fiction magazines (1992:19), Garratt to her 'four volumes of pasted cuttings and pictures' of the Bay City Rollers (1990:405), Abercrombie and Longhurst to 'knowledge that is increasingly available in mass circulation press and magazines' (1998:143). None of them take the time to explore the role of media texts like the music press either in the construction of stars or fandom, an omission this research will not be replicating.

⁸ See for example, Harris (2003) and Cloonan (1997).

Research framework

So far I have outlined the significance of two of the four titular concepts of this research. I have situated the British indie music of the early 1990s in its emphases on independence from commercial music, its extra-musical fondness for 'otherness' and non-normative gender identities, and its difference from more traditional 'street' subcultures. I have also mapped out the role of the media in constructing indie as a genre, as well as its general position with regards to the music industry and the audience. This leaves public spheres and exclusion as the other two key structuring concepts of this research. The foundational importance of public communication via the media in indie makes it possible to consider it as a public sphere. Public spheres are primarily forums of debate on topics that are of interest to those participating. In the context of indie such a forum takes place in the music press precisely because that is where, week in week out, indie is discussed, defended, derided, defined and redefined. The theory of the public sphere is not only a useful one to apply to indie because of the centrality of the media to both, but also because public spheres privilege participation – after all, there cannot be a public sphere without it. The kind of participation possible in a mediated public sphere is key here considering indie's status as a 'bedroom culture'. Participation in indie need not involve the sporadic gatherings of gigs and festivals, rather solitary engagement with the debates of the music press, as an adjunct to listening to indie music, is sufficient to participate in the public sphere around it.

To be fully public a public sphere must be, amongst other things, accessible. There should be no restraints on anyone wishing to take part in discussion, and herein lies the link to the final concept from the title; exclusion. In theory no one should be excluded from a public sphere, however, theory does not always follow through into practice, especially where the exclusion of women is concerned. Both the form and content of debate in a public sphere structure how participation is possible, and for whom. Analysing those debates will therefore yield answers to the central research questions relating to the lack of women in the public sphere around indie. Following on from the analyses of the music press previously discussed it is known that they discursively construct both artists and the audience for indie. The productive nature of discourse means that in the public sphere those constructions are produced as identities – of the indie star or band and the indie fan – the character of which can be discerned through analysis. The questions around discursive constructions of value or credibility that concern Davies and McLeod (both 2001) are still relevant here, but can be re-framed to ask how the legitimate public sphere participant is produced in the music press. How is that identity constituted in terms of its gender, race, class, sexuality or nationality? What are the terms and conditions for anyone's participation in indie? Posing these questions can produce a more nuanced and complex understanding of women's participation in the genre because they are not just predicated on analysing how *women* are portrayed. Rather, by looking at the construction

of both male and female artists and fans it will be possible to show not only the differences between them, but the variation and inconsistencies in music press discourse. It is a fact, rarely acknowledged in the literature on women and the music press, that (occasionally) male artists get bad reviews as well! More than this, men are not constructed uniformly in the music press, so how does the construction of female artists differ/exclude them?

One final feature of a public sphere which makes it usefully applicable to the study of indie is its ability to allow for changes over time. Unlike a rarified subcultural formation a public sphere does not fix signifiers such as dress or music styles in the same way. Elements like these are explicitly discursive in a public sphere, and thus only fixed for as long as they are faithfully reiterated. By analysing the music press over time it will therefore be possible to identify which discourses remain dominant and which are resignified. This flexibility of the public sphere in this way gives it the potential to change for the better with regards to the participation of women, but also the worse. Thus, the model of the public sphere can account for indie's regression in the face of feminist progress elsewhere, as well as being able to accommodate the more general changes that might occur in indie. This factor is particularly relevant in the context of the period covered in this research. The period between 1993 and 1998 saw a massive sea-change in the British indie scene, one that has altered its character permanently. If the relationship between indie and the 'mainstream' was complicated prior to 1993, in the five years following it became infinitely more so. From early 1993 the indie scene in Britain began a journey that took it from the margins of pop to its very centre. By mid-1995 there were indie bands at the top of the charts and on the Six O'Clock News.

Partly as a reaction to the popularity and dominance of American grunge acts (Nirvana and their ilk) in the indie scene between 1990 and 1993, a handful of bands who explicitly played up their Britishness, who followed in a canon of British greats and made music full of specifically British cultural references, started to gain followings outside the usual indie constituencies. Most prominent among this first wave of more popular indie bands were Suede who dominated the indie scene during 1993, but whose chart success and wide media coverage was exceptional. During 1994 the term 'Britpop' had been coined in the music press to describe indie bands that flaunted a particular 'British', or more commonly 'English' aesthetic. These bands gained in popularity throughout the year with Blur, Oasis, Pulp and Elastica among those scoring top 20 hits and appearing on *Top of The Pops*. Of course such achievements were not unheard of for indie bands, but what distinguishes the period between 1994 and 1997 is the scale on which it occurred. At the highpoint of Britpop a whole generation of indie bands had big Top 10 hits, not just one or two exceptions. Steve Lamacq (2000) sums up the novelty of the situation in an anecdote about the chart position of Pulp's 1995 single 'Common People',

Number two was a big deal. Number two was almost unbelievable. Number two was notice that the lunatics had taken over the asylum. Here was the band who had spent years selling 22 copies of each record they'd released finally selling 80,000 in ONE WEEK. And that singer, who we'd always said was going to be a star, now really was GOING TO BE A STAR (p133)⁹.

Lamacq's sense of surprise is the key factor here, indie bands just weren't 'meant' to be this high up the charts. More typical had been the lowly chart positions achieved by singles no less celebrated than 'Common People', for example Blur's 'For Tomorrow' which reached number 28 in April 1993, and Oasis' debut 'Supersonic', number 31 in April 1994 (Roberts, 2004).

Britpop's highpoint in terms of chart domination came in August 1995 when Blur and Oasis both released singles in the same week, prompting their infamous 'battle' for the top of the charts. That everyone assumed at least one of them would take the number one spot is evidence of the change in expectations of British indie artists. The critical acclaim heaped on indie bands by the music press was now actually reflected in their popularity. But indie was not only accepted into the pop world of the charts at this time, it also gained recognition at the most prestigious and 'serious' event in the British music industry's calendar, the Brit Awards – Blur and Oasis picked up several awards each in 1995 and 1996 respectively. Surprisingly, given its ubiquity during the mid-1990s, there is very little academic work on the subject of Britpop. What there is concentrates heavily on the kinds of national identity invoked by bands like Blur and Suede¹⁰ but has little to say about the gender of Britpop. While the early 90s/Britpop era of indie included far more female artists than previous indie sub-genres (particularly the Madchester and Baggy scenes of 1989-91 which were literally devoid of women), they were still a minority. However, the increased popularity of indie during the 'Britpop years' raises some interesting questions for the research here, for example, one might ask how indie maintains its foundational distinction from commercial pop when it becomes commercial pop. Does this threaten indie's constitution as a masculine genre, given the association between commercial/mainstream pop and femininity?

Chapter structure

The research in this thesis is divided into three broad sections. The first two chapters outline the theory of the public sphere that underpins the analysis of indie. Chapter one engages with the literature on the public sphere and in particular Habermas' theorisation

⁹ I realise the irony of quoting a music journalist as a reflection of developments in the 'real world', having just critiqued this practice. However Lamacq's sentiments here could be taken as constitutive of indie discourse, and changing attitudes towards the acceptability of mainstream success!

¹⁰ For example Bennett (2000), Cloonan (1997), Zuberi (2001).

of the bourgeois public sphere as set out in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). The primary aim of focusing on Habermas' model is to gain a thorough understanding of the formation of public spheres, how participation is possible within them and for whom, and the role the media plays in their operation. In chapter two the theorisation of cultural and counter- public spheres, for example that by Michael Warner and Nancy Fraser, is used to develop Habermas' original model and formulate a model of the type of public sphere that exists around indie – the indie public. With this model in place, the second main section lays out and tests the methodological framework for the analysis of the music press. Chapter three defines the kind of discourse analysis that will be carried out, its appropriateness to the data and the context, and the sort of results it can yield. Chapter four tests this methodology using a sample of introductory 'new band articles' from the music press in order to sketch out the key themes and concepts that structure the indie public. In particular attention is paid to how gender effects different artists' relation to the conventions of the music press.

The final section of the thesis contains the majority of the music press analysis and is concentrated on the extended coverage of four case-study bands; Suede, Elastica, Oasis and Echobelly. The analysis is divided thematically into four chapters. The first, on authenticity, addresses how artists are constructed as artists, the aesthetic values they are ascribed and how gender effects their ultimate production as authentic. The second, on the construction of 'stars' concentrates on the bands' personalities rather than their music, and analyses the ways in which they are thought to appeal to certain audiences. The next chapter on national identity takes a similar approach in that it combines analysis of artists with that of their audiences, but here the construction of 'Britishness' or 'Englishness' is foregrounded. The traits, especially where they concern race and gender, that contribute to the national identity of artists are analysed in terms of how they contribute to the character of indie, especially during the Britpop era. The final chapter moves away from the focus on artists, and instead explores the construction of fans and audiences in the indie public through the music press's mode of address. Throughout the chapters my underlying interest is in how participation is possible in the indie public and the various ways in which both inclusion and exclusion are fostered in the sphere.

The Public Sphere

Attempting a succinct introduction to the concept of the public sphere is a near impossible task. Theories of public spheres vary greatly in their focus and scope, however, most posit that a public sphere is created when public communication takes place. Nancy Fraser (1992a) states that the public sphere,

designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state (110-1).

This central tenet of public sphere theory is reflected in a wide range of models of the public sphere. In his seminal study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) Jürgen Habermas states that the *bourgeois* public sphere is formed when 'private people come together as a public...to engage in a debate' (1989:27). Nancy Fraser, in her delineation of *counterpublic* spheres, states that they are 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs' (1992a:123). While Göran Bolin's article 'Film Swapping in the Public Sphere' (2000) takes as its focus the activities of an *alternative cultural* public sphere of horror film fans, he too stresses communication as the key to the formation of public spheres when he states 'all public spheres are centred around public communicative practices' (2000:60). This emphasis on communication, be it 'debate', 'discourse' or 'discussion', is central to formulations of the public sphere so that in a general sense a public sphere is an arena for the exchange and circulation of views on matters that are of interest to the participants.

The seeming simplicity of this definition obscures the complexity of models of the public sphere. It does however, point to the primary reason for employing the concept of a public sphere in a study of British indie music in the 1990s. Approaching the indie scene as a public sphere allows for an examination of the communicative practices that structure that sphere. Such an examination will also provide a means to explore how identities are constructed through modes of address, and to understand the terms of participation, especially for women. The following two chapters will outline a model of a public sphere that can be applied to the indie scene in the 1990s. This chapter begins with an examination of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. Though his study is largely historical in nature, Habermas' model contains insights which are relevant to the study of public spheres today. However, the problems and contradictions inherent in his model point to the reasons why it has been deemed necessary to theorise alternative types of public.

These will be the subject of discussion in the latter part of this chapter. Particular attention will be paid to the role of the media and the gendered hierarchies enshrined in Habermas' version of the public sphere. The third section will focus on the formulation of other types of public sphere which have developed out of or against the Habermasian model, most importantly, counterpublic spheres.

The rise of the bourgeois public sphere

Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) presents a narrative of the changes in the public sphere between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain and Western Europe. He charts the shifts from the courtly form of publicity, through the public sphere in the world of letters to the bourgeois public sphere, and finally to the public sphere in the age of the mass media. Though he takes time to describe and analyse all these types of public, only one, the bourgeois public sphere, captures Habermas' imagination as an ideal type. In order to understand why this sphere holds such an important position in Habermas' theory, it is necessary to refer to the spheres it grew out of, especially the literary form of the public sphere.

The literary precursor to the bourgeois public sphere, the 'public sphere in the world of letters', is formed when cultural commodities (theatre, music, literature, art) start to become generally available and are claimed as a topic of debate by individuals (1989:29). Habermas states that,

even before the control over the public sphere by public authority was contested and finally wrested away by the critical reasoning of private persons on political issues, there evolved under its cover a public sphere in apolitical form – the literary precursor of the public sphere operative in the political domain. It provided the training ground for a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself – a process of self-clarification of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness... sparked by the products of culture that had become publicly accessible: in the reading room and the theater, in museums and at concerts. Inasmuch as culture became a commodity and thus finally evolved into "culture" in the specific sense (as something that pretended to exist merely for its own sake), it was claimed as the ready topic of discussion through which an audience-oriented subjectivity communicated with itself (p29).

A second factor in the formation of the public sphere in the world of letters comes from the separation of public and private spheres. The space offered by the private sphere allows individuals to contemplate and engage in dialogue without being subject to the restrictions of public authority. This creates the opportunity for what Habermas calls 'audience-oriented subjectivity' a kind of subjectivity born out of the intimate sphere of the conjugal family and based on the experiences of that sphere (p28). These two developments allowed for the creation of the literary pre-bourgeois public sphere, but in Habermas' account it is clear that it is a temporary step on the path to the bourgeois

public sphere.¹ The extract above portrays the public sphere in the world of letters as a 'training ground' for the critical use of reason which would later characterise the bourgeois public sphere. The form of argument used in this sphere is not identical to that of the future bourgeois public sphere. It is not adequate for the task of debating 'the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour' (p27), as Habermas puts it.

The reason for the deficiency in the debate is that it was not yet independent from the authority of aristocracy – it had not acquired 'the autonomy that turns conversation into criticism and *bons mots* into arguments' (p31). This 'literary precursor' then is a kind of proto-public sphere, it is not fully bourgeois because it still contains elements of the courtly form of publicity. Habermas states that, 'the public sphere in the world of letters was not exactly bourgeois because it brought with it elements of the publicity involved in the representation enacted at the prince's court' (p29). This suggests that if the public sphere in the world of letters was not fully 'public' it had less to do with the content of the debate i.e., cultural commodities, than with its form. For Habermas the debate that took place in the public sphere in the world of letters is inferior to that of the bourgeois public sphere because it was not fully rational and was not capable of dealing with topics pertaining to the common good. Subsequently what was so novel and significant about the bourgeois public sphere for Habermas was precisely the medium of its political confrontation, i.e., people's public use of reason, which he describes as 'peculiar and without historical precedent' (p27). The medium of rational-critical debate employed in the bourgeois public sphere is what gives it its unique, and for Habermas superior, character.

The importance and uniqueness of this new form of debate is illustrated in Habermas' description of the early art critics or 'kunstrichter'. As new areas of life became open to question, topics such as philosophy, literature and art were freed of the monopoly held by

¹ Although there are definitely differences between the bourgeois public sphere and the public sphere in the world of letters, not only in the topics of debate, but the form of debate and its participants, it is difficult to clarify the exact nature of these differences from Habermas' descriptions. In places Habermas highlights not the differences, but the similarities between the two spheres, for example he states that 'the public very much assumed its specific form; it was the bourgeois reading public of the eighteenth century. This public remained rooted in the world of letters even as it assumed political functions' (1989:85), while elsewhere he is able to assert that,

the circles of persons who made up the two forms of public were not even completely congruent. Women and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere, whereas female readers as well as apprentices and servants often took a more active part in the literary public sphere than the owners of private property and family heads themselves (p56).

This apparent confusion makes Habermas' argument difficult to follow to the letter, but by engaging a generous reading it is fair to conclude that it is the issue of rational-critical debate which sets the two spheres apart. Indeed it is crucial for Habermas that rational-critical debate between autonomous individuals takes place in order for there to be a public sphere.

church and court and made available for rational-critical debate (Fleming, 1995:120). The new occupation of *kunstrichter* came into being as pamphlets of criticism became the mainstay of the public sphere in the world of letters and then the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas views the *kunstrichter* as having a 'peculiarly dialectical task.' He states that,

The art critics could see themselves as spokesmen for the public – and in their battle with the artists this was the central slogan – because they knew of no authority beside that of the better argument and because they felt themselves at one with all who were willing to let themselves be convinced by arguments. At the same time they could turn against the public itself when, as experts combating “dogma” and “fashion”, they appealed to the ill-informed person’s native capacity for judgement...The *kunstrichter* retained something of the amateur; his expertise only held good until countermanded; lay judgement was organised in it without becoming, by way of specialisation, anything else than the judgement of one private person among all others who ultimately were not to be obligated by any judgement except their own. This was precisely where the art critic differed from the judge. At the same time, however, he had to be able to find a hearing before the entire public, which grew well beyond the narrow circle of the salons, coffee houses and societies, even in their golden age. Soon the periodical (the handwritten correspondence at first, then the printed weekly or monthly) became the publicist instrument of this criticism (1989:41).

The significance of the *kunstrichter* for Habermas lies in the fact that they exercised *lay* judgement in the assessment of various cultural forms. Up until this development judgement was the preserve of the judiciary, the church and the court and the public exchange of lay judgement was absent. The idea that the *kunstrichter* must 'find a hearing before the entire public' is a necessity for Habermas given the logic of critical debate. The *kunstrichters'* arguments had no authority other than by the force of the best argument, thus opinions must be exposed to that force for discussion to take place and consensus to be reached.

However, the public use of reason is not the only founding principle of the bourgeois public sphere. Two other important factors shape its formation: the principle of universal access, and the 'bracketing' of social inequality within the sphere. Habermas stresses the importance of universal access to the bourgeois public sphere when he states that, 'the public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of universal access. A public sphere from which specific groups would be *eo ipso* excluded was less than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere at all' (p85). He also contends that, 'the bourgeois public's critical public debate took place in principle without regard to all preexisting social and political rank and in accord with universal rules' (p54). The importance of these two structuring principles is highlighted by Nancy Fraser (1992a) who states that,

the public sphere connoted an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters. The discussion was to be open and accessible to all, merely private interests were to be inadmissible, inequalities of status were to be bracketed, and discussants were to deliberate as peers. The result of such discussion would be public opinion in the strong sense of a consensus about the common good' (p113).

It is the combination of the principles of rational-critical debate, universal access, and deliberation as peers which gives the bourgeois public sphere its unique character, and

which allow it to perform its primary function of enabling debate based purely on the force of the better argument. It is this ideal-type of public sphere that Habermas is frequently accused of idealising. As the next section will demonstrate, his idealisation is not without some very serious problems, however, it is important to understand that, as Fleming (1995) argues,

Habermas' initial attraction to the classical bourgeois public sphere was rooted in an effort to recover its emancipatory potential for critical theory. It was his intention to use the emancipatory moment he was hoping to find, to develop a critical standard against which he could evaluate subsequent historical public spheres (p121).

So for Habermas the bourgeois public sphere functions not only as a moment, realised or not, in history, but a normative model of publicity. Moreover, this model is *formal*, that is it does not enshrine any particular view or conception of the good life, rather it shifts the burden of the moral from the content of debate to the form of debate (Meehan, 1995:3).

The fall of the bourgeois public sphere

Habermas' descriptions of the bourgeois public sphere and the public sphere in the world of letters are striking for the way in which he portrays the role of the media within them, and how this changes in the era of mass communication. Especially interesting is his emphasis on the importance of journals and pamphlets of art/music criticism in the public sphere in the world of letters. These built on the arguments taking place in the coffee houses, but also became part of the discussion in themselves (Habermas, 1989:40). More than this though, printed criticism became, in time, a substitute for face-to-face discussion. Habermas observes that in the last quarter of the eighteenth century pamphlets and periodicals,

constituted the public that had long since grown out of early institutions like the coffee houses, salons and Tischgesellschaften and was now held together through the medium of the press and its professional criticism. They formed the public sphere of a rational-critical debate in the world of letters (p51).

To state that the periodicals held together the public sphere in the world of letters is quite a leap from Habermas' more characteristic insistence that 'private people *come together* as a public...to engage in a debate' (p27 emphasis added), as 'coming together' suggests that face-to-face communication was the foundation of the public sphere. Despite this minor inconsistency, it remains clear that the early print media played an important role in the circulation of discourse in the bourgeois public sphere.

The fall of the bourgeois public sphere, in Habermas' account, is precipitated not only by large scale changes in the working of the state and the development of organised concerns within civil society, but also by the changes in the scale and organisation of the media. Habermas says of the situation in the era of mass communication,

discussion seems to be carefully cultivated and there seems to be no barrier to its proliferation. But surreptitiously it has changed in a specific way: it assumes the form of a consumer item. To be sure, at one time the commercialization of cultural goods had been a precondition for rational-critical debate; but it was itself in principle excluded from the exchange relationships of the market...put bluntly: you had to pay for the books, theatre, concert, and museum, but not for the conversation about what you had read, heard, and seen (p164).²

Here Habermas is referring to changes in the media industries which resulted in them becoming large-scale commercial companies rather than small-scale family run concerns. This shift altered both the organisation and the content of the print media – in order to attract a wider range of readers papers adopted a ‘lighter and livelier style of journalism, as well as a more vivid style of presentation,’ while at the same time they became increasingly reliant on advertising revenue (Thompson, 1990:178).

Thompson (1990, 1995) explores the changes that occurred with the rise of the mass media and mass communication, and identifies two key characteristics which separate mass communication from interpersonal communication and the early print media. The first of these is that mass communication makes products (newspapers, magazines, books, television programmes) available, in principle, to a plurality of recipients thereby making them generally accessible to anyone who has the technical means, abilities and resources to acquire them (1990:218-222). This allows individuals in geographically dispersed locations to receive the same products and information. Although this means a wider range of individuals are able to receive information, their dispersal precludes any kind of regular gathering such as that which took place in the coffee houses and salons of Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere. Secondly mass communication involves a different form of communication from conversation. Thompson states that;

mass communication generally involves a one-way flow of messages from the transmitter to the receiver. Unlike the dialogical situation of a conversation, in which a listener is also a potential respondent, mass communication institutes a fundamental break between the producers and receiver, in such a way that recipients have relatively little capacity to contribute to the course and content of the communicative process (p218-219).

Furthermore he observes that ‘in contrast to face-to-face interaction, where the interlocutors can question one another and observe one another’s responses, in mass communication the personnel involved in the production and transmission or diffusion are generally deprived of immediate feedback from the recipients’ (p220). Habermas argues that this situation has led to the destruction of the public sphere (for him both the cultural

² This statement brings out an inconsistency in Habermas’ account as previously he notes that the public sphere in the world of letters is held together by its print media. Unless these publications were free (and Garnham (1992) and Curran (1991) suggest they weren’t) it seems people were already having to buy their ‘conversation’ well before the ‘age of the mass media’ even if the commodification of debate in this age was on a smaller scale compared to later developments in the organisation of the media.

and political forms, see Habermas, 1989:179-180) because in the era of mass communication,

far fewer people express opinions than receive them...the community of publics becomes an abstract collection of individuals who receive impressions from the mass media [and]...it is difficult or impossible to answer back immediately or with any effect (1989:249).

This is why Habermas adopts such a pessimistic view of the public sphere in the age of the mass media. He believes that the commodification of debate by the mass media has emptied it of its critical functions and disallows the possibility of participation for individuals because the difficulty, or impossibility, of answering back violates the principle of universal access.

Habermas exhibits an extremely negative and pessimistic view of the mass media and mass culture. When he states that 'mass culture has earned its rather dubious name precisely by achieving increased sales by adapting the need for relaxation and entertainment on the part of the consumer strata with relatively little education, rather than through the guidance of an enlarged public toward the appreciation of culture undamaged in its substance' (1989:165) his cultural elitism becomes all too clear. He insinuates both that mass culture is 'damaged' and that it would be natural for all members of society to want to enjoy and appreciate the same kind of 'high art' he considers worthy.³ The vehemence of Habermas' argument on this topic seems to close down the possibilities for reformulating the public sphere in the age of the mass media, and he makes it hard to imagine how participation in debate would be possible under such conditions. Indeed as Fraser notes 'we are left at the end of 'Structural Transformation' without a conception of the public sphere that is sufficiently distinct from the bourgeois conception to serve the needs of critical theory today' (1992a:111-2). However, his observations about the mass media continue to be relevant to contemporary theorisations of the public sphere. It is rare that Habermas' critique of the mass media is adequately addressed in such work, yet it seems clear that it must be unless the concept of the public sphere is to be abandoned altogether.

Critiques of the bourgeois public sphere

This section will explore the value of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere as an ideal against which to evaluate future public spheres. In light of feminist critiques of the bourgeois public the value of Habermas' 'ideal type' sphere is severely undermined. Here those critiques will be examined since they are the most relevant to the formulation of an indie public and the analysis of gender in it. The main feminist critiques of the bourgeois

³ Habermas' views on this subject are frequently attributed to his reliance on the theories of Adorno. See also N. Garnham (1992), J. Curran (1991), P. Dahlgren (1991), O. Boyd-Barrett (1995), Benhabib (1992).

public sphere centre around the exclusions enshrined by the three central principles of Habermas' theory; universal access, both the form and content of rational-critical debate, and the bracketing of social inequalities within the sphere. It is fruitful to elucidate such critiques because of the influence Habermas' theory has had on the field of public sphere theory, and because these critiques are useful to an understanding of how *any* public sphere may be gendered.

The problems associated with Habermas' principle of universal access to debate in the bourgeois public sphere are twofold. Firstly it is clear, even from Habermas' account that this principle was never realised, even when the bourgeois public sphere was operating. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the principle of universal access is built on a series of exclusions which mean that it *cannot* be realised. With respect to the former, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas not only states that 'a public sphere from which specific groups would be eo ipso excluded was not a public sphere at all' (1989:85), but that,

however exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who – insofar as they were propertied and educated – as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion. The issues became "general" not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to *be able* to participate (p37).

This assertion begins to suggest that universal access is largely a principle, rather than actuality, as only the 'propertied and educated' could in fact participate. However Habermas highlights this fact more directly when he states that, 'the masses were not only largely illiterate but also so pauperised that they could not even pay for literature. They did not have at their disposal the buying power needed for even the most modest participation in the market of cultural goods' (p38). Here Habermas appears to accede that the principle of universal access remained largely unrealised, and that participation was in fact dependent on at least some economic and educational factors.⁴

It seems access to the bourgeois public sphere was also dependent on gender, especially with the relocation of debate from the salons to the coffee houses. Not only does Habermas reveal that 'women and dependents were factually and legally excluded' (p56), from this new location but that,

only men were admitted to coffee-house society...whereas the style of the *salon*, like that of rococo in general, was essentially shaped by women. Accordingly the

⁴ Historical evidence also suggests that the emphasis on the bourgeois public sphere as a reading public had significance for the participation of women. Shevelton (1989) observes that the split between the literate and the illiterate became highly gendered around the beginning of the eighteenth century so that 'although women's literacy was, apparently, increasing in the urban centres, it was a more rudimentary, limited literacy than that of their male counterparts' (p27-8).

women of London society, abandoned every evening, waged a vigorous but vain struggle against the new institution. The coffee house not merely made access to the relevant circles less formal and easier; it embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shopkeepers (p33).

This extract contains a certain irony which is typical of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* – Habermas follows his rather derogatory description of women's vain protest at their exclusion from the coffee houses (he insinuates that their major complaint is with being neglected by their menfolk, rather than being excluded from discussions they were previously included in) with a statement about how the move to the coffee houses made the public sphere *more* inclusive. Habermas' seeming obliviousness to the problematic exclusion of women makes his prioritisation of the principle of universal access difficult to swallow. However, while the physical exclusion of women, and Habermas' lack of concern for it, is worrying, it could still be argued that women were excluded from the bourgeois public sphere as a result of historical conditions and that in theory, the principle of universal access holds true.

This possibility is belied, however, by further analysis of Habermas' principle of universal access which reveals women's exclusion from the bourgeois public sphere was not just contingent, but necessary in its foundation. Nancy Fraser (1992a) makes a powerful critique of Habermas' theory when she argues that far from being constituted on the principle of universal access, the bourgeois public sphere is actually created through a number of exclusions, most significantly that of gender (p113). Working from the revisionist historiography of Joan Landes, Fraser notes that the republican public sphere in France was,

constructed in deliberate opposition to that of a more woman-friendly salon culture that the republicans stigmatised as "artificial", "effeminate", and "aristocratic". Consequently, a new austere style of public speech and behaviour was promoted, a style deemed "rational", "virtuous" and "manly". In this way masculinist gender constructs were built into the very conception of the republican public sphere, as was a logic that led, at the height of the Jacobin rule, to the formal exclusion of women from political life (p113-114).

Fraser also states that this exclusionary operation was essential to the public spheres in Germany and Britain at the time as well. This exclusion of the feminine as a foundation for the bourgeois public sphere suggests that even if Habermas' ideal of universal access could be realised, the public sphere would still not represent a level field for women's participation.⁵

⁵ Fraser (1992a) also suggests that not only was the bourgeois public sphere the product of structural changes in gender relations which enshrined the conjugal patriarchal family, but that it was also implicated in the process of bourgeois class formation (p114). She states that 'its practices and ethos were markers of 'distinction' in Pierre Bourdieu's sense, ways of defining an emergent elite, of setting it off from the older aristocratic elites it was intent on displacing on one hand and from various popular and plebian strata it aspired to rule on the other' (p114). This form of class distinction works with the separation of public and private spheres as a key signifier of bourgeois difference (p115), which results in the irony that 'a discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and

A similar exclusion of the feminine exists in the bourgeois public sphere through the separation of spheres which is necessary for the constitution of the public. Habermas makes it clear that,

the experiences about which a public passionately concerned itself sought agreement and enlightenment through the rational-critical public debate of private persons with one another flowed from the wellspring of a specific subjectivity. The latter had its home, literally, in the sphere of the patriarchal conjugal family (1989:43).

If rational-critical debate in the public sphere depends on the conjugal family, or intimate sphere, as the 'wellspring' of subjectivity, this obviously presupposes a distinction between public and private. This is problematic because, as Benhabib (1992) points out, 'traditional modes of drawing this distinction have been part of a discourse of domination that legitimizes women's oppression and exploitation in the private realm' (p93). Dahlgren (1991:6) suggests that accepting the separation of public and private spheres, as Habermas does, results in complicity in the subordination of women. It also results in the form of rational-critical debate being predicated on women's oppression and confinement to the private sphere. However, this is not the only problem raised by the separation of public and private spheres. It not only affects the form of debate, but also the content.

The strict demarcation of what was admissible as a topic of debate in the public sphere meant that a whole range of concerns came to be labeled as private and treated as improper subjects for public debate (Landes, 1998:142). In limiting debate in the public sphere to 'general' issues or the 'common good' Habermas overlooks the strong association of women's discourse and their interests as particularity rather than the desired generality associated with masculine speech (p142-3, see also Fraser, 1992a:131, and Benhabib, 1992:89-90). Landes sums up the problems inherent in allowing the male particular to masquerade as the universal when she states that this type of universality has,

eclipsed women's interests in the private domain and aligned femininity with particularity, interest and partiality. In this context the goals of generalizability and appeals to the common good may conceal rather than expose forms of domination, suppress rather than release concrete differences among persons or groups (1998:144).

Fraser, also points out how issues of the 'common good' which are debated in the public sphere are decided from the perspective of the participants and what is of concern to them (1992a:129). This is obviously problematic if those participants are drawn from a relatively small sector of the male population for they may not reflect the diversity of interests in the population as a whole. Indeed she argues that while power hierarchies exist in society,

the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction' (Fraser, 1992a:115).

there are prima facie reasons for thinking that the postulation of a common good shared by exploiters and exploited may well be a mystification...these notions, therefore, are vehicles through which gender and class disadvantages may continue to operate subtextually and informally, even after explicit formal restrictions have been rescinded (p131-132).

Finally, Fraser also challenges Habermas' assertion that debate within the public sphere takes place between peers. Fraser argues that in fact social inequalities were not eliminated in debate, they were merely ineffectually bracketed (1992a:119). Instead, she argues, 'discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality' (p119). These include the practical difficulties of participating in debate for women; men tend to interrupt women and speak louder and for longer, while women's contributions are ignored. The type of language used in deliberations may leave subordinate groups without the vocabulary to express their thoughts. Further, subordinated groups lack equal access to the media which constitute the material support for the circulation of views in the public sphere (p119-120). Rather than bracket social inequalities Fraser argues they should be thematized explicitly in the bourgeois public sphere; bracketing them does foster participatory parity but works to the advantages of dominant groups (p120).

Feminist critiques of Habermas' principles of universal access, rational-critical debate and social parity highlight the fact that women's exclusion from the bourgeois public sphere was not just accidental, but constitutive of that sphere (Landes, 1998:143, see also Robbins, 1992:xvi). Nancy Fraser (1992a) sums up the 'darker' revisionist view of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere by arguing that,

The exclusions and conflicts that appeared as accidental trappings from his perspective become constitutive in the revisionists' view. The result is a gestalt switch that alters the very meaning of the public sphere. We can no longer assume that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere was simply an unrealised utopian ideal; it was also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule (1992a:116).

There is clearly much to criticise in Habermas' theory however, its importance here is that it projects a public sphere that is based around public discourse and debate. The ideal of the public sphere represents a model for democratic participation in the negotiation of shared concerns, needs and experiences which is hard to abandon altogether even in the face of critiques of Habermas. It is testament to the power of Habermas' vision that it has prompted theorists of counterpublic spheres to re-imagine his theory in order to better achieve its founding ideals. The following section will explore the concept of counterpublic spheres and the modifications theorists such as Fraser, Bolin and Warner have made to Habermas' theory of the public sphere. The challenge now is to fully understand the formation and operation of counterpublic spheres, to recognise how they differ from the bourgeois public sphere both in form and content, and to identify whether and how the

structures of exclusion constituted in the bourgeois public sphere are replicated in counterpublic spheres and ultimately in the indie public.

The formation of counterpublic spheres

Since the publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas' account of the bourgeois public sphere has been modified by many theorists to allow for the theorisation of counterpublic spheres. Counterpublic spheres have been formulated as a response to the exclusions of the bourgeois public sphere, as a means by which dominated or 'subaltern' (Fraser, 1992a) groups can create their own public spheres which operate outside, and often in opposition to, the dominant political public sphere. Such counterpublic spheres are primarily, as Fraser puts it, 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (1992a:123) and we may think of feminist, black or gay counterpublic spheres as examples of this model. The theorisation of counterpublic spheres arises explicitly as a critique of Habermas' model of a single public sphere in that it presupposes the necessity of multiple public spheres in a multicultural and socioculturally diverse society. Fraser (1992a) observes that,

public life in egalitarian, multicultural societies cannot consist exclusively in a single comprehensive public sphere. That would be tantamount to filtering diverse rhetorical and stylistic norms through a single, overarching lens. Moreover, since there can be no such lens that is genuinely culturally neutral, it would effectively privilege the expressive norms of one cultural group over others and thereby make discursive assimilation a condition for participation in public debate (p126).

This makes clear the need for multiple spheres in a stratified, unequal society, however, as Asen (2000) argues, 'even if one could imagine a genuinely egalitarian society, recognition of sociocultural diversity calls for multiplicity' (p441). It is vital to thoroughly interrogate the concept of counterpublic spheres here because it is the theorisation of multiple public spheres which opens up the possibility of conceiving the debate, discussion and construction of indie music as a public sphere.

Counterpublic spheres can be said to serve two basic functions. The first is indicated above – they provide a space in which counterdiscourses can form and circulate, thus they directly challenge the assumption that the bourgeois public sphere adequately engages with issues of the 'common good' as Habermas asserts. Rather, they allow topics excluded from debate in the bourgeois public sphere to be addressed. Fraser (1992a) states that, 'insofar as these counterpublics emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they help expand discursive space. In principle, assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out. In general the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive

contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies' (p124). Here Fraser illustrates how counterpublic spheres are, like the bourgeois public sphere, based on discourse and debate. The fact that this debate takes place in one of a multiplicity of (counter) public spheres points to the second of the two basic functions of a counterpublic sphere, namely that they exist in part to disseminate their discourses outside their own sphere in the dominant political public sphere (Felski, 1989:167, Fraser, 1992a:124). It is this orientation towards a larger public that guarantees counterpublic spheres their publicist character. They are not imagined as separatist enclaves, rather as Fraser argues, 'insofar as these arenas are *publics*, they are by definition not enclaves, which is not to deny that they are often involuntarily enclaved. After all, to interact discursively as a member of a public, subaltern or otherwise, is to aspire to disseminate one's discourse to ever widening arenas' (p124).

The above suggests that the content of debate in counterpublic spheres is different from that of the bourgeois public sphere, indeed it may be argued that this is what makes them 'counter'. Debate in counterpublic spheres is not on issues of 'general concern' but on those issues which are excluded from the bourgeois public sphere, issues of particular, rather than common interest. However, critiques of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere have shown that it is exclusionary not just by virtue of the topics available for discussion, but in its constitution and by the very form that discussion takes. Therefore when considering the operation of counterpublic spheres, it is necessary to examine whether they merely replicate Habermas' model in all but name or whether they offer a potentially more accessible and participatory mode of public engagement. Michael Warner's arguments in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) about the formation and operation of counterpublic spheres concur with Fraser's only up to a point. Like Fraser he argues that 'a counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and have a critical relation to power' (p56). However, he questions whether Fraser's formulation of the feminist counterpublic sphere deserves to be considered a *counterpublic* and asks,

is its oppositional character a function of its content alone; that is, its claim to be oppositional? In this case we might simply call it a subpublic...with the difference that a thematic discussion of political opposition is more likely to be found in it. There would be no difference of kind, or of formal mediation, or of discourse pragmatics between counterpublics and any other publics. Fraser's description of what counterpublics do...sounds like the classically Habermasian description of rational-critical publics, with the word 'oppositional' inserted (p118).

In response to this question Warner offers some more complex arguments about the formation and internal logic of publics than does Fraser, and in doing so he opens up and enlarges the scope of counterpublics. He begins by stating that counterpublics are based on two key principles. Firstly, they are self-organised spaces of discourse which exist by virtue of being addressed, and secondly, that address in publics must be oriented towards

strangers (2002:58-76). These features of the public sphere begin to hint at a reformulation of Fraser's model and the situation is made clearer when Warner states that 'in modern societies, a public is by definition an indefinite audience rather than a social constituency that could be numbered or named' (p55-6). For Fraser a subaltern counterpublic is 'counter' because of the 'subaltern' character of the participants. She states that 'members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, peoples of colour, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these *subaltern counterpublics*' (1992a:123). Here she bases the 'counter' of the public on the subaltern identity of its participants, while for Warner the counter of counterpublics must be manifested in 'an awareness of its subordinate status' (2002:56).

In Warner's model of counterpublic spheres the counter character of the sphere is not dependent on the pre-existing social identity of the participants as in Fraser's. Rather his emphasis is on the nature of the discourse in the sphere, and whether it, not the participants, forms an opposition to the discourse of the bourgeois or dominant public sphere. This way of conceptualising the 'counter' in counterpublics opens up other kinds of publics to analysis. Of this type of counterpublic Warner argues that,

discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying...its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on precise demography but mediated by print, theatre, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like. Counterpublics are often called "subaltern counterpublics", but it is not clear that all counterpublics are composed of people otherwise dominated as subalterns. Some youth culture publics or artistic publics, for example, operate as counterpublics, even though many who participate in them are "subalterns" in no other sense (2002:56).

What Warner is able to do with this model is to expand the concept to include types of counterpublic that are not directly political, in the sense that they are oriented towards a critique and reform of the state. For Warner *cultural* spheres can be public too and this assertion provides a base for the theorisation of an indie public. Unfortunately Warner does not elaborate on how such a cultural counterpublic sphere would operate, however such an account can be found in Bolin's 'Film Swapping in the Public Sphere: Youth Audiences and Alternative Cultural Publicities' (2000).

Bolin's article concerns the cultural activities of young male 'film swappers' in Sweden. He examines their use of a genre of violent action and horror films and analyses their practices of film swapping, fanzine writing and film production in terms of cultural publicness in order to 'shed light on those microprocesses of communication that result in the formation of public spheres of various kinds' (2000:58). Bolin focuses his investigation on the 'internal communicative patterns' of the film swappers as it is these which form the basis of their public sphere. He calls this sphere an 'alternative cultural public sphere',

perhaps to highlight his focus on the cultural rather than the political. Although Fraser includes cultural practices in her discussion of what constitutes the feminist counterpublic sphere (e.g. journals, books, films etc), Bolin notes that she does not 'explicitly...differentiate between cultural and political public spheres' (p59). Fraser's failure to distinguish between them reinforces Bolin's view that there has been a,

general bias towards discussions on the political public sphere, i.e. the sphere where matters of state interest are discussed. And, important as this is for questions of democracy, it is at the cost of a neglect of the cultural public sphere, i.e. the sphere where cultural commodities are created, exchanged, consumed and discussed (p58).

In this respect Bolin's term 'alternative cultural public sphere' has different connotations to Fraser's use of the term 'subaltern counterpublic'. Fraser's sphere is reliant on pre-identified 'subaltern' participants to define its 'counter' status. On the other hand Bolin's film swappers' sphere and Warner's conception of a youth culture or artistic counterpublic derive their 'counter' status from the subordinate nature of the discourse in those spheres. Participants in this kind of counterpublic may or may not be subaltern, their public sphere is 'counter' because it retains an awareness of its subordinate status. Thus Bolin's argument is akin to Warner's when he states that,

processes of hierarchisation are of course of crucial importance for the construction of alternative public spheres. The founding initiative for developing an alternative conversation is, firstly that one finds that there is something wrong with the discussion within the bourgeois, common public discussion, for example that certain opinions are not expressed, and secondly, that one's voice is not strong enough or simply not allowed to speak out in this forum. Thus alternative spheres always grow from some sort of subordination (p64-5).

While Bolin's model shares common ground with Warner's, it also retains the centrality of public communication and debate crucial to Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. Bolin states that, 'the Film Swappers have fanzines (in either paper or web version) as the centre of their alternative sphere, just in the same way as the traditional public sphere had newspapers' (p63). The difference between the debate in the newspapers circulating in the coffee houses of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere and that of the Swedish film swappers is merely that, 'the Film Swappers' debate is not concerned with the political issues of the day, but with the making of (alternative) film canons' (p63). However, while these two models of the public sphere share an emphasis on public communication they are not identical. Theorising public spheres such as Bolin's or Warner's which are based on youth- or sub-cultures or on artistic publics poses a number of questions about how these spheres are formed and operate. Furthermore, it is important to ask to what extent Habermas' or even Fraser's models of the public sphere can be applied to these kinds of public. These are questions which I believe can be best addressed through research undertaken pertaining to a specific sphere, but first it is necessary to examine the formation and operation of cultural counterpublic spheres with reference to Habermas and Fraser and ask whether they do, or can, adhere to the same principles. For instance, are cultural counterpublic spheres universally accessible – do they retain this as a principle? How is the subject of a cultural counterpublic sphere formed? Do cultural

counterpublic spheres presuppose the same kind of public/private split as Habermas' bourgeois public sphere? Does debate in cultural counterpublic spheres take the form of rational-critical debate, and what role does the media play in the functioning of cultural counterpublic spheres? Understanding cultural counterpublic spheres in this way will build towards the model of the indie public which will be the object of this research.

The principle of universal access

Although universal access to the public sphere is never achieved in Habermas' account of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas holds on to it as a founding ideal. Its importance lies in the fact that universal access guarantees the public-ness and inclusivity of the public sphere (1989:85). Habermas argues that,

however exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who – insofar as they were propertied and educated – as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion. The issues became “general” not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to *be able* to participate (p37).

For Habermas universal access not only ensures that the public is inclusive, but that consensus in the bourgeois public sphere is reached through debates subject only to the force of the better argument. In his description of the film swappers Bolin makes a very similar argument to ensure the same kind of universal access in their alternative cultural public sphere. He argues that the film swappers' practices are public and accessible because, 'every person that accepts the terms set up by the Film Swappers (i.e., he or she has to like horror films with extreme violence and the discourse around it) is welcomed to take part in the sphere... This makes the Film Swappers' practices inclusive rather than exclusive' (2000:63).

Warner's model of counterpublics contains two similar founding principles which ensure a counterpublic is, 'in principle open-ended' (2002:73). The first of these is the principle that 'a public is self-organised' (p67). He argues that 'a public is a space of discourse organised by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic; it exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, Web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced. It exists by virtue of being addressed' (p67). Warner's second principle is that 'a public is a relation among strangers' (p74). What he means by this is that reaching indefinite strangers is the primary orientation of writing (or speaking) to a public – a public will fail, he argues, if it has no reception in the world, but to succeed it must also be 'in excess of its known social basis. It must be more than a list of one's friends' (p74). Warner's two central principles are intrinsically linked because,

the orientation to strangers is in one sense implied by a public's self-organisation through discourse. A public sets its boundaries and its organisation by its own discourse rather than by external frameworks only if it openly addresses people who are identified primarily through their participation in the discourse and who therefore cannot be known in advance. A public...unites strangers through participation alone (p74-5).

In stating these principles Warner insinuates that universal access, at least as an ideal, is central to publics and counterpublics.

Theoretically this explanation of the operation of publics seems to work. Address in publics must be to strangers, and thus be universally accessible, for the debate to be open and inclusive. But Warner does not uncritically uphold this ideal in the same way that Habermas, or even Bolin, does. Rather he interrogates its limits in relation to counterpublics, and in doing so provides a more thorough and challenging account which illustrates the dangers of replicating the processes involved in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere when conceptualising counterpublics. He begins this process by highlighting the fact that his logic contains a 'chicken and egg' circularity. He asks, 'could anyone speak publicly without addressing a public? But how can this public exist before being addressed?' (p67). This inconsistency seems to threaten the idea of stranger address in publics. Firstly because it implies that if a public is addressed it already exists and therefore may be known, and secondly because the mode of address conjures an addressable object which is by implication not a 'stranger'.

This 'chicken and egg' conundrum looms even larger in relation to the formation and operation of counterpublics. Addressing strangers in the context of a counterpublic (e.g., a gay magazine, a feminist journal, the music press) changes how strangers are addressed. Counterpublics may come into being through address to indefinite strangers, but counterpublic discourse differs because, as Warner argues, it,

also addresses those strangers as being not just anybody. They are socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse; ordinary people are presumed not to want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene. Addressing indefinite strangers, in a magazine or sermon, has a peculiar meaning when you know in advance that most people would be unwilling to read a gay magazine or go to a black church (p120).

What this means is not that in addressing a counterpublic one knows precisely the character of the public, but that the address itself both creates and addresses a social entity which is not totally unknown. This adds a dimension to the circulation of public discourse which is absent, or at least not made explicit in Habermas' version of the public sphere. For Habermas the *form* of rational-critical debate theoretically makes debate open and inclusive, however, this supposed universality masks a particular social entity – bourgeois, white, male discussant. What Warner highlights is how this is a feature of the public sphere whether in the bourgeois public sphere or a counterpublic sphere. He argues that,

writing to a public helps to make a world insofar as the object of address is brought into being partly by postulating and characterising it. This performative ability depends, however, on that object's being not entirely fictitious – not postulated merely, but recognized as a real path for the circulation of discourse. That path is then treated as a social entity (p91-2).

If writing to a public has a performative ability to bring an object of address into being what effect does this have on the ideal of universal access? Can one conclude that in a counterpublic the mode of address postulates a partially known addressee and that this excludes those who are not characterised by the social entity that is addressed? Warner does consider this conclusion, but his argument implies that this process is not necessarily exclusionary. His position is that,

it isn't just that we are addressed in public as certain kinds of persons or that we might not want to identify as that person (though this is often the case, as when the public is addressed as heterosexual or white, or sports-minded, or American). We haven't been misidentified, exactly. It seems more to the point to say that publics are different from persons, and that our partial nonidentity with the object of address in public speech seems to be part of what it means to regard something as public speech' (p78)

Warner argues that public address is both personal and impersonal and that address is both to us and to indefinite strangers (p76-7). Indeed it is the appeal to strangers which makes public communication 'public' rather than being addressed to a single person (p85). Moreover he states that if addressing a public means speaking 'in a venue of indefinite address' and hoping 'that people will find themselves in it' (p86), then if the public speech 'finds' us 'it does so not on the basis of our concrete identity but by virtue of our participation in the discourse alone and therefore in common with strangers' (p77-8).

This aspect of Warner's theory disavows the critiques of the public sphere's exclusionary nature, for example Fraser's, and in doing so precludes the possibility of analysing existing public spheres in terms of how they disallow certain types of access or participation. Further, Warner's assertion that 'we haven't been misidentified...our partial nonidentity with the object of address in public speech seems to be part of what it means to regard something as public speech' (p78), fails to consider that certain addressees may not just be misrecognised, but not recognised at all. While public address cannot be expected to be personal – if it were it would not, by Warner's logic, be public – are we to accept the fact that if certain social entities are absent from public discourse they must *disidentify* with that discourse in order to participate in it? If so, then why formulate counterpublics to articulate counter-discourses which more adequately attend to the needs and experiences of those excluded from other publics? I would argue that it is vital to highlight and explore the ways in which publics and counterpublics fall short of the ideal of universal access. Not because that ideal is necessarily attainable, but because by settling for a 'partial nonidentity with the object of address' it is unclear how certain social entities are able to participate in the public sphere.

The retention of an ideal of universal access in counterpublics marks a similarity to Habermas' bourgeois public sphere in that both forms of public need universal access in order to make them fully 'public'. However, the way in which universal access is precluded in counterpublics and the bourgeois public sphere is different. In the bourgeois public sphere universal access fails because Habermas' notion of the autonomous individual which engages in rational-critical debate is founded on the exclusion of the feminine, the separation of public and private spheres and property ownership. In counterpublic spheres the individual participating is not presumed to be 'just anyone', but is already cast as a particular social entity, thus the possibility of truly universal access is precluded.

The rational subject

The idea that counterpublic spheres do not presuppose an autonomous, rational subject makes it necessary to examine the type of subjectivity they do enshrine. Such an examination will allow a better understanding of the operation of counterpublics, especially the one which will be formulated for study in this research. In her description of the feminist counterpublic sphere, Felski (1989) argues that, 'unlike the bourgeois public sphere...the feminist public sphere does not claim a representative universality but rather offers a critique of cultural values from the standpoint of women as a marginalised group within society' (p167). The kind of feminist counterpublic sphere posited by Felski (and Fraser) is a type of subaltern political counterpublic which seeks, in part, to transform the narrow conception of *subjectivity* inherent in the bourgeois public sphere. In such a sphere social rank is *not* disregarded in the way that it is in the bourgeois public sphere, moreover a recognition of the specific experiences of, in this case, a gendered subjectivity, is necessary for the formation of a counterpublic.

Warner's understanding of subjectivity in counterpublics goes further. He argues that whether a counterpublic is 'subaltern' or not it 'does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere' but rather, 'participation in such a public is one of the ways in which its member identities are formed and transformed' (2002:57). He explains that counterpublics,

are scenes of association and identity that transform the private lives they mediate...these public contexts necessarily entail and bring into being realms of subjectivity outside the conjugal domestic family. Their protocols of discourse and debate remain open to affective and expressive dimensions of language. And their members make their embodiment and status at least partly relevant in a public way by their very participation (p57-8).

The idea that subjectivity is formed *in* counterpublic spheres has interesting consequences when considering the effects on inclusion and exclusion from such spheres. Because counterpublics do not presuppose a subjectivity formed in the conjugal

sphere, nor do they require the bracketing of social inequalities, they seem to allow for a broader, and more inclusive, possibility of participation. However, accepting the idea that counterpublic spheres actually form and transform subjectivity also poses the question, crucial to this research, of what kind of subjectivity *is* formed.

If subjectivity in counterpublics is formed in *public*, this also has consequences for the relevance of the public/private split that was key to the formation of the bourgeois public sphere. There are three main reasons to question whether the public/private divide would be as deep or as rigid in (cultural) counterpublic spheres as it is in Habermas' account. The first is suggested above – that counterpublic spheres do not rely on a subjectivity formed in the private sphere as subjectivity is formed and transformed through participation in a counterpublic. Without the private as the site of subject formation and the public as the site where subjects formed in private 'come together' the role of each sphere is blurred, thus it is possible to ask whether the connection between the feminine and the private, and the masculine and the public, has also been disrupted and whether this in turn increases the possibilities for women's participation in counterpublics. The public/private split is also challenged in counterpublic spheres via the topics available for discussion. Counterpublic spheres often specifically highlight and prioritise issues which have been considered the domain of the 'private' or the particular and thus excluded from discussion in the bourgeois or dominant public sphere.

Thirdly, changes in the media have also altered the character of the public/private split. For Habermas the growth and commercialisation of the mass media means rational-critical debate has been replaced by individual consumption. Moreover these, 'acts of individual reception,' occur in private, requiring no further public discussion (1989:163). Although Habermas overstates both the power of the media and the passivity of audience reception, it is clear that the massification of the media, and especially the electronic media, has changed the role it plays vis à vis the public and private spheres. As Reimer (1995) notes, 'the mass media...have not only been transferred from the public to the private sphere; they have also, in a parallel process, been naturalised in the home' so much so that today 'it seems natural for us to see the mass media as solidly anchored in the private sphere' (p58-9). Changes in the mass media, alongside the redefinition by counterpublics of what constitutes a topic for public debate, mean that 'public' and 'private' have a different significance in counterpublic spheres.

Counterpublics also forge a new relation to the form of debate in public spheres. One common characteristic of the counterpublic spheres discussed by Fraser, Warner and Bolin is that discussion within such publics would fail to meet Habermas' criteria for public debate. Asen explains this situation succinctly by observing that, 'counterpublic spheres do not appeal to an ideal of universality (as did the historical bourgeois public sphere)

but, rather, advance affirmations of specificity' (2000:429). Asen is right; whether a counterpublic sphere is based on a subaltern identity or a particular cultural practice it cannot be said to embody the objective universality that characterised the bourgeois public sphere. Consequently discussion in counterpublic spheres cannot fulfill the criteria of being on general issues of interest to all, since not 'all' people will be expected to participate. Warner acknowledges that appeal in counterpublics is far from 'general'. He argues that a counterpublic, 'selects participants by criteria of shared social space, habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references and circulating intelligible forms' (2002:106). In stating this Warner illustrates one of the contradictions inherent in the operation of counterpublic spheres, namely that;

they enable confidence that discourse will circulate along a real path, but they limit the extension of that path. Discourse addressed to a public needs to extend its circulation – otherwise the public dwindles to a group – yet the need to characterise the space of circulation means that it is simultaneously understood as having the content and differential belonging of a group, rather than simply being open to the infinite and unknowable potential circulation among strangers (p106).

Warner's argument opens up multiple questions and possibilities for studying counterpublic spheres however, neither he, nor Bolin, develop the question of the 'particular' or 'interested' character of counterpublics. Viewing a counterpublic sphere as caught between the principles of universality and particularity can allow an investigation of the terms under which such spheres operate. In characterising the 'space of circulation' do counterpublics exclude certain participants and types of participation? Do they presuppose that participants will have a shared knowledge of the cultural form at the centre of the sphere and be in agreement on the discourses through which discussion of it takes place? What will be the terms and conditions for participation for those who find themselves off the path that discourse circulates on, or who wish to challenge the terms of the debate? The following chapter will elucidate these questions in relation to a model of the public sphere formulated to conceptualise the indie music scene in Britain in the mid-1990s.

The Indie Public

With an overview of the theories which define the term 'public sphere' in place, the question presenting itself here is; what's Habermas got to do with the *NME*? The aim of this chapter is to bridge this somewhat improbable-sounding gap and to formulate the model of the 'indie public' that will inform the analysis contained in the research chapters. This model cannot hope to resolve once and for all the fundamental questions and contradictions at the centre of the idea of the public sphere, but will be built upon contingent resolutions to form a basis from which to conduct the research. In order to formulate the indie public it is necessary first to *define* the term 'indie public', I will then move on to outline how the sphere is *formed* through public communication in the media. Following that the important *features* of the indie public are discussed; the ability for it to evolve over time, its formation in opposition to other cultural publics, and the inclusion of promotional discourses in the sphere. The penultimate section of this chapter deals with perhaps the most vital issue in relation to my research, that of *participation*. I ask how participation is possible in any public sphere, and for whom, and discuss the form and meaning of participation in the indie public. Finally this chapter presents some of the *benefits* of formulating indie as a public sphere rather than as a subculture or a scene. With good working definitions of all these features of the indie public it will then be possible to address the central research aims of interrogating structures of exclusion, especially that of gender, in the indie public between 1993 and 1998.

The term, 'the indie public' is being used to describe the arena where indie music is created, consumed, discussed and evaluated. Its participants include artists, mediators and audience members all of whom share certain assumptions about the validity, and indeed superiority, of indie as a cultural form and inhabit, metaphorically at least, what Harris describes as, 'an alternative musical universe' (2003:xv). I am calling the indie public a 'cultural counterpublic sphere', a term that draws broadly from Warner's (2002) outline of a 'counterpublic' and Bolin's (2000) study of an 'alternative cultural public sphere'. This term combines elements of both theories in order to characterise the type of public sphere formed around indie. Bolin (2000) states that a cultural public sphere is one in which 'cultural commodities are created, exchanged, consumed and discussed' (p58). This is an appropriate description for the indie public because the sphere centres around a specific genre of popular music and is concerned with the valorisation, celebration and elaboration of that genre, its styles, fans, events, products and artists. The indie public is not only cultural, but 'counter', specifically in the sense described by Warner. He argues that what makes counterpublics 'counter' is the fact that they are

structured by different dispositions or protocols from those that obtain elsewhere in the culture, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. In the sense that I am advocating here, such publics are indeed counterpublics, and in a stronger sense than simply comprising subalterns with a reform programme. A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status.¹ The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public but a dominant one. And the conflict extends not just to ideas or policy questions but to the speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public or to the hierarchy among media. The discourse that constitutes it is not merely a different or alternative idiom but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness (2002:119).

The indie public fits the model Warner outlines here and can therefore be called a counter-public sphere. Indie music itself is defined by its opposition to a mainstream pop scene in which commercial success is the measure of value. In his article on the politics and aesthetics of the genre Hesmondhalgh states that,

indie proclaimed itself to be superior to other genres not only because it was more relevant or authentic to the youth who produced and consumed it (which was what rock had claimed) but also because it was based on new relationships between creativity and commerce...[It] emerged from a hard-headed network of post-punk companies which made significant challenges to the commercial organisation of cultural production favoured by the major record companies (1999:35).

Because it was built on these premises indie contravenes the rules of commercial popular music discourse and is discussed according to different assumptions. It is equally fair to argue that indie is aware of its subordinate status, despite Hesmondhalgh's assertion of its self-professed 'superiority'. It is subordinate in that the language and frameworks through which indie is formed and understood are not ones which necessarily apply outside its own sphere, and which are in some sense less legitimate than the dominant cultural discourse.

In modelling the indie public on Warner's model of a counterpublic it cannot also fit into the model of counterpublic sphere outlined by Fraser (1992a) and exemplified by the feminist counterpublic sphere. Here, although she includes cultural practices in her description of the basis of that sphere, the feminist counter-public sphere is a political sphere with emancipatory aims. She terms it a 'subaltern counterpublic' which not only signals that it is a 'parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (p123), but also reveals the subaltern identity of the

¹ Warner does not fully explain what he means by 'subordinate status' in reference to counterpublics, however, he does state it is not linked to the subordinate status of the participants (2002:56). It is clear that he does not use the term to mean that counterpublics are inferior to the dominant cultural or political public spheres, indeed as Hesmondhalgh's statement reveals, participants in counter-public spheres may well consider their sphere to be superior – this almost goes without saying, for why would anyone elaborate or participate in any kind of counter-public sphere unless it offered a 'better' world than the existing dominant sphere?

participants. As a *cultural* counterpublic sphere the indie public cannot be viewed in the same way. The way in which indie music is excluded or marginalised in the dominant pop public sphere is wholly different to the way subordinate social groups such as women, Black or lesbian and gay people are excluded from the dominant political public sphere. The indie public is based, not on the subaltern identity of its participants, but on the taste or preference for a certain genre of popular music.² Therefore the indie public cannot be considered a *subaltern* counterpublic, but this is not a problematic situation for the research here, in fact it opens up two roads of further possibility for examining the character of the indie public.

The first is that according to Warner's outline of the logic of counterpublics, the subaltern identity of the participants is not a prerequisite for the formation of a counterpublic (2002:56). Given the predominance of white, male participants in the indie scene it is clear that the indie public falls into the category of counterpublics whose participants are not necessarily subalterns. What Warner's argument also opens up is a shift of focus away from the participants' social status onto the nature of the discussion that forms the sphere. With a definition of both the 'cultural' and 'counter' nature of the indie public in place it is possible to provide an account of the formation and functioning of the sphere. With the foundation of the indie public – as a cultural counterpublic sphere whose 'counter' status is based on its discourse not its participants' identities – in place we must now examine *how* the sphere operates.

The Role of the Media

As the previous chapter stressed, all public spheres are formed around some kind of public communication and interaction. This is as true for Habermas' bourgeois public sphere as it is for Bolin's alternative cultural public sphere of Film Swappers, and so it is for the indie public. Public communication in the indie public is mediated, specifically by the music press, and as such it is vital to understand the media's role in, not just the indie public, but public spheres in general. Habermas' view of the mass media is a rather bleak one and he provides few clues as to how a public sphere could be formed with the mass media at its centre. However, it is clear that for contemporary publics, the media will inevitably play a major role in both their formation and operation, and the questions raised by Habermas as to their suitability for this task are still pertinent. Warner notes that, 'Habermas would have us ask whether it is even possible to be public in the validating sense when the public media are mass media, and to some extent this remains a

² One might also note here that no one involved in the indie scene is subjected to systematic discrimination on the basis of their musical preference, a fact which makes cultural counterpublics such as indie hard to equate with political subaltern counterpublics such as the feminist public sphere. This is not to say that cultural publics are not political.

question for counterpublics as well' (2002:63). In order to find a way around this problem Dahlgren (1991) suggests that,

One could in principle accept Habermas' evaluation as definitive for our own 'post-bourgeois' age and for the future as well, in which case there is little more to be said or done. But there is no point in merely going on repeating Habermas' conclusions. History is not static, and the public sphere in the contemporary situation is conditioned by other historical circumstances and is (hopefully) imbued with other potentialities...we need an understanding of the public sphere which is congruent with the emerging realities of today, and serviceable for both research and politics. This involves coming to terms with Habermas' analysis, incorporating it and modifying it within new intellectual and political horizons (1991:2-3).

The rallying cry of this approach has certainly been responded to, not only by Dahlgren, but Warner, Fraser and Bolin, who find ways to forge models of public spheres that exist within the era of the mass media. It is necessary to look to these models to examine how Habermas' theory has been modified and to question their applicability to the operation of the indie public.

Bolin begins his discussion of the film swappers by stressing the centrality of fanzines in their sphere because, as he states, 'the written word has almost always been the focus when aspects of the public sphere have been discussed, less so other forms of expression' (2000:64). He argues that fanzines are the 'centre' of the film swappers' public, in the same way newspapers and periodicals were central to the bourgeois public sphere, although of course the focus of the film swappers' fanzines is different. The fanzines function in the establishment of alternative film canons and in 'the making of social communities via communication and debate on a certain specifically defined thematic field' (p63). To a certain extent focusing on these micro-media as Bolin does he sidesteps the issue of how a public sphere is formed through the *mass* media. However, Bolin's example serves to highlight the fact that Habermas has neglected not only the possibility/existence of counter or alternative public spheres, but that in the context of a specialised sphere such as the film swappers', the media will not necessarily be the commercialised mass media that typifies public communication on 'general issues' in the dominant public sphere. Bolin notes that 'the questions debated in horror film fanzines would arguably be of little interest to those who do not share this taste in films' (p63) and it is this specialisation which offers an alternative to Habermas' view of a trivialised and depoliticised mass culture and a passive, uncritically receptive public sphere. Therefore where Habermas argues that 'to the degree that culture became a commodity not only in form but in content, it was emptied of elements whose appreciation required a certain amount of training' (1989:165), Bolin offers a public sphere which does require a certain amount of 'accomplishment' in order to understand the terms of the debate³. This point is relevant to the indie public where the music press fulfills the same role that fanzines do

for the Film Swappers, and in a similar kind of cultural public sphere⁴. In this respect it could be argued that micro or niche media such as fanzines or the music press which carry debates on 'specifically defined thematic fields' may not exhibit the same characteristics that Habermas attributes to the mass media. Therefore the possibility of the contemporary media operating at the centre of a public sphere is re-opened.

While Bolin's version of the formation of a public may highlight how Habermas' public sphere can be modified to encompass contemporary alternative/counter-public spheres, Warner's innovative and productive conception offers even more possibilities for the understanding of contemporary counterpublics. He states that, 'a public is a space of discourse organised by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic; it exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, Web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced' (2002:67). The range of texts he lists is very diverse, yet his implication is that each is capable of addressing and thus bringing into being a public, even through the mass medium of television. Warner is able to give the mass media a central role in the formation of publics because his definition moves away from a Haberasian model where the idea of face-to-face communication is privileged, forcing us to think of the public as a group of numerable actual people.⁵ For Warner a public is a text-based entity and an essentially circular phenomenon. He argues that,

without the idea of texts that can be picked up at different times and in different places by otherwise unrelated people, we would not imagine a public as an entity that embraces all users of that text, whoever they might be...a public is never just a congeries of people, never just the sum of persons who happen to exist. It must first have some way of organising itself as a body and of being addressed in discourse (p68).

It is the circularity of this situation which is essential to the phenomenon of the public sphere. Warner concludes that, 'a public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence' (p67).

³ This accomplishment may be similar to Sarah Thornton's (1995) notion of 'subcultural capital' or Simon Frith's (1996) 'pop cultural capital', both of which further contest Habermas' statement (1989:165).

⁴ While the Film Swappers' fanzines and the music press may have in common a concern for a particular, rather than universal topic of discussion, there are significant differences between them which should be remarked upon. Fanzines are rarely run for profit and usually have a small distribution. They are often written, edited and produced by one person or a small group of people who rarely make a living, or any financial gain at all, from their zine. The national music press, on the other hand, is owned by large publishing companies and run for profit, relying on advertising revenue as well as sales for their survival. They appeal to advertisers who want to target a specialist market of young music enthusiasts. The big music papers have a full-time staff of professional writers, editors, designers and so on. Thus they do share some similarities with the mainstream mass media which fanzines do not.

⁵ In fact, aside from a common emphasis on communication in the public sphere, perhaps the only key characteristic Warner's version of the public shares with Habermas' is that the public must not be organised by the state, laws, formal frameworks of citizenship or

It is a version of Warner's discursive model of the formation and operation of publics that will be adopted to describe the indie public. Not only does it offer a public which can be created through forms of public communication found in the mass media, but it will allow the characteristics of a particular sphere, here indie, to be opened up to examination. Because the public is brought into existence via texts it is possible to look to those texts to understand thoroughly how the public functions and what assumptions it is based on. Warner further modifies his argument in relation to the formation of counterpublics and it is here that the strength of his model, and its applicability to the indie public, comes into its own. He argues that address in counterpublics has a definite character which is attributed to the fact that counterpublic spheres are already interested and particular. He states that the people addressed by counterpublic discourse are,

not just anybody, they are socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse; ordinary people are presumed not to want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene (2002:120).

This gives the public a performative element in that an object of address is brought into being by being addressed. Whilst this object does not represent the totality of the addressees it is also not entirely fictitious and is treated as a social entity (p91-2). Although Warner does not elucidate it, it is clear that if the object of address is constituted through the public discourse of a sphere then it will be possible, through an analysis of that discourse, to reveal that object and subsequently to examine the processes of inclusion and exclusion that define it. This is why this is an extremely productive theory for outlining the indie public and facilitating a certain kind of research.

Change and evolution in the indie public

However useful Warner's theory of the public appears to be, it is inevitably not without its internal gaps and contradictions meaning that it cannot be used wholesale as a template for the indie public. The first such gap concerns the notion of the evolution of counterpublic spheres. Warner's account fails to provide any indication of how a counterpublic sphere might come to be addressed in the first place, or how the mode or object of address of public discourse may change over time or through interaction with discourses from other types of sphere. In a sense the idea of evolution of public spheres is exactly the focus of Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* – he charts the changes in the public sphere from the courtly form of publicity, through the bourgeois public sphere and into the age of mass media. Change over time is one of the characteristics of the indie public and is particularly important in the period covered by this research. The popularisation of indie in the mainstream during 1994-6 is a case in

preexisting institutions such as the church, unions or professional organisations; in both

point. During this period discourses in the indie public which devalued commercially successful music as inauthentic shifted as indie artists valued for their authenticity became extremely commercially successful. Similarly the link between inauthenticity and popularity may have been a relatively recent discursive turn. Indeed Hesmondhalgh (1999:38-9) suggests that during the late 1980s indie music was particularly unpopular, so perhaps discourses shifted then which brought about the association of commercial success and inauthenticity as a means of valorising an otherwise devalued genre. Although this is just one example, it indicates that a model of the indie public must not be based on static discursive constructs but be sensitive to changes in meaning and evaluation that occur in the sphere.

Diane Railton's article 'The Gendered Carnival of Pop' (2001) makes a very interesting argument which represents one way to think about change and evolution in publics. Railton links the birth of the ideology of rock and the public sphere and argues that the moment in rock criticism that occurred during the early 1970s when non-commercial criteria were employed in the evaluation of artists and their work, acted like the formation of the bourgeois public sphere in that it freed criticism from outside constraints (for rock 'the market' and for the bourgeois public sphere aristocratic authority). She likens the two largely because they are both based on the exclusion of the feminine. It is rock's opposition to feminised, commercial, 'low' pop which creates its masculine character. Railton states that,

rock distanced itself from the 'low' in a way that can be seen as very similar to the methods common within the bourgeois public sphere: by masculinising itself, and by introducing a particular way of enjoying music that eschewed the feminine, emotional and physical response of early 1960s pop fans in favour of cool, laid-back, and thoughtful appreciation of the music (2001:324).⁶

Railton makes the link between the formation of the ideology of rock and the birth of the bourgeois public sphere in order to show how pop is devalued on account of its association with the feminine and the body. However, I think it is more interesting to view this shift not as being 'like' the formation of the bourgeois public sphere, but as a next step, at least in terms of cultural public spheres, in the transformation of the public sphere, one that occurs after the bourgeois public sphere has 'fallen' in the era of the mass media. This is a transformation which Habermas fails to contemplate because chronologically it occurs after his narrative has ended.

models the public must be sovereign.

⁶ Railton's argument about the masculinisation of rock is relevant to any notion of indie and the indie public, however that is not to say that the indie and rock scenes or ideologies are totally synonymous. The ideology of rock that Railton talks of refers to the kind of rock that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s and is talked about by Frith (1983). Indie shares with this scene a broadly left-wing or 'countercultural' slant, and of course an opposition to mainstream pop music. However, indie's roots lie in the 'DIY' (do-it-yourself) spirit of the punk movement of the late 1970s as much as in the classic rock tradition, and the ensuing opposition is not just to pop, but to the corporate record company structure of the music industry of which rock is a part.

If the formation of the ideology of rock is considered as another 'structural transformation' in the public sphere, or in this case pop music's cultural counterpublic sphere, then it is clear that it is formed through a different process than the subaltern counterpublics theorised by Fraser (1992a). This kind of counterpublic, the feminist counter-public sphere for example, is formed to create a parallel discursive arena from which to challenge the exclusions of the dominant political public sphere. Here the dominant sphere reflects the hierarchical structure of society so it is dominated by those groups atop the social hierarchy – the male, white, straight and middle class. The split between rock and the mainstream pop public cannot be conceived of in the same way because the dynamic of the split is different. The so-called 'dominant' side of the rock/pop split in this case is actually feminised. Pop is 'low' culture and as such is associated with the tastes of women and girls (and gay men – all feminised groups) and with a lack of thoughtful appreciation. In constituting itself in opposition to pop, rock is masculinised. It may be 'counter' to dominant pop, but the gender dynamic is reversed. Railton does not bring this point out in her discussion. However, it raises some interesting questions about the possible characteristics of cultural counterpublics; just because they are 'counter' it does not necessarily mean they will be any more egalitarian than the dominant public sphere⁷ when it comes to, for example, the participation of women or the exclusion of the feminine. Indeed it points to important paths for investigating the exclusions on which spheres like the indie or rock public are constituted.

The point of discussing Railton's argument here is to highlight the way in which Warner's account of the formation of public spheres requires additional theoretical developments in order to fully understand the formation of a public in terms of its evolution. Warner's notion that publics are self-organised by discourse also needs further explanation in regard to the specific types of discourse that form a public. In his examples of the types of public discourse which organise publics Warner mentions books, television shows, websites, speeches, magazines and sermons (2002:67/120) without giving any indication of how they may differ in terms of the creation of publics. In particular I am concerned that he does not consider 'publicity' in the broader sense of advertising and promotion. This seems to place Warner at radical odds with Habermas who attributes the depoliticised and trivialised nature of modern media in part to their role in public relations and the display of 'showy pomp' designed to encourage consumption (Habermas, 1989:195).

⁷ Railton definitely provides interesting avenues of enquiry and a novel way of linking rock ideology and the public sphere, however I am wary of certain aspects of her theory. She seems to essentialise the approach to music taken by men and women and has little to say about the women who invest in a 'masculine' approach to music. Further, the only strategy for challenging rock's hegemony she proposed is in the celebration of the bodily, feminine appreciation of pop found in the pages of teen magazines such as *Smash Hits*. While this may lead to a re-evaluation of the value of pop, celebrating rock's 'other' will do little to challenge the dichotomy which separates pop and rock in the first place.

While Habermas' pessimistic attitude towards the possibility of a meaningful public sphere in the age of the mass media serves to close down ways of imagining new publics, Warner's seeming disregard of the nature of media texts is equally extreme. This is why it is necessary to be aware of how publicity operates in these texts and to consider the effects this might have on the character of the publics they organise.

In the conclusion of *Promotional Culture* (1991) Andrew Wernick argues that communicative processes have come to be saturated in the medium of promotion (p186). By promotion Wernick means advertising, in the wide sense of the term, that is publicising something in a favourable light, not just the medium of advertisements taken out and recognisable as such (p181). Promotional messages, he asserts,

include the whole universe of commercially manufactured objects (and services), in so far as these are imaged to sell, and are thus constructed as advertisements for themselves. A special case of the latter (in my terminology: "commodity-signs") is cultural goods. These, indeed, are typically cast in a doubly promotional role. For not only are cultural goods peculiarly freighted with the need and capacity to promote themselves. Wherever they are distributed by a commercial medium whose profitability depends on selling audiences to advertisers they are also designed to function as attractors of audiences towards the advertising material with which they are undercut. In the organs of print and broadcasting, information and entertainment are the flowers which attract the bee. In this sense, too, the non-advertising content of such media can be considered, even semiotically, as an extension of their ads (p182).

It is clear how this relates to media such as the music press because it obviously fulfills the dual function of promoting artists as it discusses them, as well as having to attract a certain audience to sell to advertisers. Therefore the relation between the artists written about and the paper itself can be characterised by this mutually beneficial promotional condition. The question for the formulation of the indie public is how this effects the path of the object of address. Is this object anything more than a passive consumer, constituted in discourse to attract profit to both the music papers and the music industry?

Wernick's response to such question is to propose a strategy for promotional limitation based on the rehabilitation of the public sphere (1991:193). Breaking down the promotional condition of contemporary culture implies, he suggests, 'a sustained effort to revalorise the public realm itself as a space for disinterested expression and communication' (p193). This is a particularly Habermasian conclusion and one which, given the critiques of the ideal of 'disinterested' communication provides only a dubious hope for the future. While it is inevitable that promotional discourse will be a feature of the indie public⁸, the nature of the sphere means that it does not necessarily imply the passivity of Wernick's model. Not only is 'disinterested expression' an impossibility in the indie public, but one might ask what the implications of publicity inclined towards

⁸ Harris (2003:8) notes that for many indie labels and bands in the 1980s and 1990s the music press was their only means of promotion, as direct advertising was financially out of their league.

consumption are in the context of a sphere built on a genre of music which defines itself specifically against the profit driven commercialism of mainstream pop. The 'flowers' and 'bees' of the indie *public* are engaged in a relationship of shared assumptions and identities which makes participation more meaningful than a simple producer/consumer relationship.

Participation

So far this chapter has outlined a model of the indie public in terms of how it is formed and how both changes over time, and the nature of promotional messages in the discourse, may affect the functioning of the sphere. The final vital issue to explore is that of participation. Despite the fact that participation seems to be of crucial importance to all public spheres, indeed a public sphere with no participants is nonsensical, it is a particularly under-theorised area of public sphere theory. Analyses of participation are often confusing or caged in abstract terms, which makes them difficult to apply to actually existing public spheres. Without a clear idea of how participation is possible both in theory and practice, it is very difficult to ascertain whether, and how, a public is functioning. In order to understand how participation is possible in the indie public it is first useful to review how it is imagined on the literature on the public sphere.

In Habermas' analysis of the bourgeois public sphere participation initially appears straightforward and obvious. Because he emphasises the role of face-to-face communication, which takes place in the celebrated coffee houses, it is evident that participation means engaging in rational-critical debate in the form of interpersonal verbal discussion. Participation is guaranteed in Habermas' account through the ideal of universal access; it is supposed that if there are no barriers to participation then everyone who wishes to engage in debate will be able to do so. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Habermas' model is not only unworkable and unrealised in practice, but founded on the exclusion of women and the working class. This aspect of participation has attracted a lot of theoretical attention⁹ and the enhanced understanding of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere it has produced is invaluable. However, what is neglected by these analyses is how participation is possible when debate is does not take place in face-to-face situations but is carried in the pamphlets and periodicals of the bourgeois public sphere or the mass media of contemporary publics. Even Habermas admits that the type of discussion that took place in the coffee houses existed only for a short time before printed criticism took over as the medium of discussion (1989:51). What he is unable to provide is an adequate account of how participation, not just for women or excluded minorities, but for *anyone*, is possible in this kind of print-mediated sphere. Is

⁹ See for example Fraser 1992a, Benhabib 1992, Landes 1998, Dahlgren 1991.

reading a weekly periodical sufficient to constitute one as a participant in the bourgeois public sphere? Is reading akin to engaging in rational-critical debate, or does it entail a more passive, receptive mode of engagement? These questions are vital if one is to fully understand how a public sphere functions.

Warner's account of the formation and operation of counterpublics partially answers these questions. He does attempt to describe participation, but his conception is unclear and at times even contradictory. Warner's public is constituted through mere attention and is unlike a nation or a social group/class which encompasses its members all of the time (2002:87). Because a public exists only by virtue of address Warner argues, 'it must predicate some degree of attention, however notional, from its members' (p87). The degree of attention can vary widely so that Warner is able to argue that someone asleep at the ballet is still a member of that ballet's public, or someone doing the hoovering with the television on is still part of the broadcast's public. This is possible because both the ballet and the television are voluntary activities in which 'the act of attention involved in showing up [or switching on] is enough to create an addressable public' (p88). Publics for Warner are contingent on their members' activity, not on their position in the social structure or material existence. He states that 'publics...lacking any institutional being, commence with the moment of attention, must continually predicate renewed attention, and cease to exist when attention is no longer predicated. They are virtual entities, not voluntary associations' (p88).

This is a very different conception of participation from that implied in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. For Habermas criteria have to be fulfilled as to the type of person allowed to participate, and the mode in which that participation takes place. For Warner on the other hand publics are literally craving the attention that constitutes them – 'texts clamor at us. Images solicit our gaze' (p89). There is a sense in which Warner's version of participation seems rather passive in comparison to Habermas'. However, he counters this argument stating that publics,

they by no means render us passive. Quite the contrary. The modern system of publics creates a demanding social phenomenology. Our willingness to process a passing appeal determines which publics we belong to and performs their extension...The appellative energy of publics puts a different burden on us: it makes us believe our consciousness to be decisive. The direction of our glance can constitute our social world (2002:89).

Warner's model of participation in publics offers many benefits over the Habermasian version. It allows the possibility of participation in a public that is addressed through mass media texts, and it enables individuals to participate in multiple spheres concurrently. For Habermas participation of any kind would not be possible in mass-mediated public spheres so any analysis of how those spheres might function is precluded. Warner, on the other hand, is not caught up in the trope of interpersonal communication which limits Habermas' model of participation, so he is able to theorise precisely the kind of

participation that Habermas can not. However, once again Warner's theory goes too far in the opposite direction, and his extremely brief discussion of participation neglects some crucial issues. Firstly it seems far too weak a conception of participation. It is hard to accept that if one, for example, finds a copy of *Goat Herders' Weekly* on a train and glances through it, then for those moments one is taking part in some kind of goat herding public sphere? Granted you have responded to that publication's call for attention and by Warner's logic have become a member of the sphere. But what if you don't understand what you are reading in the magazine, or you strongly disagree with the concept of goat herding on ethical grounds? Are you a member of the public then? When applied to actual situations, aspects of this approach just do not fit either with other formulations of counterpublic spheres or with Warner's own arguments about counterpublics. He argues that it is wrong to mistake the addressee of public speech for an actual person (p85), but the idea that an indiscriminate and random gaze can constitute our social world doesn't seem to account for the ways in which involvement in a counterpublic sphere can transform identity or offer meaningful ways to understand the world.

The weakness in Warner's conception of participation means that it needs modifying or supplementing in order to produce an account of participation which encompasses both the inclusivity and specificity of counterpublic spheres as well as opening up ways to address how counterpublics may be constituted on exclusions which condition participation, which is why participation in the indie public will be predicated on sustained attention to the discussions of the sphere, not just an off-chance fleeting glance. Here I will propose that the model of participation implied by Bolin's account of the film swappers' sphere can be used in conjunction with Warner's to improve the effectiveness of both versions in the model of the indie public I am developing. In Bolin's description of the public sphere of film swappers he sees the *criteria of evaluation* the swappers employ as the key to participation in their sphere. He states that,

every person that accepts the terms set up by the Film Swappers (i.e., he or she has to like horror films with extreme violence and the discourse around it) is welcomed to take part in the sphere. It does not have to be agreed on which director is the greatest or which horror and violence genres are the best. But there has to be a mutual acceptance of the legitimacy of discussing these genres and directors on the same terms as everybody else. This makes the Film Swappers' practices inclusive rather than exclusive (2000:63).

Unlike Warner's rather indiscriminate and fleeting notion of participation, Bolin's model requires a familiarity with the terms of debate in the public sphere in order to participate. While Bolin does apply a broad definition of the 'terms' or criteria for evaluation he is rather disingenuous in his assertion that 'every person that accepts the terms...is welcome to take part.' People may be *welcome* to take part, but it is questionable whether entry into the film swappers' sphere is this simple. In reading the two extracts from film swapping fanzines in Bolin's article I was unable to make head nor tail of the barrage of

obscure references and allusions to other films and directors. Even if I loved horror films it would be difficult for me to 'take part' in any communicative practice without having some understanding of the codes and conventions of the genre, a knowledge of the directors, actors and writers of the films and an awareness that underground fanzines discussing these issues existed in the first place. A similar situation exists around the music press and the indie scene. By way of an example consider this extract from the *NME* about a new band called Tetra Splendour;

Tetra Splendour, you see, operate in a parallel universe where the overworn elements of yer Toploaders are shot through with bolts of imagination and small-town escapism. The four [members of the band] formed in Porthcawl, but relocated to Cardiff when labels began to call...Indeed Tetra Splendour remain removed from any South Wales 'scene'. Their slow-rolling sound is pitched somewhere between Clearlake (who they insist they've never heard) and a contemplative Supergrass...For all their 'now' technology, Tetra Splendour defiantly dance in nu-psychedelic pastures... (Gardner, 2001:12)

In order to make any sense of text like this one not only has to accept the terms set up by the music press – that you have to like music made by artists committed to writing and performing their own work who aren't motivated by commercial success – but, in the case of this article for example, one also needs to be familiar with; the existence and music of the band Toploader, the *NME*'s/alternative scene's attitude toward Toploader, the existence of a South Wales scene and the bands that might comprise, the music of the bands Clearlake and Supergrass, the concept of 'nu-psychedelia' and other bands in that scene, the conventions of the 'On' section of the *NME* where the article is featured, and even the visual codes in the photo of Tetra Splendour that accompanies the piece.

Without familiarity with the concepts listed above the description of the band is practically meaningless. Therefore in order to make participation in a counterpublic like the indie public meaningful, a knowledge of the object of the sphere is required. It is this prerequisite possession of knowledge that qualifies the practices of Bolin's film swappers as 'inclusive rather than exclusive,' and the same is true of the indie public. It should be clarified that the film swappers' sphere is inclusive not of everyone, but of those who accept the terms of the debate, and this acceptance must accompany a degree of specialised knowledge. But it is equally true that as an 'alternative' public sphere with an extremely narrow set of topical concerns, Bolin's Film Swappers' sphere is not presumed to appeal to the general population, a situation which is equally true of the indie public. In light of this I want to argue that the high degree of specialised knowledge required to identify oneself as an object of address in a counter/alternative public sphere is what makes participation in that sphere meaningful for participants. It includes them in the sphere by rewarding their knowledge and making them insiders. It is important then to recognise that counterpublics exhibit not just a specific set of criteria of evaluation, but also require knowledge of the 'interest' of the sphere.

The notion of criteria of evaluation can bring much needed substance to Warner's rather thin conception of participation. I propose that the criteria of evaluation are the point at which participation is possible. It is the specific criteria of evaluation that characterise and distinguish a counterpublic, therefore by accepting those criteria participants are able to participate in debate in the terms of the sphere. Through the principles of sustained attention and acceptance of the criteria of evaluation a model of participation in the indie public can be formulated. This combination of the two approaches diminishes neither – the central notion that a public exists by virtue of being addressed is not undermined by arguing that that address will encompass certain constructs, including criteria of evaluation, which define the character of the public sphere it creates. These constructs enable what can and cannot be said on a certain topic in a counterpublic as well as making available certain social identities to participants.

Benefits of the indie public model

This chapter has outlined a formulation of the indie public which will form the basis of my research. Many of the central characteristics and internal logics of this model will be revealed and challenged by the analysis itself, so it is important to make clear that it is a working model, not a blueprint. However, before I move on to outlining my methodological approach it is firstly necessary to explain the benefits of studying the British indie music scene of the 1990s as a counterpublic as opposed to conceptualising it as, say a 'subculture' or a 'scene'. Formulating a general definition of 'subculture' against which to contrast 'the public' is as difficult as defining 'the public' itself. Sarah Thornton (1997), for example, ventures that 'subcultures are groups of people that have something in common with each other (i.e. they share a problem, an interest, a practice) which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other social groups' (p1). Yet this description holds true for a number of different terms by which scholars imagine and make sense of people as members of discrete populations or social groups, for example, 'community', 'society', 'culture' and public (p1). Indeed the contradictions Warner identifies in the formulation of counterpublics suggests that in spite of a need to address strangers, a counterpublic sphere will also be based on the shared interests of a knowable group. However, there are analytical differences between a public and a subculture, which Thornton only partially accounts for when she states that,

The public has been conceived as a body of rational individuals, responsible citizens who are able to form their own opinion and express it through officially recognised democratic channels. By contrast, subcultures have tended to be envisaged as disenfranchised, disaffected and unofficial. Their shadowy, subterranean activities contrast dramatically with the 'enlightened' civil decencies of the 'public' (p2).

As counterpublic theorists such as Warner and Bolin have shown, publics can also be 'disenfranchised, disaffected and unofficial' and perhaps it is testament to the lack of

public sphere theory of this type that Thornton attributes 'the public' such an official character. It is not this issue which distinguishes publics from subcultures in my formulation of the indie public. Rather, it is the opportunities public sphere theory offers to view the indie scene as those brought together primarily through their participation in a certain type of *discourse*. This is also why it is inappropriate to describe the object the research as the indie 'scene'. This term suggests a collection of localised spaces, for example clubs and gigs, in which select groups of indie fans and followers gather. The 'scene' therefore cannot accommodate those who do not, or cannot, inhabit such spaces, whereas the indie public encompasses a greater geographical spread of participants whose participation is discursively rather than physically conceived.

There are other reasons why it is inappropriate to study indie as a subculture. Thornton (1997:4) observes that the 'sub' in subculture not only 'gives us a clue to one of the main assumptions of this tradition of scholarship – namely that the social groups investigated in the name of 'subcultures' are subordinate, subaltern, or subterranean. 'The ways in which subcultures have been considered 'beneath, but within' society relate to the social status of their participants either as deviant, or as perceived of as lower down the social ladder due to social differences of class, race, ethnicity and age (p4). The sense of the 'sub' in subculture as denoting the subaltern identity of its participants is not as subtle as the concept of a counter-public sphere which can conceptualise an opposition to the dominant public sphere, while its participants may be 'counter' only in their participation in the counter-public sphere (Warner, 2002:56).

Adopting a conception of indie as a public sphere rather than a subculture allows for a more flexible angle from which to approach changes in the indie scene. The fact that the 'sub' of subculture represents a binary opposition to mainstream or dominant cultures often results in subcultural changes being viewed through the tropes of the tainting or 'selling out' of authentic subcultures. Although subcultural theorists such as Thornton (1995) have questioned this framework, arguing that mass or niche media are crucial to the very formation of subcultures, the idea of 'selling out' persists. A counterpublic sphere is able to offer a more nuanced approach. Bruce Robbins (1993) suggests something similar when he assesses the benefits of using a 'public sphere' framework to analyse what might otherwise be referred to as (sub)culture or hegemony;

Unlike 'hegemony' the public sphere is less on the side of rule, more open to opposing views. Unlike 'culture', it is more obviously a site of intersections with other classes and cultures...To speak of a working-class public sphere, as Negt and Kluge do, rather than working-class culture, is to stress *a site of interaction and continuing self-formation rather than a given or self-sufficient body of ideas and practices distinguishing one group from others*. Public sphere invokes 'identity', but does so with more emphasis on action and their consequences than on the nature or characteristics of the actors (pxvii, my emphasis).

It is the opportunity to focus on this 'interaction and continuing self-formation' which can provide a good understanding of the changes that occurred in the indie scene during

1994-5 when its increased popularity and acceptance in the mainstream would throw doubt on its ability to be termed a subculture. Ultimately it is the ability of the concept of a public to account for participation through discourse that is its greatest asset. The process of analysing these discourses will be the subject of the next chapter.

Methodology

The model of the indie public as a cultural counterpublic sphere formulated in the previous chapter will form the basis of my research and act as the object of study. The overall aim of the research is to interrogate the indie public in order to gain an understanding of how participation is made possible and how inclusion is fostered in the sphere, especially for women, in terms of the subject positions that are discursively constructed in the indie public. In order to accomplish this, the ways in which discourses of gender, class, race, sexuality and national identity inform the basis and operation of the indie public are subject to particular scrutiny. It is the aim of this chapter to explore the methodological pathways my model of the indie public opens up, and to explain how a discourse analysis of the music press will allow me to achieve my research aims. Firstly, I locate the sources of public communication in the music press which are analysed in the research, before outlining the reasons why discourse analysis is the method particularly suited to the study of public spheres. Secondly, I then move on to define in greater detail what is meant by the terms 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' in the context of my research, and to discuss the methodological advantages and limitations these concepts places on the analysis. The final sections outline the practicalities of the analytic process, and the organisation of the research findings in terms of the thematic division of the chapters.

Locating public communication in the indie public

The public communication of the indie public analysed in this research is that which takes place in the printed music press. Placing the media at the centre of a public sphere is an inevitable step given the nature of contemporary public spheres for it provides the main means of communication between large and geographically dispersed audiences. While Habermas's bourgeois public sphere may, for a short time, have been characterised by face-to-face communication, the same cannot be said of the indie public. Here, public communication, that is, communication which is addressed to strangers, rather than being a conversation among acquaintances, occurs almost exclusively in the pages of the music press. From the mid-1980s the *NME* and the *Melody Maker* became devoted to reporting on indie, a remit also taken up by *Select* from 1990. While the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select* constitute the core publications of the indie public, and the place where indie bands get their first exposure, indie artists were also featured in a range of other niche and general publications during 1993-1998. Accordingly the coverage of indie in

monthly 'rock' music magazines such as *Vox* and *Q*, lifestyle magazines such as *Sky*, *The Face*, and *Loaded* and pop publications such as *Smash Hits* and *Top of the Pops Magazine*, is partly constitutive of the indie public. Nevertheless the majority of the data analysed in the research is drawn from the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select*, simply because they are the publications which address themselves to an audience whose primary interest, in terms of musical taste, is indie. Articles from the other specialist publications, *are* included in the analysis as part of the sample of articles on the bands in my case-studies. This is because such articles contribute to the construction of those bands in the indie public, and because in all but a small minority of cases there are few discernable differences (for example in criteria of evaluation or canonical references) between their mediation of indie and that of the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select*, indeed much of the time the articles are written by the same group of journalists. What this fact is most indicative of is the way in which, during the 1990s and the popularisation of indie, the public communication associated with the genre exceeded its public sphere and surfaced in the mainstream pop, rock and other cultural public spheres.

Arguing that the indie public is constituted in and by the print media necessarily de-emphasises the role of audio-visual media in the indie public. This may seem problematic in that the advent of television as a mass media is often thought to have transformed contemporary public spheres, not least in Habermas's account of the bourgeois public sphere. However, in the context of British indie music in the 1990s, television media coverage is relatively unimportant for two main reasons. Firstly, despite the huge importance of television and radio coverage for commercial pop music, for non-mainstream genres such as indie, the print media still occupy a privileged position. In her study of heavy metal subculture, Deena Weinstein (1991) sums up what makes the print media special in this respect;

Although all media can be either mass, specialised or somewhere in between, depending on the character of their audience, the print media can more easily cater to specialised interests and audiences than do the electronic media. Not only are magazines generally cheaper to produce, in terms of capital expenditures, than radio programs, television programs and movies, but they provide the opportunity for enthusiasts to read and look at them at their own pace, selecting just what they want to attend to and how intensely and in what order they want to attend to it. The magazine is there for a member of a music-based subculture to pick up and put down at will, and often contains a wealth of detail absent from most radio or TV programs. Perhaps most importantly, magazines freeze the signifiers of a subculture, allowing them to be learned and absorbed. The reader finds out what's 'in' in terms of style, fashion, and lingo (p175-6).

This encapsulates the continuing importance of the printed music press even in the face of increasing music coverage on television and radio. The print media can offer access to a depth and range of information and knowledge that is simply unavailable elsewhere – that which I have argued is crucial for participants to acquire in order to participate in the indie public.

Secondly, during the early 1990s at least, the print media provided the only sustained coverage of indie available – the genre’s lack of commercial success and relative obscurity ensured its absence from mainstream television coverage. In the 1990s music television in Britain was dominated by terrestrial Saturday morning music programmes such as *The Chart Show* (prior to 1998)¹ and *CD:UK* (since 1998) and also the BBC’s *Top of The Pops*. Due to these programmes’ almost total focus the chart, coverage of indie on them was confined to bands whose popularity had already thrust them into the Top 40. Towards the mid-1990s indie bands received some exposure on shows such as *Later with Jools Holland* (BBC2) and the short-lived *The White Room* (Channel 4), but the later time slots allocated to these shows underscored their low priority in the schedules. Television coverage, then, is predicated on commercial popularity, as opposed to coverage in the specialised print media which reflects non-commercial and aesthetic criteria of evaluation. Radio programming in the 1990s posed more of a threat to the print media’s monopoly on indie mediation. John Peel’s show on Radio One, along with *The Evening Session* which was broadcast four nights a week on the station from 1990, were both dedicated largely to playing indie music. Both shows perform the invaluable service of allowing listeners to actually hear music, however, unlike the print media they were unable to provide the prolonged discussion and critical evaluation of both artists and the genre which are crucial to the discursive construction of the indie public.

Why Discourse Analysis?

Formulating indie as a public sphere emphasises the public communication that constitutes it. As the previous chapter laid out, the indie public is to be understood as being organised by its own discourse – it exists by virtue of being addressed – and as a result of this circularity, ‘an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence’ (Warner, 2002:67). This means that the mode of address and protocols of the indie public postulate certain addressable objects which take a specific form given that address in the indie public is not to a general population, but to those already marked off from the generality by their appreciation of indie music. The implication of this is that certain subject positions are made available through the discourse of the indie public, thus the ability to take up such subject positions is part of what it means to participate in the sphere. Participation is also made possible through the acquisition of a specialised knowledge of the field, here indie music, gained through paying sustained attention to the debate, and in the acceptance of the criteria of evaluation which underpin that debate. In terms of this model of the indie public it is clear

¹ *The Chart Show* did featured indie music only as one of its three ‘specialist’ chart rundowns along with dance and rock. Thus, once every three weeks a segment of the hour-long show lasting under five minutes would count down the top ten best selling indie

that the key to understanding how it operates and how participation in it is possible lies in the public discourses that constitute it. It is for this reason that a discourse analytic approach is the most appropriate methodological approach for this research.

Other types of analysis have limitations which restrict the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from the data. A purely statistical content analysis of the music press may be able to highlight how exclusions occur in the music press in terms of the lack of representation of certain social groups, for example by showing the percentage of female artists written about or the ratio of male and female writers. It may also be able to show whether there are shifts or changes in these patterns of representation over time. However, such an analysis cannot reveal the significance or meaning of what is actually written or discussed. Therefore a quantitative approach is only useful in the analysis in as far as it can provide information on the frequency of occurrences of certain phenomena. Similarly one could conduct a study of the indie public through a series of interviews with those engaged in the sphere. This is the methodological approach taken by Bolin (2000) in his research on the film swappers' sphere. He spent time with several film swapping fanzine writers in order to understand the basis of their sphere, a method that enabled him to find out about how the fanzines are produced and the problems that occur in the process. However, in concentrating on those individuals who actively participate in the production of zines, he says little about those who read the zines, how they participate in the sphere, or the content of the zines themselves. This is a problem in the context of my research because I am interested in how what is actually written enables or constrains participation in the indie public.

The literature on the public sphere as a whole features a striking *lack* of attention to what is actually said in the public communication that constitutes public spheres. The focus of a whole range of writings from Habermas to Bolin seems to lie in questions of whether a particular sphere is properly 'public' and democratic and in analysing the internal logic of public spheres. Such questions are limited in what they can reveal about the actual communicative happenings in a public sphere. Bolin's analysis of the film swappers' alternative cultural public sphere is a good example of this deficiency. He describes at length how the film swappers' practices are both public and alternative, and how their network of fanzines provide the public communication necessary to form a public sphere. He also explains that the film swappers' sphere is, 'open to anyone who shares the same taste in films and videos' (2000:64), and that, 'it does not have to be agreed on which director is the greatest, or which horror and violence genres are the best. But there has to be mutual acceptance of the legitimacy of discussing these genres and directors on the same *terms* as everybody else' (p63 my emphasis), in order to illustrate the inclusivity of

singles of the week. Often these singles would not have videos and a still photo of the band would be shown to accompany a snippet of the track.

the film swappers' sphere and to show that there is divergence of opinion and debate within it, albeit over an already pre-defined topic. What he fails to articulate, however, is that this is the limit of what his argument can reveal about the character of the film swappers' sphere. He precludes the possibility of illustrating how these 'terms' function in the actual discussion in the sphere or to ask how they serve to include or exclude certain topics, or discussants from it.

An analysis of the terms that structure the debate in the film swappers' sphere would have allowed Bolin to further show what kinds of subject positions are made discursively available and thus what kinds of participation and inclusion the film swappers' sphere offers. For example, Bolin extracts two fanzine reviews of horror films where the writers discuss the film's sexual content and produce opposing opinions on whether or not such content makes the film 'good' (p63-4). His aim is to show how, while opinions may differ, the *terms* of the debate define the sphere. However he fails to comment on the fact that both reviews are approached from a heterosexual, male position and also address the reader as such. Bolin does not view this as problematic, despite the fact that he has described the Film Swappers' sphere as 'inclusive'. By discussing the sexual content of films the fanzine reviewers help to reinforce one 'term' of the debate, one possible criteria of evaluation, but by discussing only the female characters' presence in the sexual content and by heterosexualising both their and the readers' relation to it, they structure the debate in a certain way, one which excludes subject positions other than that of heterosexual male. It is obviously not enough to 'share a taste' for horror/violence films to become part of the film swappers' sphere – rather, analysis of the discourse of the sphere reveals that there are other levels at which inclusion is (im)possible.

Clearly, Bolin's assertion that, 'every person that accepts the terms set up by the Film Swappers...is welcomed to take part in the sphere' (p63), does not go far enough in explaining what terms and conditions might be attached to that 'acceptance', nor in fully understanding how participation and inclusion function in public spheres. Bolin is certainly not alone in failing to offer this kind of analysis of the workings of public spheres, however, the literature does point to some possible pathways for the further understanding of the operation of public sphere. In his discussion of the media, and in particular the news media, as a public sphere, Peter Dahlgren (1991) begins to point towards the kind of analysis that is needed when he argues that,

our understanding of the public sphere must also be of a practical nature, attuned to the flow of the relevant discourses in the media. Close familiarity with what is said and not said, and how it is said – the topics, the coverages, the debates, the rhetoric, the modes of address, etc. – are a prerequisite not only for an enhanced theoretical understanding but also for concrete political involvement within – and with – the public sphere (p19).

This is as far as Dahlgren's discussion goes and he stops short of actually carrying out such an analysis. Similarly Nancy Fraser asserts that when it comes to addressing the

structural inequalities of public spheres the task of critical theory is to, 'render visible the ways in which societal inequality infects formally inclusive existing public spheres and taints discursive interaction within them' (1992a:121). Both these theorists point towards a discourse analysis of the content of debate in the public sphere with the aim of understanding how those discourses come to constrain or enable what can be said about a given topic. Like Dahlgren, Fraser fails to follow up on her suggestion, leaving it instead as a mere suggestion for future work on the public sphere. In following through these suggestions I not only hope to gain a better understanding of the nature of public spheres and their operation, but also to put into practice hitherto untested methodological suggestions such as Dahlgren's and Fraser's.

Defining 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis'

Having established that other textual analysis techniques cannot fully realise the research aims of my project, it is necessary to focus on discourse analysis in order to define the term and fully explain its methodological role in understanding the indie public. Discourse analysis as a qualitative methodology was introduced through the paradigmatic shift in the social sciences variously termed the 'turn to discourse' or the 'linguistic turn'. This turn has been characterised by the 'increasing attention given to the significance of language and discourse in the construction of knowledge and the formation of persons or subjects' (Poynton & Lee, 2000:1). Influenced in part by poststructuralist theories of language, this shift has been instrumental in the development of discourse analysis and its adoption as a qualitative method in social and cultural research in a range of disciplines. However, to describe discourse analysis solely as a 'method', or to treat it as a transferable skill or tool is misleading. Fairclough (2001) urges us to think of discourse analysis as a theory as much as a method and describes it as 'a theoretical perspective on language and more generally semiosis...which gives rise to ways of analysing language or semiosis within broader analyses of the social process' (p121). The 'theoretical perspective' which Fairclough refers to is the poststructuralist conception of language which contests its status as a neutral and transparent medium between the social actor and the world (Wetherell & Potter 1988:168). Language does not simply reflect an external reality, rather it is constitutive of that reality and in this way, as Parker (1988:185) notes, it is the key to understanding social life. While it can be said that most approaches to discourse share this view of the constitutive power of language, the diversity in its basis and application make it extremely difficult to formulate a succinct, or even just a working definition of the range of practices referred to by the term 'discourse analysis'. It is, as Burman and Parker (1993) state in their introduction to discourse analytic research, 'very difficult to speak of "discourse" or even "discourse analysis" as a single unitary entity' (p3). The wide range of meanings applied to the term discourse is in part due to its

chequered history, and in part to the disciplinary context in which it is being used, and even then definitions differ within disciplines.

On top of this Mills (1997) warns that the confusion over the use of 'discourse' is often compounded by the way the term is often left undefined or merely used to signal a vague theoretical sophistication (p1). However Mills offers an introductory model through which it is possible to identify three main disciplinary areas that have characterised the usage of 'discourse'. The first area is mainstream linguistics. Here discourse implies a concern with language in use, as opposed to language as an abstract structure, although the term may merely refer to an extended and cohesive piece of text or utterance. For other linguists,

discourse is defined by the context of occurrence of certain utterances (thus, the discourse of religion, the discourse of advertising). These contexts of production of texts will determine the internal constituents of the specific texts produced (p9).

This definition is relevant to the analysis here in terms of delineating a 'discourse of indie', and its attendant discourses of, say, 'authenticity', 'star quality' or 'fans', which determine what is said in the music press. The second discipline to define discourse is social psychology/critical linguistics where concern is with power relations and the structures of utterances that form as a result. Such a definition enables the theorist to identify, for example, racist or sexist discourse and to understand how it functions and the effect it has on participants. This is also relevant in the analysis of the indie public because of its ability to elucidate how sexist discourse operates in the music press to marginalise or exclude female participants. The third area in which discourse has been characterised in a specific way is cultural, critical and literary theory. Here the meaning of discourse is heavily influenced by Foucault's use of the term and denotes, as Mills states, 'the general domain of the production and circulation of rule-governed statements' (p9).²

While Foucault's work has been crucial and influential in the development of 'discourse theory' his ideas cannot, unfortunately, be said to constitute a well-ordered, coherent and systematic blueprint for the analysis of British indie music in the 1990s. Furthermore, Foucault's followers have not used his ideas in a uniform fashion, rather the lack of

² The poststructuralist theory of language implicit in discourse analysis, particularly Foucauldian theory, is commonly supposed to be at odds with the theory of language Habermas employs in his theory of the public sphere and communicative action and therefore the synthesis of the two that I propose may be problematic. However although I am aware that a theoretical conflict of sorts exists between Habermas and Foucault the conception of the public sphere being used here owes little to the Habermasian framework which conflicts with the Foucauldian approach, thus eliminating the potential contradiction in making use of a broadly Foucauldian discourse analytic framework. The model of the public outlined in this study emphasises the discursive construction of public spheres, rather than the universalising and proceduralist character of Habermas' work. Furthermore the indie public is a particularised sphere in which the need to generate universally generalisable norms is replaced with a focus on an interested, as opposed to disinterested or objective, form of participation. (See Kelly 1994, Fraser 1994, 1995a and 1995b, Benhabib 1992 and 1995, Holub 1991, Ashenden 1999, Ashenden & Owen 1999, S. Thompson 1999, Owen 2002, White 1988).

system in Foucault's approach has led to a certain degree of flexibility in the way his theory can be utilised in diverse and changing circumstances (Mills, 1997:17). Given this situation it is necessary to highlight the elements of discourse which are most relevant here in order to form a methodologically stable base from which to conduct the analysis. It is important to recognise not only the opportunities and benefits of adopting a certain definition of discourse, but also the limits of what an analysis can achieve, what kind of results can be produced and crucially how the methodology will work in the context of the model of the indie public as formulated in the previous chapter. In order to frame this discussion I would like to put forward two related aims of the discourse analysis in my study. The first is to analyse the construction of the indie public in discourse. Here the focus will be on the internal logics of what is written in the articles selected for analysis, most importantly the identification of the criteria of evaluation used and how certain accounts are authorised and thus privileged. This is important because it is through acceptance of the criteria of evaluation in the indie public that participation in the sphere is possible. The second aim follows from the first and will address the discursive production of subject positions, for example of the 'artist' and the 'fan', that are made available to participants in the sphere. This element of the analysis will allow a thorough exploration of *who* is able to participate in the indie public and on what terms and also reveal the structures of exclusion the indie public is based on.

Mills offers a succinct explanation of both aims when she observes that,

one of the most productive ways of thinking about discourse is not as a group of signs or a stretch of text, but as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972:49). In this sense, a discourse is something which produces something else (an utterance, a concept, an effect), rather than something which exists in and of itself and which can be analysed in isolation. A discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving (1997:17).

This is a particularly good definition for my project because it highlights both the aims of the analysis. First it refers to the productive quality of discourse, i.e., that discourse forms the objects of which it speaks. This view of discourse can be used to illustrate the way in which the mode of address in the indie public produces subject positions, and 'indie' itself. Secondly Mills' definition of discourse emphasises the ideas, opinions and concepts which build up to form a discursive structure. The idea that a discursive structure is built up from a particular 'way of thinking' seems especially relevant to my formulation of the indie public where it is precisely the 'ways of thinking' that make the public communication on indie music specific to that form. Furthermore, the idea of 'criteria of evaluation' by which artists are assessed and discussed in the indie public is analogous to the notion of a 'systematicity of ideas' in that both indicate a particular way of organising the text which it is possible to identify through analysis.

Methods: Analysing the 'systematicity of ideas'

There are multiple strategies for analysing texts which will play an important role in understanding the construction of discourse in the indie public. Fran Tonkiss (1998) suggests several methods that can be used in approaching texts and it is fruitful to explore them here in order to outline how they can be utilised in the research. Tonkiss proposes that the first step in analysis is to organise the data into key categories of interests, themes and terms because as she notes 'identifying recurrent themes or terms can help you to organise the data and bring a more systematic order to the analytic process' (p254). Doing this can help to clarify certain elements of the text – what kinds of ideas and representations are manifested, what associations are being made, what meanings are being mobilised (p255). This process sounds relatively straightforward, however it will be invaluable in beginning to understand the conventions and central concepts that structure the language of the indie sphere. In the context of my study it is vital to gain an understanding of how the discourse in the music press is constructed and built up through the repetition of certain modes of argument or invocation of references. Without this initial understanding it will be difficult to move onto the analysis of how subject positions are made available or to attempt to reveal the exclusionary character of the indie public.

Following this, Tonkiss argues it is useful to examine the rhetorical organisation of the text. This implies paying close attention to 'the argumentative schemes which organise a text and which work to establish the authority of particular accounts while countering alternatives.' (p250). She states that 'wherever a speaker aims to use language persuasively, to dismiss alternative claims, and to produce certain outcomes (forgiveness, agreement, apology, a purchase, and so on), attention to the rhetorical or argumentative organisation of their account will be fruitful' (p250). I believe this will be a particularly relevant strategy in the analysis of the music press precisely because those texts are designed to be persuasive. There is an interlinked element in looking at persuasive texts which is highlighted by the linguistic analyses of Susan Hunston (1994, 2000) and Hunston and Thompson (2000). In their discussion of the role of evaluation in text Hunston and Thompson (2000) argue that evaluative texts are able to manipulate the reader to persuade him or her to see things in a particular way. Manipulation may, for example, take the form of evaluating a certain aspect of a situation as a problem. This works as manipulation because,

evaluation is particularly difficult to challenge, and therefore is particularly effective as manipulation...One way that this may be the case is when information that is 'given' in a clause is expressed evaluatively...The reader is not positioned to make a decision as to whether or not to agree with these evaluations; instead the reader's acceptance of the evaluation is simply assumed (p8).

While Hunston and Thompson's use of the term 'manipulation' may be problematic in that it assumes a certain form of reception on the part of the reader which cannot be verified, their comments about the persuasive techniques used in the text are valuable. Rather than viewing such textual conventions as manipulation, it may be illuminating to treat them as one of the ways in which the indie public belies its criteria of evaluation. Unmarked evaluative clauses are effective because the kind of evaluation they imply fits into the value system of the indie public. The taken-for-granted nature of such statements actually helps to foster inclusion in the indie public by assuming the readers' participation in the sphere.

Another way inclusion and membership are constructed in the text is through the employment of an 'expert language'. Tonkiss discusses this in relation to the 'expert language' of medical discourse. She argues that 'such an expert language has three important effects: it marks out a field of knowledge; it confers membership; and it bestows authority' (1998:248). There are obvious similarities here between the acquisition of the expert language of doctors and what I have termed the specialised knowledge required for participation in the indie public. In the case of the doctor's expert language Tonkiss argues that,

language in this sense represents a form of tacit or backstage knowledge which professionals draw on in their everyday practice and which they tend not to reflect upon. The internal conventions and rules of medical discourse act as a way of socialising doctors into the medical profession, and enabling them to operate competently within it (p248).

Analysing this kind of expert language within the indie public might include identifying the use of references and allusions in the text to other artists, events and canonical works which participants in the sphere are expected to recognise. Not only are participants assumed to possess this knowledge, but by analysing its content (for example the kinds of artists frequently referred to) it will be possible to further characterise the indie public. Finally, Tonkiss's assertion that authority is bestowed via the use of such expert language/specialised knowledge has implications for which accounts are legitimised in the indie public and which will be excluded.

The production of legitimate, or preferred accounts is also highlighted by Gill (2000) when she identifies another form of rhetorical organisation of texts. She uses a persuasive newspaper article to show how the text offers a preferred reading by offering two accounts and privileging one. This is achieved by the writer laying the groundwork for her argument by, 'telling her readers what it is not...This is a common rhetorical move, designed to protect or 'inoculate' an argument from criticism and to offer a 'preferred reading', indicating the way the argument should be interpreted (p182). Recognising this move in the text is one way of looking at contradiction and variation in texts, which is another technique in this kind of discourse analysis. Tonkiss promotes this as a useful strategy arguing that,

Differences within an account point us to the work that is being done to reconcile conflicting ideas, to cope with contradictions or uncertainty, or to counter alternatives. By paying attention to such variations the analyst disrupts the appearance of a 'smooth', coherent piece of discourse, allowing for an analysis of two different processes at work. The first concerns the text's internal hesitations or inconsistencies. The second concerns the way that the discourse aims to combat alternative accounts (1998:255).

By looking for variations and 'inoculated against' readings in the music press text the analysis will be able to understand better any contradictory ideas on which the indie public is founded. This technique will also help to identify the readings which are privileged and how they are constructed and through this highlight how other accounts are excluded.

The idea that discourses are based in practices of exclusion is common to most theorisations of discourse (Mills, 1997:12). It is through the exclusion of the 'unsayable' that certain discourses become legitimised as self-evident or 'natural'. To illustrate this point Mills uses the example of medicalised discourses of women's health which make it 'natural' to speak about menstruation in negative terms precisely because ways to think and talk about the topic positively have been excluded by a medical discourse which views menstruation as deviant to the male norm (1997:12). Through this idea it is possible to think about the way in which feminist theorising has articulated the 'unsayable' in order to question the apparent 'naturalness' of dominant discourses and to make excluded discursive positions available and credible. Not only that but it also provides another methodological strategy for analysing discourse in the context of my research. Given that exclusion is one of the central concerns in understanding the indie public, it will be necessary to identify the exclusions that constitute the sphere. Here there is a parallel to the work of Fraser (1992a) and Landes' (1998) critiques of the bourgeois public sphere in that they successfully argue that Habermas' account of the public sphere is based on the exclusion of the feminine.

It is not only internal variations and exclusions which structure the indie public, but the idea that its discourse is also defined through constant dialogue or opposition with other, outside, discourses (Mills, 1997:11-12). In the context of the indie public it is clear how this is connected to the 'counter' status of the sphere in that counterpublics are formed in opposition, and subordination to, pre-existing public discourses. Warner states that the discourse that constitutes a counterpublic is not, 'merely a different or alternative idiom, but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness' (2002:119). By highlighting the fact that all discourses, not only those that constitute counterpublics, are in dialogue and opposition with others, and combining this with Warner's argument about the relation of counterpublic discourse to other public spheres, it is possible to consider how the indie public is distinguished in relation to other cultural public spheres, primarily that of mainstream pop music. Fairclough (2001) shares

this view of discourse as contested and states that 'an order of discourse is not a closed or rigid system, but rather an open system, which is put at risk by what happens in actual interactions' (2001:124). The idea of discourse being in continual contestation allows the analysis to take into account the changes that occurred in the indie public during the 1990s. It allows discourses to gain or lose authority over time and also has the potential to take into account shifts brought about by discourses originating outside the indie public, for example in the mainstream pop sphere, which become part of the indie public. This aspect of flexibility and contestation also benefits the analysis in that it prevents any false imposition of order on the discourse where none exists. The music press isn't a unified text and while patterns will occur, they will not be able to account for all the statements produced. Discourse analysis, however is able to cope with such inconsistencies. As Gill (2000) notes, 'unlike some styles of analysis which suppress variability or simply gloss over instances which do not fit the story being told, discursive analyses require rigour in order to make analytical sense of texts in all their fragmented, contradictory messiness' (p180).

Analysing the discursive formation of subjects is the second, equally crucial, key to understanding both how the indie public is constituted, but also how participation is made possible. Janet Ransom (1993) shows how this kind of analysis can be done, and in doing so highlights an important limit on what kind of questions can be answered. She states that, 'Foucault explains that "in discourse something is formed according to clearly definable rules; alongside everything a society can produce (alongside: that is to say, in a determinate relationship with) there is the formation and transformation of "things said"' [1991: 63]' (p131). Ransom suggests that,

it becomes possible to study, for example, "things said" about women within the discourse of sexology and to generate a detailed historical analysis...The focus of Foucault's method would be to identify the *subject position* which the discourse constitutes – the "problematic frigid wife", for example, - and see how that subject position is discursively located in relation to other categories (p131 my emphasis).

This method is directly relevant to the formulation of the indie public, especially in respect of the performative element of counterpublics whereby an object of address is brought into being by being addressed in discourse (Warner, 2002:91-2). Analysing that discourse allows the indie public participant to be revealed and interrogated, and by examining the exclusions on which such position is constituted it is possible to identify the terms that shape participation in the indie public.

Using discourse in this way, can be very productive, but it also limits both the kind of analysis that can be carried out and the kind of conclusions which can be drawn. This methodology cannot be used to correct 'erroneous' discourse or to show that a certain text misrepresents some underlying or alternative 'truth'. Such an analysis would imply some position outside discourse from which statements can be judged, and would treat

the text under analysis as a resource when, as Tonkiss points out, 'within discourse analysis, language is viewed as the topic of the research' (1998:247). In Ransom's example from the discourse of sexology she points out that such an analysis cannot be used to make 'the statement that the discourses of sexology have misrepresented women's sexuality' (1993:131). Despite these limitations employing discourse in this way is wholly appropriate for this research. In the crudest terms what 'discourse' does is to provide a way of looking at the music press which isn't a purely linguistic analysis. The research does not look at how women are represented (i.e., with a view to declaring 'this representation is sexist'), similarly its concern is not to ascertain whether what is written in the music press is 'true' or accurately reflects an external 'reality'. Similarly because it is a text-based form of analysis, discourse analysis cannot say anything about who the audience for any given text actually is, nor how they use the texts analysed. In the context of the indie scene and the music press, a discourse analysis of the type I have outlined cannot speculate as to whether negative or positive press coverage has affected the success, or lack of it, enjoyed by a certain artist. Rather my analysis treats what is said in the music press as the construction of that reality with the aim of showing how it is possible to say the things that are said. Therefore the analysis concerns the way discourses produce and constrain what can be said in the indie public and how what is said produces notions of indie as a genre, indie artists and participants in the indie public.

The analysis

The final section of this chapter will outline how the analysis of the indie public is organised in terms of how the data is used. Even if the analysis was limited to the data available from just one weekly music paper, say the *NME*, between 1993 and 1998 this alone would include around 300 newspapers, an unmanageable amount of material for a close textual analysis. Therefore it is obvious that the material available must be filtered in order to make it at once more easily accessible, and realistically 'analysable'. For this reason I have concentrated on two main areas of analysis. The first type of analysis will be of a sample group of 'New Band' articles³. These relatively short, introductory and recommendatory pieces were a regular feature of the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select* and the analysis of them is designed to build a sense of the 'systematicity of ideas' which constitute the discursive construction of the indie public. The research sample comprises fifty-four new band articles, three selected from each aforementioned publication for each year between 1993 and 1998 (inclusive). Only British bands have been selected, and in this respect the sample is not representative of the totality of new band articles published in the music press. The articles are also all drawn from issues of the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select* published in March/April and September/October, this is to avoid any seasonal

³ See Appendix 1 for a full list of the articles in the new band articles sample.

variations that may occur at other times of the year, for example, articles from beginning of the year may focus more closely on what will be 'in' in the new year, while articles from the middle of the year may reflect bands' appearances at the summer festivals. Aside from these criteria, the selection of articles is fairly representative of the music press's coverage of new bands. New band articles take the form of a mixture of interview, review and evaluation of the band in question and as such are not limited to one particular format, as straightforward review might be. Two or three new bands are featured in this way in every issue of the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select* and the bands in question usually have a record, tour or gig to promote. New band articles are also characterised by their positive tone, as the artists featured have been singled out by the papers for praise and attention. In this sense they are excellent examples of persuasive texts and exhibit the type of rhetorical organisation discussed previously in this chapter.

The analysis of the new band articles is designed to provide an initial insight into the discursive organisation of the indie public. In order to analyse the articles I first identified the key themes and concepts around which discussion of the bands was structured. The features were common to the majority, if not all, of the articles, could then be considered indicative of the criteria of evaluation that structure the indie public – the base on which that public's 'way of thinking' is founded. The next step was to analyse more closely the way these key themes were articulated in relation to different artists in the sample, especially in terms of gender. The aim of this was to identify unmarked, taken-for-granted 'norms' and to highlight the assumptions the indie public is built on. Inclusion in the sphere relies on fitting these 'norms', so in order to understand what kinds of exclusions are built into the constitution of the indie public it was also vital to identify and analyse instances where bands were marked as 'other'. In this instance 'exclusion' obviously does not mean that bands that do not 'fit' are not written about in the music press – the fact that there are new band articles about them in the first place attests to this – moreover the new band articles provide a *positive* account of such artists. The structures of inclusion/exclusion are more complex in this context and in the process of analysis I had to 'unlearn' how I read the music press, and to relearn it in terms of analysing its constituent parts, its inconsistencies, antagonisms and contradictions, and reading around the superficially positive assessments passed in the new band articles.

The understanding gained from the analysis of the new band articles forms a basis for the second strand of analysis. This takes the form of case-studies of four individual bands – Oasis, Elastica, Suede and Echobelly⁴. These four particular bands have been chosen because they were all prominent in the indie scene and between 1993 and 1998 and enjoyed varying degrees of success. They are also bands which, again to varying

⁴ See Appendix 2 for biographical details of the case study bands, and a full list of the articles analysed in the sample.

degrees, entered the mainstream and received coverage in a wide range of media outside that associated with the indie scene. For this reason the case studies is not limited to the three core music papers used in the new band articles analysis, rather, *some* coverage from other music magazines such as *Q* and *Vox* is included along with articles from style magazines such as *Sky* and *The Face*, teen pop magazines such as *Smash Hits*, and 'lads' mags' such as *Loaded*. This is because the focus of the case studies chapters is the construction of indie *artists*. For each of the case study bands a sample of forty articles was analysed. The samples were comprised of a range of types of pieces namely, live reviews, album reviews, new band articles, interviews and non-interview features. In order to ensure that articles were of a sufficient length for a meaningful analysis the bands' singles reviews and festival appearance reviews were omitted, along with 'news' features, as such pieces tend to be brief and somewhat superficial.

There are two reasons for using case studies of individual bands as a method, the most obvious is that the popular and rock music press as a whole is normally organised by features on particular artists, even in niche publications such as the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select* where the genre of bands covered is of considerable importance. Secondly the case study bands are a mix of male and female artists. This adds another level to my study which is generally lacking from writing about women and rock. It is important to be able to understand the way in which male artists are written about as well as female, not just so comparisons and differences in the way they are constructed can be highlighted and the identification of gendered hierarchies made, but to show that male artists are also constructed through discourses of gender. Masculinity may be an unmarked or normative category, but it is equally discursively produced. The analysis therefore shows what kind of masculine subject positions the indie public makes available and how these are just as exclusive for different kinds of men as they are for women. Within each case study I can examine how artists are evaluated and how discourses of gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality and genre interconnect in the framing of these artists in the music press.

The analysis of the case study bands is divided into four themes, each of which is the subject of a chapter. These themes were selected after an initial analysis as the ideas and topics that occurred most frequently in the articles. They are also the themes that display a degree of differentiation between the artists in question, thus they are able to provide a solid base from which to make comparisons between bands. The first of these themes is authenticity, a concept which is central to the evaluation of artists in the indie public. The aim of the chapter on authenticity is to build on the analysis of the new band articles and develop a more sophisticated account of how discourses of authenticity are manifested in the music press, and how artists' access to authenticity is both *affected* by their gendered, classed and raced identities and *affects* their ability to participate or

belong in the indie public. Where the authenticity chapter deals with how artists' art is evaluated, the second of the case studies chapters concerns the construction of stars and their appeal in the indie public. This kind of analysis was impossible to achieve with the new band articles because it focuses on the characterisation of the artists over numerous articles and over time. In the course of the analysis it became clear that stars were not just constructed in isolation, but in relation to their appeal to certain kinds of audiences with which they are assumed to share some kind of affinity. An analysis of the limitations placed on certain artists' appeal sheds more light on the processes through which inclusion and exclusion in the indie public are made possible.

The third of the case study chapters continues the idea of bands' appeal and affinity with the audience, but discusses it in terms of national identity. Although as a topic of discussion in the articles national identity did not feature as heavily as some, its importance is undeniable. The assumption of a positively valued and shared national identity in the indie public is one of its defining features, especially given the ascendancy and subsequent popularity of the term 'Britpop' to describe British indie acts in the 1990s. The chapter on national identity therefore analyses how discourses of Britishness or Englishness (although the two are often conflated) are constructed in the articles and how they foster both inclusion and exclusion in the indie public. As in the preceding chapter the analysis focuses not just on the construction of artists as British but also the audience, and how a sense of 'we' is posited. The fourth and final case study chapter also takes the audience as its focus of analysis as it deals with the construction of fans and audiences. Because the model of the indie public I am working with in the analysis presupposes an interested, as opposed to disinterested, audience the literature on fans, another kind of interested audience, is highly salient. Through an analysis of the different kinds of fandom constructed in the music press, and the value they are ascribed, this chapter is able to more clearly define a sense who comprises the 'we' of included subjects in the indie public. Additionally an analysis of the music press' rhetorical invocation of 'other people' who 'we' disidentify with provides one of the sharpest pictures of the character of the indie public.

The themes focussed on in the research chapters of this project inevitably fail to cover ever aspect of indie's coverage during the 1990s. I have, for example, little to say about drugs, irony or New Labour – all topics which have become inextricably connected to indie and Britpop in the years since its demise⁵. However, the themes I have covered are the ones which recurred most frequently in the data analysed and in themselves are more than sufficient to satisfy my research aims. The methodological approach here also provides a level of analysis that is absent from existing studies of the music press or indeed 'women in rock'. Analysing indie through the way its discourse constructs a public

⁵ See, for example, John Harris' *The Last Party* (2003).

sphere means I am not just looking at how artists are represented in terms of how these representations affect their critical reception.⁶ Rather my methodology allows me to draw wider conclusions about how the music press' discursive construction sets terms and conditions for the participation of both artists and the audience. Similarly this methodology diverges from existing studies of female artists which tend to concentrate on the material barriers facing women in the music business (e.g., Bayton, 1997, 1998), interpretations of established artists' lyrics (Whiteley 2000, Reynolds and Press 1995), interviews with female musicians (Raphael 1995) or historical/biographical works (O'Brien 2002, O'Dair 1997). While valuable in their own right, such studies struggle to account for women's continuing marginalisation in the face of feminist 'progress', while neglecting to address the issues around women's participation in music scenes or particular musical genres. In making up for these shortcomings I am able to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which not just gender, but other axis of difference continue to affect some people's ability to participate in potentially meaningful and valuable musical cultures.

⁶ See, for example, McLeod (2001), or Davies (2001).

Introducing the band

'New band' articles and the basics of the indie public

New band articles are a music press convention. Nestled between the news pages and the star interviews they are part of the everyday landscape of the music press, neither a major scoop for the paper nor a major draw for the reader, but important in that they exemplify the music press's role as an 'ideological gatekeeper'¹. The bands featured are singled out from countless hopefuls and tipped as the latest up-and-coming (indie) stars. Each article uses interview and review styles to present a positive recommendation of the band and its members. Therefore, articles clearly serve a promotional purpose for bands, but they do more than just inform the reader that an artist exists. Herein lies their usefulness to this research – new band articles illustrate three of the key elements of communication in the indie public. They apply a specific *criteria of evaluation* to bands in order to construct them as 'good', they exhibit the importance of *specialised knowledge* as they situate bands in relation to existing artists and canons and they foster inclusion through a mode of address that assumes a *shared understanding*. An analysis of these key elements will distinguish the character of the indie public and to begin to make sense of the terms and conditions for participation in the sphere.

The fifty-four articles analysed in this chapter are selected from March/April and September/October issues of the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select Magazine* between 1993 and 1998². The articles are all on British bands, and, in all but four cases, were published to coincide with the release of a band's record (usually their debut single) or upcoming tour. Each article is around 200 to 600 words long and accompanied by a photo of the band. The majority of the bands in the sample (67%) are all-male, 9% are all-female, and the remaining 24% have both male and female members.³ The sample also reveals that 76% of the articles were written by male writers. Not only does this indicate the relative lack of female writers, but it is also the case that female writers write more often about female bands than their male counterparts. Although such statistics cannot be taken as completely representative of all the new band articles published in the *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Select* between 1993 and 1998, they are indicative of general patterns in the music press. The disparities between male and female representation suggest, before any *textual* analysis takes place, that women's position in indie is on the margins.

¹ See Frith 1983, Scott 1999, Hirsch 1990, Théberge 1991.

² See Appendix 1 for list of articles in sample.

³ See Appendix 1 for more detailed statistics on the bands in the sample.

The analysis of the new band articles in this chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section focuses the key conventions of the new band articles. Because the articles are all generally positive about the bands they feature, ideas of what makes a band 'fit' in the indie public will be repeated systematically making it possible to identify the criteria of evaluation employed by the music press. What topics are most frequently discussed? What traits are the 'right' ones for bands to possess? Such questions focus on the construction of the content of the new band articles, but it is also important to attend to their structure in terms of mode of address. How are the articles addressed, and to whom? The intention in this first section is not impose a rigid order on the data, but to understand the structures and themes of the new band articles. The second section of the chapter moves on to critique the conventions already identified from a gender perspective. How is gender constructed through the articles? Does gender difference effect artists' abilities to meet the criteria of evaluation and participate in the indie public? An analysis of the construction of both femininity *and* masculinity is vital to answer these questions and this chapter attends to both. The establishment of the criteria of evaluation and mode of address and its critique provided by this chapter not only offer an initial understanding of the character and operation of the indie public which is central to the analysis of subsequent chapters, but also begins to address the central issues of inclusion and participation.

Key conventions in the new band articles

(i) Goodness

The central theme of any new band article is the assertion that the band in question is, for want of a better term, 'good'. Assurances of a band's goodness are rarely stated blatantly in the text, rather they take the form of positively valued descriptions of the band's sound or a specific song. The article on Gene does both;

"As a combined force we are very good. Potentially inspiring really." He [singer Martin Rossiter] is nothing other than correct, of course, as proved by a single called 'For The Dead' – a sparkling tale of self-loathing and filth-ridden poverty, full of Stonesesque guitars, numerous signs of songwriting brilliance, an overarching sense of decayed bohemia... (*NME* 23/4/94).

Delicatessen meanwhile, 'are a musically audacious bunch, unafraid of seeming pretentious, awkward or hard-to-swallow... Delicatessen are already startling' (*MM* 5/3/94), while Kula Shaker are ascribed goodness via some rather fantastical imagery; 'current B-side "Under the Hammer" – is terrific. Strange, mystical vocals blend into soaring, hallucinatory sequences and gravity-defying rock squizzles, in a molten, impressionistic hurricane of sound just pinned to the firmament by some direct, frizzling pop/rock songs' (*MM* 20/4/96). Such descriptions persuasively convey a band's goodness through the use of positively attributed adjectives ('sparkling', 'brilliance', 'audacious',

'startling', 'terrific', 'frizzling') to evaluate the band as they are described. Such observations however, say little about the criteria of evaluation of the indie public. Bands are not just good because they're good. Rather, there are other criteria they must satisfy in order to be produced as such.

One frequently recurring criteria is 'uniqueness' – bands are good if they are special or different from other bands. This is often articulated by linking the band to a certain sub-genre or scene, but differentiating them from it and stating their superiority. In doing this a band is elevated above an undifferentiated mass and onto a level where they are better than the rest. Powder, for example, are described thus,

Powder are a long way from the slew of charismatic-female-singer-plus-dismal-droogs line-ups currently haunting indieland...Furthermore Powder are keen to rise above the machinations of Camden scenedom and herald a return to the days of proper bands doing proper band things (*NME* 8/4/95).

Powder are special, while bands to whom they might otherwise be compared are cast as a 'slew' and not 'proper'. Embrace are described in similar terms. The article asks us to,

Think less lo-fi, more epic sounding, soul-affirming, dynamic, breathtaking rock 'n' roll – a wee bit like The Verve. "There seems to be a gap in the market for what we were doing anyway," says Danny, "so we've filled it. We couldn't be arsed with being any old indie band with a four-piece string section instead of a tune" (*Select* 4/97).

Here the band's singer makes the distinction between his band and other indie acts and in doing also suggests their originality and innovation in the genre. The article on the Nilon Bombers contrasts the special-ness of the band to others who, by implication, lack their talent and originality:

It's a dead cert that 1995 will be characterised by huge numbers of dodgy combos desperately waving the Brit Pop banner. Also guaranteed (since every gravy train eventually meets its Waterloo) is that 1996 will see the vast majority make their farewell appearances in The Maker's own AWOL column. *Salve et vale*, fame-hungry teenage loudmouths. Exceptions will be few, and Cheltenham-based Nilon Bombers are the first we've heard this year (*MM* 25/3/95).

In all three examples the bands are singled out from their peers as artists that either defy the confines of their genre or exemplify the best the genre can offer. This singularity is valued positively by writers who invoke it as a measure of the band's worth.

Bands' goodness is also expressed and evaluated though recounting band-members' formative experiences, in particular those that involve a degree of struggle or suffering in their attempt to become artists. Bands therefore frequently describe how they were outcasts at school, have been stuck in dead-end jobs, isolated in small, provincial towns or experienced financial hardship. The singer of Goya Dress, Astrid, who grew up in the Shetland Isles exemplifies this;

Astrid claims these remote slumps of windswept rock still affect both her outlook on life and her crashingly romantic songs. "I didn't used to think about it, but actually it's very isolating. I suddenly realised you're just a complete outsider if you come from Shetland" (*NME* 8/4/95).

Blessed Ethel describe how they were affected by their poor economic situation;

“We’ve all got such crap equipment,” complains guitarist and vocalist Dan Barnes... Their sound also owes much to their less than conventional approach to writing. Singer Sara Doran and Dan constructed their entire repertoire on an eight quid bontempi organ bought at the local second-hand emporium (*NME* 18/9/93).

In both cases the bands’ music has been shaped by adverse circumstances which had to be overcome in order for the band to succeed or even just exist.

The examples above highlight instances of personal suffering, however, more common is for bands to detail how they have suffered as *musicians*. Frequently band members have previously been in unsuccessful and unheard of bands, have suffered at the hands of the music industry, or have been in successful but now defunct groups, their current bands thus benefiting from their past experience. The article on Supergrass typifies this;

Deep in the mists of time Gaz and Danny were the force behind juvenile janglers The Jennifers, a group who... fell apart before anyone really had the chance to write them off for their excessive youth... After a year of rehearsals – and Danny’s expulsion from school, natch – they finally came to a point where they’d progressed way beyond their previous incarnation. Is Supergrass the natural result then? “Definitely! We had two years of travelling around in transit vans, and we had a brilliant time, and in the end it’s led us to what we’re doing now” (*NME* 15/10/94).

In the case of Hurricane #1, guitarist Andy Bell’s experience in Ride, a successful indie act of the early 1990s, is invoked to illustrate his suffering. The article argues that,

it’s an astounding rebirth considering the way that Ride spluttered into oblivion... “When we stopped I genuinely thought that was it, that I might never make music again. Which was a bit of a blow because I can’t actually do anything else. It took ages before I picked up a guitar again and thought about getting another group together” (*MM* 26/4/97).

Whether suffering is personal or musical it performs the same function; to construct the artist as committed to his/her art. In combination with the framing of bands as unique these themes in the new band articles contribute to the construction of artists’ authenticity, perhaps the most important criteria of evaluation in the indie public and one to which I will return in the next chapter.

Related to the concept of authenticity implied by the link to an artist’s experience and suffering is one which suggests that it is a band’s music which is their essential truth, and that on hearing the music it will be evident and ‘proved’ that a band is good. Of the Beta Band, *Select* says,

Thus far they’ve only played two gigs and this is their first ever interview, but confidence isn’t in short supply. “It’s a fucking brilliant record,” Stephen modestly states, talking of their debut EP, ‘Champion Versions’. “As long as people hear it, they’ll go for it, full on. Is definitely no problem” (*Select* 9/97).

The emphasis here is on the idea that, as a new band, few have had the chance to hear the Beta Band, but that once they do their goodness will be self-evident. A slightly different take on the same concept comes from *Catch*;

“We don’t give a f- if we don’t have any credibility,” announces Toby, through a mouthful of Minstrels. “We don’t care how we get labeled, because we’ve got the material to back ourselves up. The people who underestimate us are going to be proved wrong” (*NME* 27/9/97).

Here it is not just that the potential audience have not heard the band, but that misrepresentations of the band that have already been made will be disproved on hearing their music. The same idea is evident in the article on Theaudience which states that, ‘the suspicion arises that this could be the perfect lab-assembled female-fronted band. Until you hear their genuinely brilliant debut single ‘I Got The Wherewithal’, that is’ (*NME* 25/10/97). The revelatory power of the music is so strong here that it not only proves Theaudience are ‘good’ but uncovers the truth about the band’s formation – if Theaudience had been ‘lab-assembled’ their debut single could not be ‘brilliant’.

The absence of contrivance or ‘manufacture’ in a band’s formation is another important criteria in the evaluation of bands in the new band articles. Bands are frequently described as having come together through a series of coincidences, for example of Goya Dress it is stated that, ‘Terry de Castro...bummed around Bristol before chancing upon Astrid “very fatefully, through mutual friends”’ (*NME* 8/4/95), while Senser are described as, ‘seven people thrown together by the grubby magnet of London’ (*Select* 9/93). Once bands have been fatefully assembled, their success and career progression is often similarly attributed to luck or chance. One member of Fretblanket states that, ““things like getting SOTW [single of the week] things like my ultimate dreams have just...happened”” (*NME* 6/3/93), while Pink Kross’ career to date is described as, ‘a series of happy accidents’ (*NME* 24/3/96). The repeated assertions that a band is somehow ‘meant to be’ and has achieved success off the back of their talent, rather than through any implied industry or ‘behind-the-scenes’ help are crucial in constructing the idea of goodness in the indie public. It is not sufficient just for a band’s *music* to be described as good, rather they have to be shown to be the right kind of band (not manufactured), motivated by the right kind of reasons (a commitment to their music).

One final way bands are proved to be the right kind of band motivated by the right kind of reasons is through their aspirations for the future. Bands are typically asked about their ambitions and the response is reported toward the end of the article. Commonly, they state that as long as they are making music they are happy with, they are uninterested in either the trappings of fame or the machinations of the music industry. Martin Carr from The Boo Radleys exemplifies this saying,

“Me and Sice used to sit in my bedroom, practising interviews on my tape recorder, reading questions out of Smash Hits. We’d do whole concerts with tennis rackets playing along to ‘The Beatles at the Hollywood Bowl’. We’d practise getting off planes. And that’s what we still want. We want to be really famous and adored. But now it’s not really necessary. I’d still like it, but the fact that I’m happy with the records I make overrides all that” (*Select* 9/93)

Embrace express similar sentiments;

Truth be told, these heads-down, no-nonsensists aren't that keen on the age-old ritual known as 'selling yourself'. "We're not into the whole industry thing, anyway," reveals Danny. "We went to this party recently because we heard the Spice Girls were gonna be there, and we couldn't stand all the insecurity and coke-snortin' going on. We had to leave. All-nighters in the studio, that's the only thing that keeps us from our beds at the moment" (*Select* 4/97).

As well as highlighting the importance of their music over anything else that band-life might offer, statements like these also allow bands to distance themselves from mainstream pop music. The extracts above make reference to *Smash Hits* and the Spice Girls, both things closely associated with 'pop' and its profit-driven commercialism, which are then explicitly repudiated – a rejection which is key to the formation of the indie public. Crucially, what the analysis reveals is that bands' evaluation as 'good' is not based on adherence to any strict rules of genre in terms of the actual sounds they make, rather it is based upon non-musical criteria of evaluation.

(ii) Endorsements

The new band articles not only confer value on bands through 'goodness' they also achieve this through the use of *endorsements*. The articles situate new bands within a canon of existing artists, both through comparisons of the bands' musical style with other established acts and through linking the new bands with others non-musically. It is the reputation and value of the acts new bands are linked to which endorses them, for example Gene's Martin Rossiter is said to have vocals that,

sound like a close relation of Steven Patrick Morrissey. He growls. He moans. And there are times when – to Gene's credit, I guess – you could be listening to a wonderfully accomplished out-take from, say, 'Strangeways Here We Come' (*NME* 23/4/94).

The comparison is a favourable one and links Gene with the reverence attached to The Smiths. Ballroom are compared to Suede in a similar way; 'no other group in four years has come this close to reaching the melodramatic vision of Suede's first album' (*MM* 15/3/97). More commonly bands are compared to more than one other band. The Warm Jets are described thus;

After a few listens you're picking up the loose threads so tightly woven together, like REM's smoothness, the Flaming Lips' gentle loopiness, Wire's wired edge and Tiger's rolling rhythms. Throw in the odd jangle angle and you end up with a distant (and great) dysfunctional cousin of the Marion/Longpigs axis (*NME* 21/9/96).

Again the associations here are positive and they serve to ally the Warm Jets with the other 'good' bands mentioned.

In addition to drawing comparisons based on a band's sound, the new band articles also link bands non-musically through a variety of references that may include mentions of a band's label, other established artists they have toured with or who have supported them in some capacity, festivals or events a band have appeared at and other media interest they have attracted. Gomez, for example, are introduced through an endorsement; 'If you

have heard of Gomez already it might just be that you caught them supporting labelmates Embrace around the country last year... “Danny from Embrace was so up for us playing with them” (MM 21/3/98). The Nilon Bombers are endorsed on the strength of their producer's credentials; ‘The EP, produced by Ian Caple (Tindersticks, Compulsion, MBV⁴) is deadly personal’ (MM 25/3/95), while the Beta Band's endorsements are given a separate section of their article,

The band are co-managed by Brian Cannon, who designs all of Oasis' sleeves. Through that connection, they brought in Nick McCabe out of The Verve to remix 'B&A', one of the tracks on the EP...Also as the band found themselves in dire need of a rehearsal room, The Verve kindly lent them theirs (*Select* 9/97).

Occasionally music papers even endorse a band on the strength of their own endorsements – Credit To The Nation are lent credence by the *NME* with the assurance that their single was ‘already acclaimed as an *NME* Single of the Week’ (*NME* 24/4/93)!

The system of both musical and non-musical endorsements used in the new band articles works to situate and legitimate bands within the indie public. Not only do comparisons and references to other artists help construct an accepted canon within the public, but they foster participation and inclusion by rewarding the acquisition of specialist knowledge. If, for example, you don't know who the Flaming Lips or Tiger are, there is little meaning in the description of the Warm Jets discussed above. However, if you are aware of those artists you are implicitly included in the discussion of the band. Similarly, non-musical endorsements actually impart more specialist knowledge, for example that the Beta Band have connections to Oasis and The Verve, whilst simultaneously relying on existing knowledge of those bands' existence and reputation in the first place.

(iii) Mode of Address

The inclusiveness fostered by the assumption of specialist knowledge is reinforced by the new band articles' mode of address. The mode of address helps delineate who 'we' are in terms of the indie public, and subsequently constructs a *shared understanding* of how bands are discussed and evaluated. Analysing the mode of address involves moving away from just the content of the new band articles, and re-focussing on their form. While new band articles undoubtedly do introduce the band to the reader and implicitly position acts in certain canons, they simultaneously bolster the *press's* reputation for seeking out and celebrating the right kind of new talent in the right kind of way. For example, many of the articles contain references to other forms of media exposure bands have had. Such references could be interpreted as a form of endorsement in the articles, however, that coverage is invariably represented negatively and devalued. The following discussion of the Electric Sound of Joy (ESOJ) exemplifies this

Around six months ago, East Midlands five-piece Electric Sound of Joy were one of the most sought-after new bands in Britain. Two seven-inches on the Earworm

⁴ My Bloody Valentine.

label, all calmly groovy rhythms and niggling, angular guitar pop, had landed them bang in the middle of a torrid A&R whirl. There was even the odd interview. "I sing because otherwise we'd be some instrumental noodle freak-out group," frontman Greg Kurcewicz told one journalist, shortly before his band set off on a usefully prestigious tour with Arab Strap. After a couple of dates, however, ESOJ had become... well, an instrumental noodle freak-out group, out of necessity. "There were so many conflicts," remembers bassist Dan Hayhurst now. "Greg just didn't want to do it any more." Kurcewicz, whose singing had given the band the accessibility that attracted so much industry attention, had ironically walked out because that very attention was bugging him so much... The mainstream sniffer dogs may have been shaken off now the commercial hook of a singer has gone, but ESOJ are still an uncompromising pop band (*NME* 24/10/98).

Not only does the article contain examples of the band's musical suffering, biographical details of their career, and endorsements from their record label and tour with Arab Strap, but it constructs other media coverage of the band as superficial while simultaneously presenting itself as authentic and motivated by the right reasons. The attention the band is initially given is attributed to an interest in their singer who made them more accessible to the derogatorily termed 'mainstream sniffer dogs' whose interest in the band is not caged in musical terms – they are interested in the band's 'commercial hook'. The article disassociates itself from the damaging 'industry attention' and reflects on it in a detached manner. In doing so it constructs the coverage it is currently offering as *better* than that which the band originally received because it is motivated by the band's status as 'uncompromising' (i.e., good), and further that it is covering a band that the 'industry' is now erroneously overlooking. The rationales for appreciating a band implied in the article are strikingly similar to those used to determine whether or not the band itself is good. Just as good bands must be uncontrived and uninterested in fame, so good indie public participants must appreciate bands for their inaccessible and uncompromising qualities, rather than their lead-singers or commercial hooks.

Shared understanding in the indie public is further constructed through a direct mode of address. In the case of Space, for example, it is claimed that, 'you'll have heard 'Neighbourhood' on the Chris Evans show; seen it on 'The Chart Show'. Now hear about it from Liverpool weirdo scallydelics Space themselves' (*MM* 20/4/96). The address to 'you' in this statement makes it powerfully inclusive, assuming as it does, a knowledge of 'your' media habits. But it also construes 'you' as the kind of person for whom Chris Evans and the *Chart Show* are insufficient sources of discussion on, or coverage of, Space. Therefore as well as constructing its own discourse as 'better' than the others mentioned, it also positions its discussion as more relevant to 'you'. At the same time its discourse is only enabled by positing an object of address ('you') that will consider it the most important or relevant. Positing this object of address is what makes the indie public meaningful for those able to identify with that object, and the new band articles commonly invoke this sense of identification. The article on Ballroom, for example, discusses the current direction of the indie scene and states, 'we could see the return of heart-baring,

soulful passion, reinforcing the pre-irony beliefs of vulnerability and honesty. Most people would call it rock. I think you'll know what I mean when I prefer to call it pop' (*MM* 15/3/97). The address is inclusive both in the 'we' which encompasses the scene, and in the 'you' addressed directly in the second sentence. Here 'you' are assumed to share the interpretation of genre categories, while the singularity of the personal 'you' contrasts with the undifferentiated mass of 'most people'.

It is not just the music press and its readership which are included in the 'us' of the indie public, the bands are also part of the sphere. The interview sections of the new band articles frequently intimate facts that are presented as confidences. For example, the article on Revolution 9 contains the following comments,

we're not wilfully obscure, and it's not a question of being precious," explains bass player and cellist, David Barbenel. "We're not so much taken up with ourselves that if people are talking we can't play, but it just seems like a waste of time trying to do it. There are just so many people who mistake volume for power, which is not what it's all about" (*MM* 20/3/93).

The information is presented in the form of a confidence shared with a knowing audience that differentiates that constituency from one that wouldn't 'understand' (the 'many people who mistake volume for power'). The implication is that if the band were talking to those 'others', rather than 'us', they wouldn't be able to say the same things. The articles also report interviews in an informal manner so that The Delgados, for instance, are reported to be 'happy to sit around and discuss such fripperies as global motoring etiquette, the delights of pan pipe practitioners Incantation, and how The Delgados started' (*NME* 16/9/95). The implied camaraderie of 'sitting around' discussing 'fronteries' intimates a closeness between the interviewer and the band, and by extension the audience as well. The construction of the articles in this way constitutes equality and inclusiveness in the indie public – the mode of address assumes an addressee who will share the values and meanings expressed.

What this understanding of the shared values of the indie public does not imply is that all the articles express exactly the same opinion of various artists or genres. A good example of this is found in the way the articles praise or dismiss the contemporary Britpop scene. Mansun, for example, are positioned squarely within Britpop, the article on them stating that, 'in an exceptional pop year in which every two-bit outfit in the land seems fired with enough inspiration to rattle off a great single, Chester's Mansun are no exception' (*MM* 7/10/95). Not only are the band considered good, but so is the genre they fit into. In contrast the same genre is referred to in the article on Linoleum, which states, 'so many young British guitar bands, so few fresh ideas between them. It's a rare treat these days if you find a new group who have one twist to bring to the time-honoured guitars-drums-and-attitude trick' (*MM* 13/4/96). Here the genre is mentioned in order to dismiss it and raise Linoleum above it. Such variance of opinion highlights diversity in the content of debate in the indie public, while the construction of shared values occurs

through the mode of address. Both articles above rhetorically position the audience as being in agreement with the statements made, they are expected to *share* the values being expressed, and thus be included in the public's discussion.

Critiquing the key themes

The first sections of this chapter have provided a sketch of how the criteria of evaluation, acquisition of specialist knowledge and mode of address of the indie public are constructed in the new band articles. Using this sketch as a basis for further analysis it is possible to examine how differences that exist between bands affect their evaluation in order to produce a more nuanced account of the character of the indie public. In this section I will concentrate on gender difference in order to interrogate the apparent neutrality of the conventions of the music press.

One key convention to explore in this respect is the way in which artists recount their formative experiences. This is a particularly apt example because both the female and male artists conform to the convention – they discuss their past experiences as if to explain who they 'are' and how they have undergone the necessary suffering that makes a good band. The articles on the all-male band Fretblanket and the all-female Tampasm, for example, both make reference to experiences the bands had whilst at school.

Consider these two short extracts, the first from the article on Fretblanket,

"We did our first ever gig at school at lunchtime," confesses singer Will. "There were 350 watching us – that's more than we've ever had since!... "Because we're young, people don't realise that we've already been through the shit," gripes Clive. "We started when we were 14" (*NME* 6/3/93).

And the second from the article on Tampasm,

Still, they must be popular with the old school chums? Not especially. "A lot of this band is revenge, on people who wouldn't let us be in bands with them when we were at school because we were female," snarls Olivia, like a she-wolf protecting her brood (*Select* 3/97).

Both bands have suffered as artists, but Tampasm's experience is explicitly linked to their gender. Though it may be somewhat embarrassing or uncool for Fretblanket to have to 'confess' to having played their first gig at school, their experience, and subsequent talk of what they've 'been through', refers only to their youth and status as a band. The particularity of Tampasm's experience, on the other hand, is reinforced via the highly gendered comment about 'a she-wolf' protecting her brood, thus defining the band heavily via an unflattering kind of primal/maternal ultra-femininity.

The Fretblanket/Tampasm example is indicative of the way in which gender is marked in the articles on female artists in a way which is not for male artists. Tampasm explain their success, experience, suffering and so on in terms of how being *women* has affected them. Fretblanket do not – their male experience is presented as 'normal' and implicitly

universal. It is not only experiences relating to suffering which are constructed differently for male and female artists in the new band articles. Female bands are very frequently discussed in relation to their personal lives, especially their private/sexual lives in a way that *none* of the male bands in the sample are. Discussions of dating, boyfriends and being chatted up/harassed by men are frequent, as is talk about male rock stars and celebrities. Of the five articles about all-female bands, four contain statements of this last type. Fluffy declare their ambition; “we want to meet Jarvis!” froths Amanda. They all cheer. “We’ve got a toy sheep called Jarvis. He’s my hero ‘cos he’s great and really sexy!” (*Select* 9/95). Tampasm say that, “we’ll be happy when we’ve met Skid Row” (*Select* 3/97). The Voodoo Queens say that “Our teen anthem is ‘Keanu’, after all...and let’s face it, Keanu Reeves is horny” (*MM* 20/3/93). Finally the Pink Kross article reports that, ‘Singing drummer Vic Boyd, a woman whose growl is worse than her bite, was interrupted kissing Pavement’s Steve Malkmus by the sound of her alarm clock’ (*NME* 24/3/96).

This particular feature of articles about female artists has two interlinked effects. Firstly it securely locates female artists in the ‘heterosexual matrix’. Judith Butler (1990) uses this term to,

designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised...[and] to characterise a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (p151:n6).

In other words it is the idea that biological sex (male or female) aligns with both gender identity (masculine or feminine respectively) and desire for the ‘opposite’ sex. The fact that this system also reproduces patriarchal (and homophobic) hierarchies is not coincidental, and in the context of the new band articles it works to define female artists within a narrow model of heterosexuality. Secondly, the bands usually express their desires for male rock stars in response to questions about their ultimate ambitions, and their comments are always positioned at the end of the article, thus suggesting they sum up the truth of the band and overriding sentiments expressed earlier in the piece. Not only does discussion of female artists’ ambitions in terms of meeting male rock stars mean that discussion is not about their music as it is for male bands, but it also positions female artists in the role of the groupie, one of the traditional roles for women in rock, and not one heavily associated with outstanding musicianship.

This is not the only way in which female artists’ gender is emphasised over their status as musicians in the new band articles. In discussions of predominantly- and especially all-female bands, the band members’ gender identity is an explicit theme, and indeed often forms the angle of the whole article in a way that does not happen for male artists. The

article on the Voodoo Queens opens with the question, 'what is the most shocking thing a *girl* can do in public? [my emphasis]' (*MM* 20/3/93) which immediately establishes the band's gender as a theme in the article. Similarly Pink Kross's article opens with the line, 'Bassist Geraldine Kane, a *woman* with a penchant for feather boas...[my emphasis]' (*NME* 24/3/96) which while mentioning her musical role in the band also highlights that she is female. This is repeated later when the drummer is introduced; 'Singing drummer Vic Boyd, a woman whose growl is worse than her bite...' (*NME* 24/3/96), which reinforces the theme implied at the start. Likewise the article on Fluffy opens with the declaration that, "'Young girls shouldn't be afraid to look feminine...'" (*Select* 9/95), again instantly establishing gender as a topic of discussion.

In certain cases it is possible to see how female artists have attempted to resist the discussion of themselves as women. However, bringing up the subject at all still allows a discussion of gender to take place. Tampasm, for example, fall into the trap they were trying to avoid when they argue that,

"Women in rock always have to be crazed harpies, mad women who are just completely nutty, or they're sexy and lovely and non-controversial." "...and who wants to be Alanis Morissette?" finishes Charlotte. "We just want some respect, which isn't a word you use when you're talking about female bands." Ooh, get back in the knife drawer, Miss Sharp' (*Select* 3/97).

'Women in rock' is a term that has come to be understood in the language of the music press through the publication of articles on the (novel) success of some female artists whereby they are reductively and somewhat patronisingly grouped as a genre. The music press's reaction when bands attempt to resist this label is interesting, the (male) writer responds to their criticism with a sarcastic and highly-gendered comment which neutralises and trivialises the band's objections. Although Tampasm's objections could be read as an attempt to establish their individuality and uniqueness vis à vis other female artists, it also reinforces the exact reading of themselves they are trying to resist. In fact, later in the piece during an exchange about the band's ambitions wherein they jokingly declare a desire to, 'dominate the world', Jen from the band is described as 'Fuhrer-istic' with, 'eyes blazing maniacally like some kind of crack-crazed Eva Braun' (*Select* 3/97).⁵ This is precisely the kind of 'crazed harpie' image of women in rock the band were trying to critique.

The attention paid to female artists' gender, rather than their musicianship also extends to the kinds of endorsements they receive. In the sample of articles analysed, not only are all- or predominantly-female bands compared to others less often than the all- or predominantly- males bands, but the female artists are typically compared/linked with other female artists and the male artists are typically compared/linked with other male artists. Very rarely are any comparisons made across gender, especially between bands

where a male vocalist is compared to a female one.⁶ This puts female artists at a disadvantage in relation to the canon. The marginalisation of women in rock, and later punk, new wave and 80s indie, over the past three decades means that there are far fewer common reference points available for female artists. Because comparisons are not generally made across gender it is nearly impossible for female artists to fit into the canon of the most frequently cited bands which is overwhelmingly comprised of all-male acts – for example, the bands most often mentioned in the new band articles sample are the Rolling Stones, the Clash, Roxy Music, The Smiths, the Stone Roses, Suede and Oasis; all all-male bands. In terms of the specialist knowledge that is circulated through the comparisons and endorsements in the new band articles, it is clear that it will largely exclude female artists. Additionally, because only a small number of female artists are referenced it makes it seem as though there is very little variation between female artists.

Female artists are also more often linked to artists outside the rock/indie genres, and specifically to mainstream pop artists, than are male artists. Tampasm, for example, are said to be, 'primed to be the noisenik Spice Girls' (*Select* 3/97), while Sing Sing are asked how, as a duo, they feel, 'succeeding in the footsteps of Mel & Kim, Elaine Paige & Barbara Dickson, and – erk! Alisha's Attic?' (*MM*, 3/10/98). It is interesting that the bands are compared to mainstream, commercial, yet all female acts, and not to male bands from the indie/rock milieu. This tendency has the added effect of distancing them from indie's canon and aligning them with commercial pop. When the major themes and conventions of the articles strive to distinguish bands as 'good' precisely through their rejection of the contrivance and manufacture of the mainstream, to link female artists to pop acts has the effect of devaluing and delegitimizing them.

While comparing female artists to pop acts already undermines their position within the indie public, sometimes, the mere fact that a band is female is enough to insinuate that they are in some way contrived. This is exemplified by the articles on Northern Uproar (an all-male band) and Fluffy (an all-female band). The Northern Uproar article describes how,

Northern Uproar loiter nonchalantly at brave Scotland's T In The Park fest. Brash of mouth, they face the crucial question of the hour. They hail from Manchester, cultural arena for football, rock, or undimly racist comedy. But just what has been the single most inspirational event in the rainy city? In, say, the past five years? "Us," bellows singer/bassist Leon Mayer instantly. "Us, us, us," Flourishing a meaty finger, he gets more specific. "Yeah, me an' him, an' him, an' him." Correct. The subject is messianically Mancunian self-belief and Northern Uproar have just secured their starter for ten...With a band who support City, play swaggeringly unreconstructed rock 'n' roll and are willing to talk about little but

⁵ Note that even when female bands are being compared to dictators comparisons cannot be made across gender – Jen is likened to Hitler's girlfriend rather than the man himself.

⁶ Of the total of 55 different artists that all-male bands in the sample are compared to musically, none have female singers. The bands with female singers are compared to only 10 bands, 8 of which also have female singers.

themselves, it's tempting to see Northern Uproar as the Oasis youth team. Obliging they're even prone to internal scrapping... "The last time was at the services – we ended up battering shite out of each other while everyone came out of the Burger King to watch" (*Select* 10/95).

While the article on Fluffy declares,

The Fluff have a load of Angry Woman Rock up their flimsy sleeves. Indeed, they bring up the (gulp!) Woman Issue totally unprompted. "So many girls are afraid to be girls," claims Amanda. "Apart from Courtney Love, who's really feminine and uses her sexuality and is a strong woman. I don't think women should dress like boys. That's what's great about PJ Harvey. She was boyish and now she's gone really glam. She looks amazing and she's become an icon, a real woman." This fem-rock ebullience may be all very well, but will it work? It's well known that the female audience find it difficult to identify with singing saucestrels – take Shampoo. And boys can feel intimidated by feistiness of a certain order (*Select* 9/95).

The description of Northern Uproar is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, by highlighting certain characteristics (arrogance, brashness, swaggering, violence), reporting Leon's speech to mimic his accent, and using descriptions such as 'meaty' and 'unreconstructed', the article constructs the band in terms of a specific kind of Northern working-class masculinity which is in stark contrast to the construction of femininity in the Fluffy article. It seems almost inappropriate to argue that gender is 'unmarked' in the Northern Uproar article when there seem to be so many pointers in the text highlighting the centrality of the band's masculine presentation to their overall character. However, when seen in contrast with the Fluffy article it becomes clear that the construction of gender has very different implications when a female band is under discussion.

Like the Northern Uproar article, the piece on Fluffy constructs an equally vivid picture of the band's gendered identity. What is intriguing here is the way in which Fluffy's femininity is constructed as a gimmick. The question posed as to whether the band's 'fem-rock ebullience' will 'work' casts their femininity as something 'put on' in order to sell records, and this marks them as contrived and suspicious – they are not being themselves but using gimmicks to become successful rather than letting their music speak for itself. Ultimately femininity is constructed as artificial, and to crown it all the suggestion is that it won't pay off as a strategy because neither female nor male audiences will respond positively to it.

On the other hand, no such doubt is cast on Northern Uproar despite the strong characterisation of their masculinity. The article suggests that the band are derivative in both their music and their image; describing them as the 'Oasis youth team' hardly connotes originality or uniqueness, but in spite of this Northern Uproar are vindicated and supported and the suggestion that they are capitalising on their similarities to the hugely popular, not to mention profitable, Oasis in order to sell records is absent. Unlike Fluffy, Northern Uproar's gender identity is not seen as gimmicky or artificial, but rather as

something which contributes to their authenticity as artists and informs their musical style. The contrast between how Fluffy and Northern Uproar are written about shows how masculinity is naturalised in the music press while femininity is not only marked out as different and abnormal, but actually prevents female artists from satisfying the criteria of evaluation that structure the indie public.

This section has shown how the key concepts at work in the new band articles are not neutral criteria by which all bands are discussed and ultimately judged. When applied to female artists it highlights how these concepts are marked as masculine and thus, how female artists often fail to meet the criteria for inclusion in the indie public. More than this, it is as though bands that do not fit the standard are actually reduced to their difference and little else is said about them. This is reinforced by two further factors. Firstly, it is not just gender difference which overdetermines discussion on bands. For Cornershop, a band with two key Asian members, otherness in terms of race forms the central theme of their new band article. When discussing the band's politics the article states,

"It's not just about racism, for a start," says Tjindar Singh. "We'd like to make people think about loads of issues, be it homophobia, sexism or attitudes toward the disabled. The trouble was, after the Morrissey incident everyone just centred on the racism"⁷ (*Select* 4/93).

The implication of this statement is that this article will be different and the bands will discuss their political interests outside of race. However, the article later reports how after an unsuccessful period in the band's career, 'Cornershop were reborn – Tjindar determined to say something about the *racism* which he'd experienced at college in Preston' (*Select* 4/93, my emphasis). Although the band attempted to expand the discussion, the article reinstates race as both the primary source of inspiration for the band and the only 'difference' that will be broached in the article. In his book on Asian involvement in the British music scene of the 1990s, *Brimful of Asia: Negotiating Ethnicity in the UK Music Scene* (2004), Rehan Hyder acknowledges the way in which the music press, 'clearly reflects the workings of an exotic politics which seeks to define non-whites one-dimensionally in terms only of their politics, in particular the struggle against racism' (p89). In turn this both ignores the differences between non-white bands and has the effect of 'minimising the importance of, or ignoring entirely, the musical output itself' (p89).

A similar situation applies to the Black rap artist MC Fusion of Credit to the Nation. His difference is also highlighted and drawn attention to quite explicitly;

Fusion has to be one of the most incongruous sights in indiedom. Not just a teenage rapper, not just a black teenage rapper, but a black teenage rapper from West Bromwich, gold dripping from his neck and hands – who reads *The Guardian* (*NME* 24/4/93).

⁷ The 'Morrissey incident' referred to involved Cornershop burning photos of Morrissey in front of his record company's (EMI) offices in response to Morrissey's ambiguous Union Jack flag waving during his performance at Madstock in Finsbury Park in the summer of 1992.

MC Fusion's differences are literally listed, almost hysterically and although the article is in itself positive, it is unable to articulate much above the sense of novelty attached to the idea of a Black rap act participating in 'indiedom'. Hyder's observations are totally relevant to the discussion of the new band articles, and illustrate how both Cornershop and Credit to the Nation are literally reduced to their racial differences, thus revealing the unmarked normative whiteness of the indie public. However, unlike the gendering of Fluffy, neither Cornershop nor Credit to the Nation's racial identities are cited as a source of potential inauthenticity.

Secondly, the marking of difference can be found in some of the articles on mixed bands where the gender of the female members of the band, even where they are prominent singers or songwriters, is not mentioned at all. In the articles on Linoleum, Goya Dress and Blessed Ethel, for example, the femininity of female band members is not discussed, and they are not constructed via their relations with men, nor via gendered stereotypes. In fact their gender is as unmarked as that of the majority of male artists in the sample. This feature of the discourse in the new band articles suggests that in the indie public gender difference is either erased, or artists are reduced to it. Female artists can be 'female' or 'artists' but not both.

Masculinity

If femininity in the new band articles is highly marked and defined through discourses of difference and heterosexuality, the same can certainly not be said about masculinity. Not only is gender unmarked in the articles about male artists, but they are notable for the almost total lack of references to women in any capacity – as partners, girlfriends, influences and most surprisingly as objects of desire. The absence of discussion of male artists' private lives and sexuality is remarkable given the insistence in the literature on the construction of masculinity that masculinity is constituted through frequent references to heterosexuality. In their discussion of the construction of masculinity in popular fiction Batsleer *et al* (1985) observe that masculinity,

is typically registered at the outset, in masculine romance, in terms of an explicit and normative heterosexuality. This might seem so obvious as not to be worth saying. But an interesting feature of the genre is that, in spite of an overwhelming presumption to the same effect, it seems compelled, with sometimes pettish insistence, to repeat the fact...The protagonist of the thriller or adventure story has another world of male camaraderie, rivalry and contest, whose ambiguous and potentially unstable values and connotations need to be neutralised by ritual reassurances of sexual conformity (p75/6).⁸

⁸ Although Batsleer *et al*'s discussion concerns fiction they state that their observations extend beyond this; 'the generic and ideological implications are not limited to extended narratives or circumscribed by the medium of the printed book. The patterns and motifs that we analyse can be found – differently produced and inflected, certainly – in films,

The frequent reassurances of the hero's heterosexuality are not essential to the main plot but appear to shore up masculinity against, 'the terrible, the unthinkable humiliation of being unmasked, in an unguarded moment as a cissy, a pansy or a weed' (Batsleer, 1985:78).

The constant reinstating of heterosexuality in order to define masculinity is frequently discussed in the literature on men's magazines in the 1990s, especially the new breed of men's lifestyle magazines, such as *GQ*, and their more 'laddish' offspring, particularly *Loaded*. Such magazines are haunted by the spectres of homoeroticism and homosexuality precisely because they present stories about, and photographs of, men to a predominantly male readership. Gill (2003) explains how men's magazines resolve the anxieties associated with homoeroticism in two ways, 'first through the adoption of a "laddish" tone which enables male editors and journalists to address readers as "mates", and secondly through an almost hysterical emphasis on women's bodies and heterosexual sex' (p44). Whelehan (2000) also notes how, 'the near pornographic depictions of women and sex is a kind of antidote to the homoerotic potential of the style and fashion features which displayed the male body for a male gaze, and this obviously in part explains the increase in "glamour" shots and copy reinforcing the heterosexual message' (p62).

What is remarkable about the new band articles is that *like* the men's style press they feature a plethora of text about and images of men, but *unlike* them contain none of the reassurances of heterosexuality.⁹ Thus the indie public makes available masculine identities that are not articulated in other men's media, and furthermore unlike the femininity of female artists, the construction of masculinity in the indie public does not systematically reinscribe hegemonic heteronormativity. These findings tally with some of the arguments Simon Reynolds makes in his article about the late 80s indie scene, 'Against Health and Efficiency' (1989). His observations that indie represents a reaction or alternative to the healthy 'bodymusic' of the mainstream, with its emphases on sex, style, hedonism and fitness (p245), clearly posits a kind of masculine identity in indie which is not based a virile muscularity for men. Reynolds notes that, 'the alternative scene, home of oppositional meanings, has always defined itself as pop's other. So in

musicals, comic strips, magazine stories, and stage plays' (1985:70), so their observations are certainly relevant here.

⁹ The literature on the construction of masculinities in the media contains no references to the music press aside from its role as the training ground of *Loaded's* founders James Brown and Tim Southwell (Crewe, 2003:97-98). Gill (2003:45) notes that 'there has been little research exploring the connections of contemporary music with representations of masculinity, yet it would seem obvious that musical styles have a profound impact on the ways in which masculinity is codified and lived.' Her observation is notable in that she does not refer to the music press, the study of which is excluded from both the analysis of men's magazines, and the examination of masculinity and musicians.

today's independent label music, diverse as it is, we can find a common impulse to rise above the body' (p246).

Although Reynolds is writing about a slightly earlier period than the one covered by the new band articles, his characterisation of indie is still evident. The article on Supergrass, for example, illustrates precisely what Reynolds describes. The band are introduced thus:

International jetset popstars Supergrass are exercising their puny bodies in the swanky gymnasium of the Newport Hilton hotel. Drummer Danny attempts to lift some coin-sized weights and collapses under the strain, while heartthrob singer Gaz gasps for breath on the cycling machine...(*NME* 15/10/94).

Supergrass are ironically described as 'international jetset popstars' and the sarcasm spills over into the description of the band in a gym. Both images are conjured to reflect exactly what Supergrass are not: mainstream pop and healthy/fit. Ballroom similarly fit this image. The article explains that:

the rest of Ballroom – drummer Matt, guitarist Tim and bassist Michael – produce just the right amount of epic grandeur to enhance the heaven-bound beauty of Gary's voice. Although with his pallid expression and ironing-board body, it is difficult to believe he's capable of more than an apologetic wheeze' (*MM* 15/3/97).

Again the band are portrayed as slightly ethereal and un-bodily ('heaven-bound') and the description of the singer's body also fulfills Reynold's view of the indie norm – pale and wan. Laura Lee Davies (1995) paints a similar picture of the indie scene in the early nineties and points to The Smiths as the ultimate embodiment of indie. Of that band she says that,

With his wimp geekiness compensated for – at least to his schoolboy admirers – by an intellectual swagger (a walking Oscar Wilde quote machine), Morrissey was the hero for a generation of seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds. They could blame their continued virginity on a suddenly fashionable "gentility" and had Johnny Marr's achingly beautiful, jangling guitar music as a sound-track to their *NME*-reading, fanzine-writing lives (p125).

In the new band articles the lead singer of Gene, a band who are compared to The Smiths, is described as, 'a clean-cut, worryingly articulate young man,' with 'an overarching sense of decayed bohemia (musty smelling bedrooms, failed affairs)' (*NME* 23/4/94). Such descriptions echo both Davies' and Reynolds' observations and construct masculinity in the indie public as vulnerable, sensitive and curiously unsexual.

Alongside the rejection of the healthy body Reynolds also suggests a refusal of sexuality in indie. He observes that, 'our indie scene's espousal of the sexual politics of the wimp recalls the Sixties interest in androgyny. But today it's less a question of liberation into a world of free-flowing, polymorphous desire, as liberation *from* sexuality' (1989:250).

Reynolds further argues that indie caters for those excluded by the confidently sexual worlds of pop, rock and r'n'b; 'it deals with all the matter written out of pop's script – squalor, antagonism, frustration, difficulty, doubt...[it is]...a rewriting of youth in terms of maladjustment, awkwardness, introversion misery' (1989:253-4). Reynolds assertions are

borne out in the absence of references to (male) sexuality in the new band articles. Even in relation to one of the very few references to male sexuality his argument stands – the article on The Crocketts contains a discussion of their forthcoming single that states,

“It’s about meeting a woman and marrying her and then realising that she’s fat and ugly and you don’t want to be married to her at all,” says 22-year-old Daniel. Was it written from experience? “Erm, I’d rather not talk about it,” he says blushing, “I haven’t been married though” (*MM* 14/3/98).

Misogynist overtones aside, sexuality in this song certainly seems to be something both frightening and difficult to discuss. The stating of Daniel’s age, and the fact he blushes when made to talk about the song both suggest his inexperience, vulnerability and retreat from overt sexuality.

The point of discussing masculinity in the new band articles has been to illustrate that the way in which it is constructed in the indie public is far from co-incidental. Rather, the constitution of a ‘wimpy’ or unhealthy and unsexual masculinity is crucial to the definition of indie itself. It is precisely by embodying the ‘indie’ ideal of masculinity that artists are included in the genre, and their performance of this identity signals their difference from both mainstream pop’s healthy bodies and more overtly sexual forms of rock (Davies, 1995:124). However, the way in which masculinity remains the unmarked norm is problematic when taken in the context of the explicit marking and discussion of gender for female artists. The analysis of the new band articles has shown that female artists are not, to paraphrase Reynolds, ‘liberated *from* sexuality’ (1989:250), but defined through it, placing them at odds with the constitutive gender norms of the indie public. It is not that the articles on female artists are necessarily overtly sexist, though a few definitely verge on that territory, but that the way female bands’ gender is constructed disallows their full participation in the indie public because they fail again to satisfy the criteria of evaluation.

Inevitably, not all of the male artists in the sample are constructed precisely along the lines discussed above. The previously discussed Northern Uproar, for example are confident and arrogant and cannot be said to be distinguished by their ‘intellectual swagger’ or ‘maladjustment’. However, despite their brashness, Northern Uproar’s masculinity is still not constructed with reference to any kind of active (hetero)sexuality. Rather their masculinity is rarefied in relation to other *men* via a series of what Batsleer *et al* describe as, ‘fine adjustments of comparison, contrast, rivalry and degrees of approval,’ through which, ‘the hero’s own definition as a man becomes sharper, without ever being explicitly presented as such’ (1985:78). The article on Northern Uproar exemplifies this in a discussion of the band Menswear;

As their name suggests they have nothing but scorn for perfidious Southern scam-mongering. “Fucking Menswear,” ponders Leon... “Forget it, man, it was all done 30 years ago. If you put some twat in a suit, it doesn’t mean he’s cool, it just means he’s a twat in a suit” (*Select* 10/95).

While the band's comments here are articulated as part of a North/South divide, Northern Uproar are simultaneously defining themselves against the rather effete way in which Menswear 'do' masculinity. What is notable is that the construction of Northern Uproar's masculinity does not require women in any capacity.

Conclusion: The indie public as a homosocial sphere

The relative absence of women in the new band articles as artists, writers or even as foils for the construction of male artists' masculinity speaks to the essential homosociality of indie public. In her study of male homosocial desire, *Between Men* (1985), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick analyses canonic English literature texts in terms of the relations between men. She draws a clear distinction between male *homosexual* and *homosocial* desire in order to understand the structure of men's relations with other men (p2). Sedgwick argues that even outwardly heterosexual relationships act as a means of men relating to other men, either in terms of establishing status or through promoting the interests of men. In relation to the new band articles it is fruitful to consider Sedgwick's observations because the absence of women in the articles on men, combined with the almost overbearing 'marked-ness' of female artists' femininity and heterosexuality frames indie as having male homosociality as one of its key features. The music press is, after all, largely written about, by and for men. The construction of a feminised, vulnerable and 'wimpy' masculinity in the indie public is possible precisely through the absence of women. In her discussion of Shakespeare's sonnets Sedgwick argues that, 'actual women are so far from the centre of consciousness that even to be womanlike, *in relation to men*, is not very dangerous' (p34). The masculinity of feminised men is secure because there are no women around to reinstate a heterosexuality premised on normative versions of masculinity and femininity.

However, in the case of the indie public it is not that there are *no* women around, just very few, which poses the question women's position in a male homosocial environment. Sedgwick notes that the homosociality of 'men-promoting-the-interests-of-men' can not only exclude, but also allow for the domination of, women (1985:3). Although relations between men may be central, they will still take place in a society where men and women have unequal access to power, thus patriarchal relations that oppress both women and homosexuals are by no means weakened in a homosocial setting. Sedgwick characterises women's status in male homosociality as, 'being ostensibly the objects of men's heterosexual desire and being more functionally the conduits of their homosocial desire toward other men' (p57). These rather limited female roles are also identified by Don Romesburg (2004) in an article about male homosociality in contemporary American cinema. He observes that the effect of male homosociality, 'seems to be that women, pushed to the margins of these apparently progressive male relationships, find

themselves represented in predictably boring ways – nag, supporter, sexy sidekick, mother, wife’ (p65). The construction of female artists in the new band articles certainly reflects Sedgwick’s and Romesburg’s arguments. The frequent references to men in the articles on female artists (as objects of desire, or sources of emotional suffering/lyrical inspiration) not only confine women to the kinds of traditionally feminine role Romesburg describes, but give male readers the opportunity to see how they can relate to the women in the bands and to position themselves either as lovers or idols, both of which will confer status on them in relations with other men. With men central even to the articles on female artists, any kind of meaningful female homosociality is precluded in the indie public.

As this chapter has shown, the homosocial character of the indie public constructed in the new band articles is not the only constraint on female participation in the sphere. Female artists struggle to meet the criteria of evaluation for what makes a good band. Where ‘goodness’ demands uniqueness, musical suffering, a lack of contrivance and a commitment to art, female artists are more often discussed in terms of their gender and their personal lives than their musical output. Where a system of endorsements is used to position bands in terms of a canon of indie greats, female artists are likened to mainstream pop acts and excluded from the canon because they are never compared to male artists. In addition to this they must try and participate in a sphere in which, to paraphrase Sedgwick, women are ‘far from the centre of consciousness’ (1985:34). Finally, given this masculine constitution of the indie public, the notion that the mode of address of the new band articles promotes inclusivity is fundamentally undermined. The construction of a shared understanding and acceptance of the criteria of evaluation in the indie public is not necessarily inclusive if the meanings that are presumed to be shared serve to exclude women from full participation in the sphere. The following four chapters will take the initial findings outlined here and examine the construction of authenticity, stars, national identity and fans in greater detail.

You need to be yourself

Constructing authentic artists in the indie public

Authenticity, as Jones & Featherly (2002) have noted is, 'simultaneously the most invisible and most opaque of the concerns that occupy popular-music critics, yet it is referred to or implied in almost all popular music criticism' (p31). This assertion is certainly borne out in the coverage of the four case-study bands, Oasis, Elastica, Suede and Echobelly¹. Issues of authenticity are present in abundance in the articles; in discussions about artistic integrity and merit, originality, sincerity and inspiration, in talk about the indie genre and commercial success, yet authenticity itself remains undefined. Even on the rare occasions when it is explicitly mentioned, for example when Oasis are described as, 'the only authentic phenomenon among the working class since the twilight of the Mondays' (*Select* 12/94), the kind of authenticity implied is multifaceted. Oasis are at once ascribed authentic roots through the mention of their class identity while they are simultaneously linked temporally to a more authentic era, the 'twilight of the [Happy] Mondays'. In this simple statement Oasis are distinguished from an implicitly inauthentic contemporary scene, described and validated and given legitimacy. Herein lies the importance of constructing authentic artists in the indie public. Where the previous chapter framed the evaluation of new bands in terms of 'goodness', when artists become established and the subject of lengthy interviews and reviews, authenticity emerges as one of the most vital criteria of evaluation in the indie public, and one of the most valuable qualities a band can possess.

Authenticity will be understood in this chapter, not as a singular construct, but as a discourse produced through discussions of bands' qualities – their originality, their lack of pretension, their emotional sincerity, their dedication to music, their eschewal of commerce in favour of art, and frequently through the negation of an inauthentic 'other'. The aim of this chapter will not be to attempt to explain *why* authenticity is such an important quality for bands to be ascribed, but rather to understand *how* it is ascribed, and to whom. The way in which constructions of authenticity intersect with those of gender and class will be central to the analysis, for an understanding of this aspect of authenticity will help provide a greater insight into the exclusions and inclusions of the indie public. I will begin with an examination of the role authenticity plays in the opposition between art and commerce precisely because it is within the terms of this debate that authenticity is most frequently discussed.

¹ See Appendix 2 for full list of articles analysed and biographical details of the case-study bands.

Art/Commerce

The literature on the subject of authenticity in rock more often than not couches its discussions in terms of an art/commerce divide. This opposition is founded on the notion that, as Deena Weinstein (1999) describes, 'rock styles and tropes forever change, but more constant than the guitars and drums is the understanding that rock is, or should be, art, and that commerce is inimical to art' (p57-8). Authentic art is not made for profit, and conversely commercial pop music made for profit is not authentic. One of the primary means by which authenticity is constructed then is through the reassurance that an artists' intentions are directed towards aesthetic and not commercial ends. This type of authenticity is especially important in terms of the indie public precisely because indie is defined through its rejection of 'mainstream' or 'commercial' pop (see Brooker, 2003:108). Exactly what constitutes 'mainstream' pop remains curiously under-articulated in the literature,² but will be used here to refer to the major-label funded, mass-marketed, singles-driven genre of pop that relies on chart position and sales, rather than aesthetic criteria, for its validation. Discussion of the art/commerce divide in relation to indie in the 1990s is particularly relevant given that indie's penetration of the mainstream at that time made the separation of art and commerce increasingly problematic. This chapter will begin by discussing how the articles on Elastica, Suede, Oasis and Echobelly construe the shifts in this dynamic.

At the beginning of 1993 at least, the opposition between art and commerce was clearly evident in the music press. The following conversation between Suede's lead-singer Brett Anderson and David Bowie from an *NME* feature from March 1993 illustrates how the mainstream/commercial, is posited as an inauthentic 'other' to indie.

Brett: "That's the whole horror of the music business generally though, isn't it? The visionless people who inhabit the music business are always looking for copies of bands that are now being successful and never actually looking for anything that's truly got any worth."

Bowie: "And boy, is the word 'business' applicable to the American situation right now? I mean, never, ever, has it become such a career-oriented option. It's light years away from how it felt in the early '70s. It really grinds 'em out. I mean, nobody believes in bands, works with them, promotes them. It's such a ruthless, ruthless business."

Brett: "That's why the independent scene should be championed. It's true that sometimes independent is just a byword for untalented but, on the other hand, there's a certain life to it that doesn't exist within the Sonys who just plough it out. The funniest thing is you get these comical bands who are like major label ideas of what indie bands are. I mean, have you heard this band The Lemon Trees? They're just MCA's idea of what an indie band is."

² Even Brooker (2003), who dedicates a whole article to the subject of indie's growth as a commercial form during the 1990s, fails to provide a definition of either 'commercial culture' or the 'mainstream'. Meanwhile in her discussion of the movement of dance music into the mainstream, Sarah Thornton (1995) notes that 'it is precisely because the social connotations of the mainstream are rarely examined that the term is so useful; clubbers can denigrate it without self-consciousness or guilt' (p101).

...I take it you've never been in the position of having an A&R man come into the studio to tell you that maybe the backbeat shouldn't be like that?

Bowie: "Never! Absolutely not!"

I bet Brett has to put up with that sort of thing though.

Brett: "Yeah, and that's why you have to be shrewd in deciding who you work with. That's why we signed to an independent in this country, so we don't have that kind of interference, because in the end the artist does know best, otherwise it just becomes a product" (*NME* 27/3/93b).

These statements make explicit claims about authenticity, crucially that authentic art is not 'product' made for profit, and indie labels can offer the artist the kind of freedom required to be authentic. This extract also confers authenticity onto Suede in a number of ways; firstly the *NME* interviewed Brett together with David Bowie and published the article over two issues under the headline 'One day, son, all this could be yours' (*NME* 20/3/93). The introduction to the first installment establishes the link between the established 'original', Bowie, and the up-and-coming Suede saying, 'from across the generational divide they came, one a ground-breaking icon possessed of an androgynous beauty and a happy knack [sic] of touching the often subconscious spirit of the times, the other, a ground-breaking icon possessed of an androgynous beauty...Erm, well you get the idea' (*NME* 20/3/93). Zanes (1999) notes how association with figures from an authentic past bestows authenticity on a current artist, and in the extract here Bowie's comment about the changes since the 1970s locate him and that era as an authentic origin, and Suede as one band who, 'are presented as having the most in common with a purer past' (p49). Suede's authenticity is further cemented through the identification of another act (The Lemon Trees) who are deemed, 'closer to the machine of commerce' (p50) than Suede. Thus, Suede's authenticity is constructed as analogous with a more authentic past and dissociated with the commercialism of the present.

This is not the only aspect of the art/commerce divide present in the early articles on Suede. Indie artists are particular in that they experience a fundamental tension between achieving widespread success and remaining pure, but unheard of, in the sphere of indie. Talking about the American alternative music scene in the 1990s, Coyle & Dolan (1999) note that,

the ethics of indie integrity systematically catch new bands in what no doubt one day will be remembered as an impossible double bind. If they win big, sell lots of records, and make their music available to millions, they lose credibility in Coolsville; on the other hand, to maintain their alternative status – to lose commercially – means that ultimately they will never escape the alterna-ghetto (p19-20).

The fascinating thing about the artists in this case-study is that, to a greater or lesser extent, the Britpop era *did* make their music 'available to millions', but all the bands managed to retain at least some credibility in 'Coolsville'. The type of double bind Coyle & Dolan talk about can only be seen in the early articles on Suede. At the beginning of 1993 Suede had already received considerable music press coverage, and were attracting

significant media attention outside the music press – in the words of one article they were becoming, ‘officially, confirmed, certified, fuck-off famous’ (*Select* 6/93). By the end of March 1993 Suede had had a number one album and a top 10 single.

Suede’s relative mainstream success is a very prominent theme in the articles from this time and attests to the tension in the indie public between commercial success and artistic integrity. The following extract illustrates this;

“People say, ‘What’re you going to write about when you get success and a load of money and get comfortable?’ But no matter what your position is in life, you still feel the same degree of pain. Even if you get taxis everywhere and you’re loved by thousands and thousands of people, there’s still the same capability for the extremity of feeling if you’re a person that does feel a lot – which I think I am... There’s a lot of good work that’s come out of the period since we became successful and since our lives changed. My favourite three songs that exist now have been written in the last year”
...He’s probably right...“So Young” – working title “Chase the Dragon”, narcotic significance fans – actually surpasses “The Drowners” as Suede’s most perfectly thrilling song (*NME* 20/2/93).

This extract makes the link between commercial success and declining artistic value, but also attempts to negate it. Authenticity is re-asserted via the discourse of emotional sincerity – Anderson states, and is supported by the writer, that the band’s success will not alter their intensity of feeling, thus by appealing to the art side of the art/commerce divide the taint of inauthenticity is avoided. The construction of mainstream success as antithetical to artistic value, implied by Brett Anderson when he notes that, “to be the most successful band in the world you have to get an element of blandness. I don’t think we could ever be at the U2 level. Maybe it’d be a bad idea for us to try” (*NME* 20/2/93), is less common in the articles on the other case study bands. In particular, the articles on Oasis do not reflect a tension between art and commerce. Indeed Oasis frequently express their desire to, as Brett might put it, ‘reach the U2 level’ – during an interview in *Loaded* Noel Gallagher says,

“Why start a band? Because you want to be number one ... When we started, there was all this apathy about bands that had had success from our scene, the *NME* indie thing or whatever you want to call it, and they had got on *Top of the Pops* and moaned about it.
If you don’t want to be the biggest band in the world then pack it in because there’s loads of hungry kids who want to be the biggest band in the world. Anything else is mediocre. Who wants to be just all right? Not me” (*Loaded*, 10/95).

Gallagher’s comments here do not negate the value of art (he doesn’t want to be just ‘all right’), but they disavow the link between mainstream success and artistic integrity, thus destabilising the art/commerce divide in the indie public.

Noel Gallagher’s declaration is by no means unique, in fact the articles on the case-study bands evidence a sea-change in the indie public. Signing to an independent label and avoiding the mainstream were no longer standards the indie artist was obliged to meet in

order to be authentic. These discursive changes are reflected in a review of Echobelly's third album 'Lustra', released in November 1997;

the core of "Lustra" is still a dismally prosaic restatement of Echobelly's arcane, baggy-cardigan-and-DM-boots indieness:... The parameters of their ambition are frozen at getting second headline in the indie tent at Phoenix and a place in John Peel's Festive 50. While the underground has been sweeping effortlessly overground ... Echobelly have remained belligerently in their basement, stapling their fanzines together (*NME* 8/11/97).

Echobelly are explicitly criticised for *failing* to move into the mainstream, rather than being praised for avoiding it. The expectation that commercial success will result in artistic failure is absent and the label 'indie' is actually used derogatorily to suggest a band that is not only artistically moribund, but anachronistic. Another review of 'Lustra' further describes Echobelly as 'terminally indie', 'indie-by-numbers', and 'indie music disguised as something far bigger' (*MM* 15/11/97), which not only uses 'indie' as an insult, but indicates that the raised commercial expectations of Echobelly do not give cause to any concerns about artistic integrity. Such statements attest that the stigma previously attached to commercial success and 'selling out' in the indie public became increasingly irrelevant.

This situation poses a significant dilemma for the construction of authenticity in the indie public. Without the comfort zone of the art/commerce opposition, how can artists be authenticated? As Coyle and Dolan note (originally in relation to Nirvana's Kurt Cobain, but equally applicable here), 'how do you complain about "corporate shit" when you are the shit, and how do you remain true to your own voice when the industry makes a killing off your every gesture?' (1999:21). The literature on authenticity offers few answers to this dilemma precisely because notions of authenticity are so often tied up in the art/commerce divide³. However the articles on Oasis, Elastica, Suede and Echobelly clearly illustrate that even in the absence of a strong art/commerce opposition, authenticity is still vital to the positive evaluation of bands in the indie public. Thus, what is evident in the articles on Oasis, Elastica, Suede and Echobelly is a re-negotiation of the terms of an art/commerce opposition in the context of a newly mainstreamed British indie scene. Brooker suggests that during the 1990s the art/commerce divide was not deconstructed but, 'resituated within the mainstream' (2003:107) and this is wholly appropriate to the analysis here. The indie public strongly retains the importance of artistic integrity but rejects participation in the mainstream as a source of inauthenticity.

Given that indie is constituted through the rejection of a *feminised* mainstream, the fact that it is subsequently re-situated within that mainstream has certain implications for the gendering of the indie public. What implications does a move towards the mainstream have for the meaning of indie and in particular the participation of women? Mainstream,

³ See for example Dettmar & Richey (1999), Coyle & Dolan (1999), Jones & Featherly (2002).

commercial or mass culture has, according to Huyssen (1985), been persistently gendered as feminine and inferior (1988:55). He theorises that,

the nightmare of being devoured by mass culture through co-option, commodification, and the 'wrong' kind of success is the constant fear of the modernist artist, who tries to stake out his territory by fortifying the boundaries between genuine art and inauthentic mass culture. Again the problem is not the desire to differentiate between forms of high art and deprived forms of mass culture and its co-options. The problem is rather the persistent gendering as feminine of that which is devalued (p53).

Although Huyssen's comments are based on the opposition between high and low culture in the Nineteenth century, a similar situation plays out within contemporary popular culture. Sarah Thornton supports this arguing that, 'even among youth cultures, there is a double articulation of the lowly and the feminine: disparaged *other* cultures characterised as feminine *and* girls' cultures are devalued as imitative and passive. Authentic culture is, by contrast, depicted in gender-free or masculine terms *and* remains the prerogative of boys' (1995:104-5).

It could be argued that with the widespread popularity and commercial success of 'Britpop' indie was feminised. With bands like Oasis desiring, and succeeding, to appeal to an implicitly feminine mass audience one might expect the demise of the masculinist elitism of indie and a revaluation of the feminine in the discourses that constitute the indie public. As the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, this was *not* the case and although the art/commerce binary is resignified, the ways in which authenticity is constructed in its stead reinforced rather than weakened existing gender hierarchies in the indie public. A model of authenticity is constructed through the articles on Elastica, Suede, Oasis and Echobelly that is not just based on an art/commerce opposition, but on multiple bases. Zanes hints at something similar in an anecdote about his band being accused of 'selling out'. He states that,

if the commercial functioned as a major setback to our authenticity, we argued our position through various practices...we established an Other wherever we could, that is, we isolated acts that seemed to have sold out more than we had, acts that seemed closer to the machine of commerce, so that we could establish a relational situation wherein we assumed the authentic pole...we brought ourselves, wherever possible, in contact with figures associated with an authentic past...we fought for our authenticity with various temporal and spatial distance models, *though without recovery* (1999:50 emphasis added).

Zanes' tale opens up the possibility of an authenticity that is fought for on various terrains to attempt to compensate for its failure in others. This model of authenticity is a contingent construction which differs between bands and over time, thus it is very useful to the analysis of the case-study bands' authenticity. However, Zanes' anecdote also concedes that 'falling back' on alternative sources of authenticity is not always successful and indeed this is crucial to the analysis here. The reliance on different sources to construct a band's authenticity does not automatically imply the relative worth of those sources, and authenticity will ultimately be struggled for and contested. The forms of

authenticity which prove most successful in the indie public will help to reveal its character, while the contingency of such forms will illustrate the workings of a discursively constructed public sphere. The following sections will examine the most frequently recurring themes in the articles on Elastica, Suede, Oasis, and Echobelly in order to analyse how authentic artists are constructed in the indie public.

Originality and (in)authentic others

The attention paid to the originality of artists is one theme that cuts across the coverage of all four case-study bands. The establishment of a band's originality and innovation is an important component in the construction of their authenticity, and ties into the qualities that constitute 'the artist'. In her study of gender and aesthetics, Korsmeyer (2004) observes that during the Eighteenth century the artist came to signify, 'the genius who creates from the reserves of his own imagination. Genius signals a powerfully original mind that vaults over tradition and the rules of art to discover entirely new ways of conceiving and enacting creativity' (p30). A high value is still attached to originality in the music press precisely because it denotes authenticity. Weinstein argues that, 'critics review albums in terms of authenticity versus imitation, with the implication or explicit understanding that imitative work cannot be "authentic"' (1999:63). The regularity with which originality is highlighted and valorised is testament to how important a trope it is within the indie public. Accusations of unoriginality are a threat to authenticity and any perceived lack of originality is played down or disavowed.

The articles on all four of the bands contain suggestions of unoriginality, of plagiarism, of songs that sound like other songs and postures filched from the annals of rock and pop history. Suede's album 'Coming Up' is accused of being 'karaoke Bowie...so in hock to its heroes, it's embarrassing' (*MM* 24/8/96). Elastica's coverage makes much of the fact that 'there is a hefty whiff of punk rock past' about their music (*Record Collector* 2/1995), and Echobelly's early live performances are deemed to be 'one part Smiths, one part Suede' (*NME* 25/12/93). Meanwhile, Oasis' third album 'Be Here Now' is described as 'another heaving sack of numbingly blatant Beatles references' (*NME* 16/8/97). When bands are branded derivative, it is never a positive assessment of the group in question. In negative reviews a band's failure to produce original sounding material is a common point of criticism, and given this it is clear that originality is an important criteria of authenticity in the indie public.

When it is suggested that a band is being unoriginal the most common way in which authenticity is reasserted is through the open acknowledgement their derivativeness, but the disavowal of any negative impact this might have on their value. A review of Oasis' debut album argues that, 'of course it nicks ideas left, right and centre, but if you're going

to do it, you might as well do it with some two-fingered gusto and take said influence to the cleaners' (*Select* 9/94). Similarly in defence of Elastica's album it is said that, 'thankfully their post-punk references are all the most intelligent ones' (*MM* 4/3/95). Suede too are justified through the argument that, 'while they draw on certain strains of '70s music, at least they ransack their own culture, rather than badly aping that of America' (*Vox* 5/93). These forms of justification accept the inevitability of sounding like ones influences, but praise bands for their brazenness or quality of influences. In this way the general ideal of originality is upheld, but failure to live up to it is excused in the cases of these 'exceptional' bands.

Another equally common argument is again to acknowledge that bands are not totally original, but to assert that they have created something new or relevant from their influences. Echobelly, for example, are praised because, 'in an age of dead-end revivalism, Sonya Aurora Madan's gang make something virile, energized and wholly fresh from classic pop moves' (*Vox* 9/94b), and in an almost identical argument made on Elastica's behalf; 'their songs are suggestive of the music of ten or 15 years ago – but they suffuse everything with enough skewed originality to make them sound genuinely new' (*NME* 21/8/93). This reinscribes bands with a degree of artistry, skill or talent which they would otherwise be stripped of. The articles on Oasis most frequently and forcefully reiterate this. A review of 'Be Here Now' states that,

at such triumphant moments as this, you almost find yourself believing that all of rock music has been leading to this point. Whatever, Oasis are clearly the finest rock synthesists the world has known...it seems that all the key thrill-points in rock history are marshalled here (*Select* 9/97).

The euphemistic term 'rock synthesists' valorises Oasis' skill and legitimises their music in terms of artistry. The frequency with which the issue of originality is raised in the articles on Oasis signals a definite area of tension; some articles celebrate the obviousness and simplicity of Oasis' style and argue that the band don't have to be original to be good⁴, while others accept the shortcomings of Oasis' original artistic contribution. One review argues that Oasis' attempts at experimentation on 'Be Here Now' fail because while, 'John Squire is a great rock guitarist capable of raising average material with the sheer heat and vision of his playing; Noel Gallagher is a good rock guitarist, and they're ten a penny' (*MM* 16/8/97). This is why,

Oasis will never top The Beatles. Without a properly propulsive rhythm guitar, or a bass player touched by genius, they can only be a Saturday night rock 'n' roll band. Albeit the most brilliant Saturday night rock 'n' roll band that ever lived (*MM* 16/8/97).

Oasis' lack of originality here denies them access to an 'artist' status. However, later in the same review Noel Gallagher is described as 'a true visionary' and 'the best/most instinctive pop songwriter...in the world'. 'Be Here Now' is also declared, 'so far beyond

⁴ See for example K. Micaliff (*Sky* 3/96), K. Cameron (*NME* 27/8/94), A. Perry (*Select* 9/94).

the horizons of any other British guitar band, it's almost laughable.' The seeming contradiction here – that the band may be produced as authentic whilst failing to be original – supports a model of authenticity with multiple bases at work in the production of a band as authentic. Thus, while none of the case-study bands are ascribed unquestioned originality in the articles, they are still able to attain value.

When a band cannot be 'proved' to be original, they can still be produced as authentic through the construction of authentic and inauthentic 'others' to whom they are favourably or unfavourably likened. These 'others' can be individual artists, music scenes or whole eras. Suede, for example, are said to have, 'distanced themselves from the pack. They don't look like labourers who struck lucky. They look like The Velvet Underground, they look like the only stars worth caring about' (*NME* 12/10/96). Suede are contrasted to 'the pack', an undifferentiated mass whose success is not earned but 'lucky', and then likened to the Velvet Underground, i.e., 'stars' who are 'worth caring about'. Statements like this help constitute a band as more authentic than the 'others' who they are constructed in relation to. This gives bands a specialness which others are seen not to possess. Oasis' are singled out, for example, through the declaration that, 'Embrace are simply not capable of things like this' (*Select* 12/98), whilst elsewhere their music is, 'illuminated by the kind of aura you're born with (sorry Embrace)' (*Q* 12/98). Both of these comments, from reviews of Oasis' b-sides compilation record 'The Masterplan', reference Embrace in order to constitute Oasis as an authentic origin to Embrace's inauthentic copy. Suede, meanwhile, are frequently cast as an authentic origin in terms of the whole Britpop scene. In one interview Brett Anderson asserts that Suede are partly responsible for the success and vibrancy of the current scene and states that, 'we were the first alternative band to write a f—ing tune for 4 years. Now everyone writes pop songs' (*NME* 15/7/95)⁵. In positing themselves as an authentic origin Suede are able to assert superiority over the current scene.

While the construction of authentic and inauthentic others appears quite straightforward for Suede and Oasis, for Elastica and Echobelly the process becomes explicitly linked to gender. As the analysis of the new band articles showed, female artists are more likely to be compared, musically or otherwise, to other female artists. The way in which (in)authentic others are constructed in relation to Elastica and Echobelly follows a similarly gendered path. It is notable that Elastica and Echobelly's authenticity is much less frequently cast in relation to (in)authentic 'others' at all. Oasis and Suede are both consistently linked to other *male* artists in the rock canon, and given the norm of linking artists along gender lines it is much more difficult for female artists to be linked to an authentic past in the rock canon precisely because there are so few known female artists

⁵ See also J. Harris (*NME* 14/1/95), T. Kessler (*NME* 27/7/96), P. Moody (*NME* 31/8/96), S. Pattenden (*Melody Maker* 23/8/97).

to refer back to. When Elastica and Echobelly are written about in relation to male artists it is usually in terms of accusations of plagiarism. In particular, Elastica's connection to late 1970s and early 1980s New Wave, particularly Wire, is cast less as a glorious recapturing of a proud heritage and more in terms of 'ripping off' the sounds of that time. One album review lists Elastica's transgressions starting with 'Connection' a 'take-off of Wire's 'I Am The Fly'... 'Vaseline' is the girls having fun as they lubricate Blondie's 'Sunday Girl'... Add to this their ransacking of 'No More Heroes' on 'Waking Up'...' (Vox 4/95)⁶. Likewise Echobelly are frequently compared to The Smiths, but again in terms of inauthentically copying their sound. Oasis' debut on the other hand is lauded thus, "Definitely Maybe" draws on the concise songs of mid-Sixties Beatles and the sprawling indulgence of early-Seventies Rolling Stones' (MM 27/8/94), which implies likeness rather than imitation and which links bands in terms of their authentic status.

When female authentic or inauthentic others *are* constructed in relation to Elastica and Echobelly, it is their femaleness, not their artistry, with which the comparison or link is made. For instance, an interview with Justine Frischmann of Elastica contains this exchange:

The New Wave tag doesn't worry her, but being in a predominantly female band does.
"That Women In Rock angle worries me, I've a nasty feeling that in a year's time the last thing anyone will want to listen to is a female-fronted group. All the exciting bands around now have women singers: Echobelly, Salad, Blessed Ethel. But what we want to do is push things as far as we can. I like to listen to things that are a bit *difficult*" (Select 2/94).

Here Elastica are positioned in relation to other 'female-fronted' bands rather than bands with whom they are considered to share an aesthetic or attitudinal similarity. Elsewhere Elastica are also said to have 'sailed effortlessly above any women-in-rock ghetto' (NME 1/4/95), while Echobelly, 'display enough vehemence to scare the Sleepaladasticas into retirement' (NME 20/12/97). Both bands are differentiated from other female artists, in the case of Echobelly the others (i.e., Sleeper, Salad and Elastica) are cast literally as one undifferentiated lump. Through a combination of the lack of canonical female artists and the constitution of female artists' authenticity in relation to the gender, rather than the art, of other *female* artists, the construction of (in)authentic others in relation to Elastica and Echobelly is not only far more limited than for their male counterparts Oasis and Suede, but much less successful in producing those bands as authentic.

⁶ 'Connection' is actually a 'take-off' of Wire's 'Three Girl Rhumba'. Elastica's second single 'Line Up' is the one that sounds like 'I Am The Fly', but the point remains.

'Realness', class and personal authenticity

Where the judgement of originality usually applies to bands' sound, the authentication of their lyrics is also a vital base of their overall construction as authentic. In general lyrical authenticity is couched in terms of how 'real' the lyrics are, to what degree they reflect the lived experience of their author or are an expression of his/her sincerity. Of the four case-study bands the articles on Suede most frequently discuss the meaning or inspiration behind their lyrics. In interviews Brett describes how his background has influenced the way he writes. In an interview with the *NME* he says that the song 'So Young', "comes from a time when me and my close friends were caught in a bit of a drugged-up situation, and there was one particular night when one person nearly died" (*NME* 20/2/93).

Authenticity is conferred onto the band through the realness of the situation their lyrics are inspired by. This is routinely reinforced in the Suede articles via statements such as, "I'm writing with reality in my voice, trying to express what's deep inside" (*NME* 5/2/94) and "I'm bogged down by the everyday, so it feels like I should write about it...I always aim to take a small statement and make it elegant" (*NME* 27/3/93b).

More often in the articles on both Suede and Oasis the 'realness' of their lyrics is equated with their working-class identity. For example, in relation to the band's single 'Animal Nitrate' Anderson says he,

"wanted the whole feeling of the song to be very working class...to be set in my parents' lives in that really backward state of mind, where they were brought up to be prejudiced and everything is very domestic and there's lino and...not much to do. The '60s were seen as a time of beauty officially – Carnaby Street and all that – and for my parents the 60s were actually rent and pregnancy tests and lino and corned beef. All that happened was they came across a copy of 'Sergeant Pepper and thought it was quite nice" (*NME* 20/2/93).

This comment makes it clear that through his class position, Anderson is able to represent an authentic reality, not an 'official' version of it. On one of the rarer occasions when Noel Gallagher discusses his lyrics he says,

"Someone once slagged us off for not singing about where we came from... but I know how shit it was living in Burnage (the south Manchester district where the Gallagher brothers grew up) so I don't have to sing about it. If you're on the dole and writing songs, you're not going to write about how crap your life is, cos you already live that life. You want to write about how great life could be if only you were a Rock'N'Roll Star or if only you could pluck up the courage to ask that fuckin' girl out, like in 'Slide Away', or if only you could fly. That's what I want to write about, not about the pregnant fuckin' girl on the check-out in the local supermarket." (*Vox* 10/94)

The way in which Gallagher defends his lyrics relates directly to his male, heterosexual but above all *classed* experience in Burnage. "*I know* how shit it was," he stresses, which in turn forms an authentic basis for his justification of *not* writing about his lived experience. For both Suede and Oasis 'realness' is something that is inextricably bound to a working-class identity, thus their music is authenticated because it comes from this 'peripheral' position.

The link between authenticity and class runs very deep, and is rarely questioned, so much so that Brett Anderson goes to some length to 'prove' his working-class roots,

Railing at what he sees as the faux-breadline chic of other bands, he reiterated that, growing up in Haywards Heath, in Sussex, he was very, very poor... "There's a tendency for people to think that Suede are a music-business thing," Brett himself explains. "Or a load of art students having a surreal romp."⁷ I just wanted to remind people that it's all completely real. That is very important" (*Select* 11/96).

In another interview the band assert their working-class authenticity against accusations that their own 'breadline chic' is in fact 'faux'.

Suede's roots lie in working class, early '80s Britain. The only thing is, they don't look like it, as Mat Osman ruefully concedes.

"If we were the tea-drinking fops that we're made out to be, we'd probably all be Seattle grunge chic types by now," he reckons. "I don't think you can be interested in looking good or being glamorous without coming from the most stultifyingly boring backgrounds. And there is nowhere duller than the suburbs of London. I do think if you come from there you're the only people left who believe in the pop dream..."

Anderson seems particularly keen to stress the seediness of his roots. He claims that every single member of Suede has had a job at one time or another cleaning toilets. He told one interviewer that when he was growing up, a raw onion was "a luxury." (Q, 2/93).

The tacit agreement that a working-class background will produce an authentic artist is obvious in these statements – it is a powerful constituent of authenticity in the indie public and one which in turn devalues artists unable to successfully fit this 'authenticity matrix'.

Most notable among those artists is Justine from Elastica, whose inability to claim a working-class identity is a substantial barrier to her constitution as authentic. Consider these remarks from an interview with the band where Justine's middle-class background is the topic of discussion,

There are certain music critics (myself not included) who are wary of Elastica for that reason alone. They feel that rich people don't belong in bands. Where, they want to know, does the angst come from, the necessary motivation which is supposed to lift 'sincere' musicians above mere 'hobbyists'? Why even bother? "There are lots of reasons why people are in bands," replies Donna, defending her friend. Donna, incidentally, is staunchly working-class, having lived above Newport's infamous TJ's venue in Wales shortly before moving down to London. (The rest of the band are virtual paupers, too.)...

"There are plenty of middle-class people in bands," Justine states. "I know I'm one of them, and perhaps I did have more choice than some people, but there's

⁷ Derogatory comments about the inauthenticity of former students (especially art students) are common – Noel Gallagher also defends his authenticity in relation to art students saying, "You start a band to get out of it... That's why we're doing this – 'cos we love music and to get out of the streets of Manchester, not because I'm an ex-art student who's up for causing chaos... we're not about that" (*NME* 30/9/95a). Both Gallagher's and Anderson's comments may be directed specifically towards Blur, several of whom are former Goldsmiths students. It is also notable that although Brett Anderson and Justine Frischmann met while they were both students at UCL, Justine's education is frequently mentioned whilst Anderson's is not, which undoubtedly aids the construction of them as middle- and working-class respectively.

as many horrible traps to fall into if you came from the middle-class as if you came from the working-class...there's certainly as much boredom and grimness to be found working in an architect's office as working on a factory production line," agrees Justine.

I'm sorry, Justine, but that's bollocks. If you're working in an architect's office at least you've got a choice. Where's the choice for the factory workers? An honest wage or the dole, which you can't survive on without financial back-up. Some f***ing choice. (MM 8/10/94)

In this extract the writer attempts to distance himself from the accepted idea that 'rich people don't belong in bands' but still feels compelled to highlight the fact that, aside from Justine, Elastica are 'staunchly working-class' whilst also denying Justine's attempt to make middle-class existence a legitimate source of authenticity. While working-class identity forms a critical source of realness and authenticity, the term 'middle-class' is used throughout the articles as an insult. For example, a review of Suede's debut album dismisses the band's angst as 'middle-class existentialism' (NME 27/3/93a), and elsewhere they are back-handedly complimented when it is said that, 'there are some moments of unbridled glory...for the educated middle classes' (NME 8/1/94).

Just as middle-class values are criticised, any suspicion that an artist is not reflecting his/her own experience in lyrics raises the spectre of inauthenticity. In a review of Suede's third album one reviewer wonders, 'quite how Brett, a long-term member of the W11 boho beau-monde' (31/8/96) gets to mix with the cast of down-at-heel characters that populate the album's lyrics. Oasis are similarly criticised for not accurately reflecting their circumstances in a review of their B-sides compilation;

the most recent song here is Going Nowhere...whose lyric looks down its overused nose without irony at pre-fame squalor – "I could do with a motor car, maybe a Jaguar, maybe a plane/here I am, going nowhere on a train" – which won't do at all (Q 12/98).

When the images Oasis, or Suede, conjure in their lyrics jar with what is known about their personal circumstances it becomes a source of inauthenticity. The most prominent example of this arises in the frequent discussions around Suede's third single 'Animal Nitrate' released in February 1993. The song's lyrical protagonist is a gay man, however, lyricist Brett Anderson is not homosexual, thus leaving the band open to accusations of being 'fake queers' (NME 20/2/93). The regularity with which this is brought up in Suede's interviews and reviews around this time, and beyond, is remarkable⁸ and attests to the importance placed on artists' personal authenticity in the indie public. The way the issue is dealt with in order to re-establish authenticity is also interesting. In an interview from April 1993 Anderson defends his position saying,

"People assume that when I'm writing about a man, it's from my own point of view, and it's not always true...But some of them are about homosexuality and a lot of that is my desire to try not, if possible, to regurgitate rock lyric writing" (MM 17/4/93b).

⁸ See J. Conway (MM 24/12/94), J. Mulvey (NME 20/2/93), S. Sutherland (NME 20/3/93), A. Mueller (MM 17/4/93), G. Martin (NME 5/2/94), S. Witter (Sky 2/94), S. Price (MM 20/3/93).

In doing so he dismisses the inauthentic threat by reasserting his originality. The way in which Suede's authenticity can be negotiated despite transgressing the rule about maintaining personal authenticity further illustrates, the contingency of authenticity in the music press' discourse. More importantly though, the prominent and detailed discussion of Suede's lyrics generally constructs them as authentic. They are explicitly praised for their artistry, skill and innovation in terms of their music, especially the lyrics. A line from the b-side of their debut single, for example, is described as, 'the most potent lyrical image ever conceived about being poor, unloved and paranoid in London' (Q 2/93). Suede are constructed as authentic through the perceived high quality of their *creative* output.

The same cannot be said of Elastica and Echobelly because their music, lyrics and personal authenticity is discussed in different ways. This rare discussion of Elastica's lyrics, is a case in point;

After 'Stutter's monumentally unsympathetic anatomisation of brewer's droop, 'Vaseline's shagging romp-along and throwaway quotes like "I'm horrifically heterosexual," you could be forgiven for thinking there's a certain obsession here...

"I think a lot of my life does revolve around sex," Justine laughs, "but I think that could possibly be said for an awful lot of people...But I do write about sex a lot. I think about sex a lot. I think I'm more honest about it than most people I've met, definitely" (NME 8/1/94).

While Justine attempts to assert a personal authenticity through honesty, the focus of the discussion is very definitely *her*, not her art. The question asked is not about why her lyrics are about sex, but whether she herself is 'obsessed' with sex. This personalisation of the discussion fits the patterns already found in the new band articles whereby female artists frequently discuss their personal lives while male artists do not. The discussions Suede and Oasis engage in with regard to their lyrics are caged in general or universal terms. For example Brett Anderson says, "I don't wanna write about boy-meets-girl. I sometimes write my songs from a gay point of view regardless of whether I am gay or not because I think there's certain segments of society that have been horribly under-represented in pop music" (NME 20/3/93). His explanation is abstract and de-personalised and has more to do with the canon and the representation of minorities than Anderson's personal life. Similarly of Oasis, one interviewer notes that, 'Noel recently moved to London after a "pretty fuckin' painful" split from his long-time girlfriend, but he reckons that some of his songs would never have been written if he'd always lived in the capital' (Vox 10/94). Here, while Gallagher's personal life is referred to in passing, it is his *change of location* that inspires his music.

The importance of personal authenticity also manifests itself in the articles on Elastica and Echobelly in relation to non-musical factors. Elastica's alleged artifice in dealing with the media, for example, is drawn attention to in one article that states,

speculation over Elastica's manipulation of their press image is not entirely unfounded. They have done little to extinguish the rivalry-with-Suede rumours that have smouldered provocatively in the press recently... Similarly Elastica's claim that they have tried to hold back their press in order to get on with making music, sits uneasily beside their healthy appetite for media attention (*Vox* 2/94).

This not only suggests that Elastica's success has been dependent on something other than the quality of their music, but that Justine is duplicitous, calculated, and manipulative of her industry contacts. Sonya from Echobelly is also accused of being inconsistent and contradictory because she,

has been seen to flaunt a rather dubious agenda. At the start, she set herself up as a strong spokesperson for Asian women, she now wholly denies this... she said she wanted her lyrics to be considered seriously, then whinged when asked in-depth questions about what they meant... Sonya also said she hated fans focusing on her appearance rather than her art. Then she turned up on stage at 1995's T In The Park in a St Trinian's-style school uniform... Sonya... contradicts herself so frequently that it's often difficult to tell whether to believe her or not (*Vox* 8/97).

The difference between the aspersions cast on Justine and Sonya's personal authenticity as opposed to that of Brett or Noel is that they relate to non-musical criteria. Any authenticity they might accrue from the discussion of their music or lyrics is foregone in favour of a personalised discussion about *them*. While neither Elastica nor Echobelly enjoy the kind of authenticity conferred by a working-class identity it is noticeable that as *women* serious discussion of their music is largely absent from the articles. Crucially though, the confluence of authenticity and working class identity that dictates a link between inauthenticity and privilege, only occurs in relation to class. Other types of privilege, for example race or gender privilege, are entirely unmarked in the articles and carry none of the authenticity attached to class privilege. Class is unique in this respect because while both working *and* middle-class identities are marked in the press, race and gender are only marked for female and non-white artists leaving the white male as an unmarked, 'neutral' identity.

Naturalness and emotion

The emphasis on creativity and lyrics that is key to the construction of Suede's authenticity is not equally applicable to the other case-study bands. However, the major trope of authenticity present in the articles on Oasis works draws on notions of personal sincerity in its attention to the band's naturalness and freedom from artifice. In general the articles construct authenticity as the antithesis of fakeness and pretentiousness, and it is Suede who most often fall foul of this standard. They are criticised for recording an 8 minute song (*Vox* 11/94), being lyrically melodramatic (*Select* 5/93, *Select* 11/94), and posturing (*MM* 8/10/94, *NME* 27/3/93a) and this contributes to their characterisation as pretentious. One review of 'Dog Man Star' states that, 'what stops this swooning, emoting

and consumptive mincing getting several of your goats is the relish and swagger it's accomplished with' (*Select* 11/94). Suede's tendencies towards pretentiousness are acknowledged and excused and the taint of inauthenticity is removed, however, in general pretension and self-indulgence are not viewed positively. Even in the assessment above there is the distinct suggestion that 'swooning, emoting and consumptive mincing' would ordinarily be things that would 'get one's goat.'

The negative construction of pretension in the articles is thrown into stark relief alongside the overwhelmingly positive associations attached to Oasis' anti-pretentious, 'what-you-see-is-what-you-get' character. For example, they are praised thus,

Oasis are rock 'n' roll. There's nothing to understand. Nothing to look for...they are perfectly self-evident. They don't need us to describe them. What we gonna say? (*NME* 27/8/94b).

The celebration of Oasis' simplicity and transparency is linked to a valorisation of their talent and music as *natural*. An interview from early 1994, says of Noel Gallagher; 'you and your brother are the Kane and Abel of Burnage, you have chanced upon rock 'n' roll genius and we are left with no option but to salute you' (*NME* 23/4/94b). The construction of the Gallaghers as having 'chanced' upon their 'genius' naturalises it and distances the band from notions of artifice and fakery. The band's naturalness is also associated with an honest simplicity, so they are said to produce 'a simple I-feel-fine celebration of youth, pleasure, escapism and total possibility with no hidden agenda' (*MM* 27/8/94), and are best when, 'at their most natural and brazen, celebratory, big-hearted and bountiful' (*Q* 12/98). Oasis are continually and consistently prized and praised for their simplicity and straight-forwardness, and it is one of the strongest bases of their authenticity. They are implicitly privileged over bands like Suede, for whilst their pretension is justified within the articles on the band, it is not without qualifying statements that such characteristics are generally a source of inauthenticity. Oasis' naturalness and sincerity on the other hand is *not* subject to any such doubt and as such their authenticity is particularly strong.

Where Oasis are praised for being 'natural', Elastica are repeatedly denied access to authenticity through their construction as 'fake' or 'contrived'. One live review, for example, describes the way Elastica 'charmed us so effortlessly...[that]...it's all almost too perfect' (*NME* 29/10/94). Being described as 'too perfect' suggests their artificiality, something which is raised again in reference to the band's debut album,

Sure 'Elastica' is not a truly great record, but it's got that sense of perfection even in its flaws, in its simplicity and the way you know it'll be listened back to with affection for its purity and the classic scruffy elegance that is the essence of Elastica...Of course it all smacks of a brilliantly calculated and executed game plan... Maybe it really is too perfect, and therein, bizarrely, may lie Elastica's fatal flaw (*NME* 1/4/95).

Elastica's 'calculated' contrivance is a critical stumbling block casting the band as not-quite-genuine and contrasting them to Oasis' positively evaluated, 'chanced upon' natural genius.

Echobelly also fall foul of accusations of contrivance. One interview suggests that band's line-up is manufactured; 'some people have suggested that Echobelly are a little too good to be true, a little too cosmopolitan and pan-sexual for hoary old rock' (*Select* 9/94), while another attacks Sonya's personal authenticity; 'the Authenticity Police have branded Sonya Aurora Madan the Emma Thompson of rock, going through the emotions to hoodwink The Kids out of their hard-earned rock dollars' (*NME* 24/9/94).⁹ While both examples attribute the negative opinions of the band to unspecified 'others', they simultaneously introduce ideas of inauthenticity into the articles. Elsewhere, the doubt as to Echobelly's authenticity is more direct. One article argues that, 'where the Manics produced an angular opus which retained all their early danger, Echobelly sound like it's all too forced' (*MM* 15/11/97), and another interviewer asks Sonya, 'is it coincidence your songs sound so commercial?' (*MM* 30/9/95). The effect is that Echobelly have to struggle to establish their authenticity in a way that Noel Gallagher never has to. Where Oasis' naturalness is accepted, Elastica and Echobelly's authenticity in relation to being natural/artificial is continually contested and negotiated for, not always successfully.

The positive evaluation of male bands like Oasis as 'natural' seems to subvert the traditional gender hierarchy of the nature/culture binary. In embodying nature Oasis occupy the feminine, and thus devalued, side of the binary. The surprising attribution of culturally feminine traits to Oasis also surfaces in discussions about the band's relation to emotions – their ability to both produce emotional work, and elicit strong feelings in listeners. Such associations tie Oasis to the feminine 'body' side of the hierarchised mind/body binary, and yet, Oasis' 'feelings' are highly valued and constitute a major part of their successful construction as authentic. In a feature from *Vox* about 'what makes Oasis so special' it is argued that,

When it comes to making music, Oasis go to work, beating around no bushes as they do so. Forget appealing to the head; they go straight for the soft emotional underbelly. To be blatantly simple about it, it's tunes that unleash the mystical forces over which our minds and bodies have no rational control, and Oasis make the internal organs go gregariously ga-ga (*Vox* 6/96).

Here what denotes Oasis' skill as artists, is their ability to affect the listener's emotions and exert power over the body. Oasis' music is consistently described in these terms. A review of their second album states that, 'Oasis are still the people who remove pop music from the arenas of intellectual debate. '(What's The Story) Morning Glory' is, for example, littered with musical quotations...but theirs is a use that is beyond cleverness and all to do with *feeling*' (*NME* 30/9/95b), whilst elsewhere they are described as, 'a noise that lifts you out of yourself' (*NME* 27/8/94a), 'inescapably touching' (*NME* 10/8/96), or 'instant and instinctive' (*MM* 16/8/97).

Responses to Oasis are also frequently caged in terms of a physical/bodily reaction, often one that is involuntary. For example, the *NME*'s review of Oasis' third album 'Be Here Now' argues first that it is, 'one of the daftest records ever made...tacky...[and] grotesquely over the top,' but ultimately praises it because, 'halfway through the epic ablutions of 'All Around The World', you realise that every single hair on your arms and neck is standing erect. And you think, defiantly, but very, very quietly, "Bugger"' (*NME* 16/8/97). As the *NME* suggests, Oasis' ability to elicit irrational and uncontrolled feelings in the listener means that they are able to bypass the established criteria of evaluation and be 'good' on a level that is beyond the control of the listener. So in one review they are described as a, 'guilty pleasure' (*MM* 22/7/95), while a gig review from Autumn 1997 claims that, 'like Elton's 'Candle in the Wind', they're beyond questions of 'good taste'. Tonight Oasis are just about emotion' (*Select* 11/97). Such descriptions construct Oasis' authenticity in a highly specific yet robustly uncontested way. The rhetorical force of 'feeling' is not something that is easily challenged, especially when reaction to a band is naturalized as bodily.

In direct contrast to the construction of Oasis' authenticity through 'feeling', emotion and instinct, Elastica are frequently constructed as inauthentic because they are knowing, calculated and 'anti-feeling'.¹⁰ Where Oasis are natural Elastica have an, 'arid staccato base, taut stutter of guitar' (*MM* 6/11/93), make 'intelligent guitar pop' (*NME* 20/11/93). Their aesthetic is described as 'clipped', 'angular' (*NME* 8/1/94), 'anorexic,' and 'purged of the flab of self-expression' (*MM* 25/3/95). One interview addresses the issue of 'feeling' in music directly;

All Elastica's influences stem from that immediate post-punk era when British rock had severed itself from the blues roots of rock 'n' roll, but had yet to discover funk. The point at which Bobby Gillespie thinks it all went wrong, in other words: when bands ceased playing from the hips, drummers stopped syncopating and white rock lost touch with black music. Revealingly, the only black music that Justine likes is ska – the speediest, jerkiest, most un-swinging form of black pop ever... So presumably Elastica don't approve of where the likes of Stone Roses and Primal Scream are at these days, i.e, retreating from rave in search of the rockist's grail of "feel", jamming till the cows come home.

"Well I try not to pitch battles with particular bands but it's definitely not my cup of tea," admits Justine, sounding at her most well-brought-up and tactful.

"Backstage at an Oasis gig last year, Liam and Bobby Gillespie started ganging up on Donna saying, 'Our music's all to do with feel and roots, and you're just shallow'. But for me, when you start relying on that traditional bluesy thing you're actually being more shallow. You're just sticking to a formula, in a way (25/3/95).

Although Frischmann attempts to reassert her authenticity her by constructing bands that 'feel' as inauthentic others, the descriptions of Elastica as anti-feeling deny them access

⁹ Labelling someone the 'Emma Thompson of rock' also of course has explicit class overtones, and once again middle-class identity is invoked as a source of inauthenticity.

¹⁰ See J. Harris (*NME* 21/8/93), J. Mulvey (*NME* 26/6/93), I. Watson (*MM* 22/1/94), J. Mulvey (*NME* 8/1/94), S. Reynolds (*MM* 25/3/95), D. Stubbs (*NME* 4/3/95), S. Maconie (*Q* 4/95).

to the kind of authenticity Oasis are granted by their ability to both produce music with feeling and affect the audience.

The gendering of this feeling/anti-feeling split between Oasis and Elastica is an interesting dimension, especially in the way it maps onto an already gendered mind/body dichotomy. As Korsmeyer notes, 'generally speaking, the world of male values is abstract and associated with the "mind," that of the female, concrete and particular and associated with the "body"' (2004:14). However, it is Elastica who are frequently associated with the mind – their intelligent pop, their cleverness and their rationality, whilst Oasis are typically associated with the body – reactions to their music are instinctive and irrational. However, the extract above hints at an alternative interpretation of Oasis' apparent feminisation in its reference to the time 'white rock lost touch with black music.' The supposed difference between Black and white music, and especially their relation to (sexual) feelings, is discussed by Simon Frith in *Performing Rites* (1996). He observes that,

There is, indeed, a long history in Romanticism of defining black culture, specifically African culture, as the body, the other of the bourgeois mind. Such a contrast is derived from the Romantic opposition of nature and culture: the primitive or pre-civilised can thus be held up against the sophisticated or over-civilised – one strand of the Romantic argument was that primitive people were innocent people, uncorrupted by culture, still close to a human "essence"... the argument is that because "the African" is more primitive, more "natural" than the European, then African music must be more directly in touch with the body, with unsymbolised and unmediated sensual states and expectations (1996:127).

Viewing Oasis' ability to 'feel' through such a racialised myth their authenticity can be seen as being based on both essentialist notions of race and class. Their whiteness is so unmarked and naturalised that it is almost disavowed to enable the band to be written about as having the classic authentic qualities of associated with Black artists, i.e., the intuitive, natural and primitive - also qualities traditionally associated with the lower classes (Frith, 1996:125).

Through these tropes Oasis' ability to 'feel' remains staunchly masculine and the link between the body and femininity is never made (either in the articles on Oasis, or, by Frith). Korsmeyer would consider this unsurprising, because although, 'no matter what activity we examine, the conceptual framework that organises ideas about who is best equipped to do what, tends to place the male [mind] function as the most important' (2004:14), when it comes to notions of creativity and the artist this hierarchy is reconfigured. She argues that 'when theorists investigate the creative power of the artist, reason often does not take centre stage but gives way to imagination, inspiration, intuition, or emotion' (p14) and that, 'traditionally "feminine" traits involving emotion and other "nonrational" mental characteristics are appropriated for male creators and actually removed from females' (p30-1). This is reflected in the construction of Oasis' authenticity in the indie public. Not only do Oasis embody discourses of creativity which stress emotion and non-rationality without being feminised, but for Elastica the emphasis placed

on their cleverness and lack of feeling distances them even further from an ideal of authentic creation than their existing position as both female and middle-class.

Conclusion: “It’s all about the music”

This chapter has explored the ways in which the four case-study bands are produced as authentic in the indie public. The analysis of the themes and patterns that emerge in the coverage of the bands show that far from being a singular and objective quality inherent in particular artists, authenticity is constructed relationally and contingently. Each band is produced as authentic through various discourses of authenticity that are intimately tied up with constructions of class, race and gender. Suede’s is based on their lyrical originality and class-identity, Oasis’ on their feelings, sincerity of expression and again, class-identity. However, the discourses that emerge in the articles on Echobelly and Elastica are much less easily identifiable. Though both bands are discussed through the same tropes as Suede and Oasis, their production as convincingly authentic is much less successful, and more frequently questioned and attacked. The fact that Elastica and Echobelly are predominantly female acts is not coincidental in this scheme, and this concluding section will show that, in the indie public being a woman is actually a bigger barrier to authenticity than selling out.

By drawing attention to one final way in which authenticity is constructed it is possible to show how female artists struggle to be authentic in the indie public. This final source of authenticity stems from statements that express the sentiment ‘it’s all about the music.’ Artists and writers alike consistently claim that music is the most important thing – more important than sex, drugs, fame or politics. It seems that when all else fails, an avowed commitment to art is as good a base as any upon which to construct authenticity. Brett Anderson for example states, “I consider nothing more important in my life than songwriting. Everything really has to be arranged around that,” (*NME* 20/2/93) while Sonya Madan affirms that, “the only reason I got into singing was to sing in a rock ‘n’ roll band and write classic pop songs” (*NME* 20/8/94). Music is more important than drugs; Justine says of Elastica’s Donna Matthews, “the thing about Donna especially is that she’s got a real drive to make music, and you just know she’d never let something as superficial as drugs interfere with that” (*NME* 10/6/95), and sex; when asked, ‘which is better, the sex or the music?’ Liam Gallagher affirms that, “Music’s my ultimate high, I don’t know why” (*Face* 11/95).

What statements that declare ‘it’s all about the music’ *do* is privilege talk about music over talk about the *band*. This creates an area of tension which can most clearly be illustrated with reference to the articles on Echobelly. Obviously, and as the next chapter on ‘Stars’ will demonstrate, the music press does devote a lot of time to discussing bands, but what

is different in the coverage of Echobelly is that discussion of the band is so prominent that the belated assertion that it is the music that matters is secondary. Thus in the articles on Echobelly it is unclear whether it is their music that is the most important thing about them or whether it is the fact that they are marked by differences of gender and race. An interview in the *Melody Maker* sums up this conundrum. Initially the interview opens with a long statement from Sonya about what makes the band relevant.

“To me a band like Echobelly is so relevant,” she says. “Early on, we got all this crap about us being ‘contrived’ or ‘too good to be true’. There is no other band coming from where we’re coming from. We’re not a bhangra band. We’re a highly articulate, powerful, exciting band and there’s so many different elements to it...I get so worked up about it. We’re relevant because we’ve come together as a result of all the problems we’ve faced. We’ve been thrown together, almost. Debbie ‘token’ black lesbian, Glenn, European, and me, Asian. And that’s so important to talk about” (*MM* 18/6/94).

It is the band’s social identities that are being privileged here as the reason Echobelly are valuable. The writer goes on to confirm that Echobelly’s musical output is not what makes them special. He says,

When I first heard Echobelly, I didn’t immediately join in the hallelujahs... musically, I felt they were too close to their inspirations, The Smiths being the most obvious... Echobelly in short, seemed to be merely another indie band and I only kept half a lazy eye on their janglepop abrasion (*MM* 18/6/94).

The characterisation of Echobelly as unoriginal, generic and undeserving of serious attention here is hardly positive and crucially it is only *after* this has been stated that the writer reverts to an ‘it’s all about the music’ argument;

Their new single, however, has me all turned round and reeling. Now it’s clicked, bang on the shiny button. Now I get Echobelly...Echobelly have crossed the line, transcended their influences and added their own Dr Martens bootstamp by way of a hallmark (*MM* 18/6/94).

Although order has been restored with music taking precedence over the band, the assertion that it’s *all* about the music here rather overstates the belated attempts to embrace Echobelly’s musical output over the novelty of their varied membership.¹¹

The articles on Elastica exhibit a similar pattern to that evident in the Echobelly coverage. Whilst superficially adhering to the tenet that ‘it’s all about the music’ the articles implicitly posit the band, and specifically Justine, as being more important than the music. For example, an early interview in *Vox* states that,

Elastica are...a sweet and stylish two fingers up to Tweesville and the ludicrous posturing of dog-end Grunge. And Justine has probably killed off a few generations of bands yet unborn, especially the ones with girl singers who sound like they’ve just swallowed a packet of marshmallows, just by being herself. Justine is the founder and the key to Elastica. She is a heroine and she is what makes them great. (*Vox* 2/94)

Elastica’s music is certainly not being privileged as the most important thing about them here, rather the band’s value is located in the figure of Justine herself. In a variation on

¹¹ See also S. Dalton (*NME* 24/9/94) and S. Williams (*NME* 20/8/94).

this, the *NME*'s new band article on Elastica attributes their uniqueness not to their music, but to the fact that the majority of the band are female;

Such is one element of Elastica's charm. Another is the way that their songs are incisive, steely things that move in a delightfully jerky, cod-robotic fashion... This, apparently is traceable to the fact that Justine – a trained architect – has a sly enthusiasm for mathematics. It's also attributable to astrology. And the fact that three-quarters of Elastica are female. (*NME* 21/8/93)

The most prominent example of the attention paid to Justine's, gender rather than her music comes from a *Melody Maker* cover feature which coincided with the release of Elastica's debut album. It argues that,

It's pretty clear now that the Menfolk have precious little left to say, when it comes to song-oriented, guitar-based music. The same old scenarios, personae and obsessions are getting reiterated with diminishing returns... I'm only prepared to take such traditionalism when it comes refreshed with a female twist.

And this is what the Womanfolk are up to: they're not cooking up aural hallucinogenes in the sound laboratory, they're taking on played-out male traditions, tweaking and reinventing them. It's a form of stylistic tranvestism... That said, Justine's pretty phased when I ask if she ever feels like she's in drag onstage. "Well, I sometimes feel like Meatloaf when I've got hair all over my face and I'm really sweaty. Which is a bit depressing. But no, I don't ever feel like a woman in drag, to be honest!"

So there's no sense in which you play-act tough-guy?

"I think lots of women do that these days. And there's always been girlie girls and non-girlie girls. There's girls who have really high voices and like wearing dresses, and others who don't. I don't think I'm exceptional, it's just that most of my mates haven't been very girlie. There's lots of young women who look and dress like I do."

As a kid were you a tomboy?

"More so now than then, actually. When you're in your twenties you feel more confident about what you are, you don't feel like you necessarily have to dress up for boys. When I was a teenager I had really long hair and felt like I had to wear make-up. But now I feel a lot more comfortable with short hair. It's something I discovered with leaving home and going to college. In a way, it's Nineties urban camouflage. It came about when I was coming back from college really late, getting on the last Tube. If you're wearing long hair and make-up, you're gonna feel a lot more vulnerable than if you've got short hair and big boots. That was definitely an undercurrent to dressing the way I do. I remember at school we had self-defence lessons and the teachers said that anyone with long hair should really wear a hat and cover it up, cos if someone wants to grab you, you're incredibly vulnerable. There's nothing you can do if someone gets hold of your hair" (*MM* 25/3/95).

I extract this article at such great length to illustrate how what begins as a discussion about music quickly reverts to discussion about Justine *herself*, not as a musician, but in terms of her gender presentation. Nowhere do Brett Anderson or Noel Gallagher have to dissect their renewal of the rock tradition in terms of their haircuts. Thus, while all the artists express sentiments to the effect that 'it's all about the music,' the fact that female artists are written about as women rather than musicians works to fundamentally undermine this central tenet of the indie public.

As a means of evaluation in the indie public, not all artists can be ascribed authenticity or the concept would have no value as a mark of distinction. However, the model of

authenticity outlined in this chapter is based on criteria which devalue the feminine, and with it female artists, on a number of levels. The art/commerce divide constitutes the indie public in opposition to a feminised mainstream however, even as this fundamental presupposition is destabilised by the popularisation of indie between 1993 and 1998 the masculine characteristics of the 'art' side of the divide continue to construct the artist in the indie public. The analysis of discussions around music, lyrics, songwriting and creativity in the articles on the case-study bands has shown that although all the bands are evaluated through a number of tropes of authenticity, Elastica and Echobelly fall short of the ideal in almost every respect. Their gender prevents them from being constructed as authentic in relation to established canonical 'others', because the canon is overwhelmingly male, while they are simultaneously cast as imitative and unoriginal. Where class is marked and privileged for artists with working-class backgrounds, the marking of gender carries no such benefits for women. Rather, the fact that gender is marked for female artists means they are discussed on those terms, rather than in terms of their art.

This may not in itself be problematic, but authenticity in the indie public is ascribed through discussions of *music*. Suede and Oasis are constructed as authentic through specific tropes relating to their lyrical potency and naturalised talent respectively. Not only are such creative traits traditionally masculine, emotionally feminine though they may seem, but no such distinct patterns emerge to constitute the authenticity of Elastica or Echobelly. Even their recourse to the maxim that 'it's all about the music' is impeded by the consistent discussion of them rather than their music. With only very limited access to the value ascribed to authentic artists it is questionable to what extent female artists can be said to be participating in the indie public. However, the music press does not just engage in discussions about the music – the next chapter will analyse the construction of the 'star' in the articles on the case-study bands. Given that this chapter has found that female artists are discussed as 'women' in terms of their characters and personal lives it is time to find out how the indie public constructs 'woman'.

If I can't be a star I won't get out of bed...

Stars and appeal in the indie public

Serious rock criticism is often posited as the opposite of the celebrity obsessed copy that occupies the pages of teenage pop magazines and gossipy glossies. There it is the stars' personal lives, not their contributions to the world of music, that is the primary focus of discussion. It might be expected that the music press' coverage of indie music would maintain this distinction – a defining feature of the indie public is its difference and separation from the feminised, frivolous pop sphere, and after all, as the previous chapter has shown, it *is* all about the music. However, the articles on Oasis, Elastica, Suede and Echobelly reveal that this is not entirely the case as at least as much space is devoted, not only in interviews with the bands but reviews as well, to discussions of the musicians that have little to do with music and more to do with star-making and character-building.

The articles on the case-study bands construct stars as much as they do artists. They feature a plethora of information about the bands' personalities, their coolness, their intelligence, their personal style, as well as commentary on their relationships and home life, even their pets, all of which cumulates to discursively construct a star in the indie public. The aim of this chapter is not to analyse the relative value of these characteristics, but to move towards an understanding of how the construction of stars makes available social identities in the indie public. In his work on Hollywood film stars Richard Dyer (1987) explains the significance of studying stars saying,

We're fascinated by stars because they enact ways of making sense of the experience of being a person in a particular kind of social production (capitalism), with its particular organisation of life in public and private spheres. We love them because they represent how we think that experience is or how lovely it would be to feel that it is. Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally, historically constructed (p17).

By taking Dyer's remit of 'contemporary society' down to the specificity of the indie public, the analysis of stars therein will not only help identify ways of 'being' in the indie public but also how participation is invited through identification.

The idea that the music press invites identification with stars is evidenced in the articles by the prominent discussion of artists' appeal, or why 'we love them' as Dyer might put it. Statements are frequently made that suggest possible relationships between the stars and their audience. Stars are posited as role models, objects of lust, as being like your mates or your brother on one hand, or exotic, special and unattainable on the other. The articles also make assumptions about the appeal of stars based on whose experiences

certain stars represent. The analysis of these kinds of statements can greatly enrich the understanding of the character of the indie public because they indicate for whom participation in the sphere is invited and the terms of that participation. Through this twofold analysis, of the construction of stars and the construction of their appeal, this chapter will examine the bases of inclusion and exclusion in the indie public. Dyer argues that stars are, 'embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives, and indeed through which we make our lives – categories of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and so on' (1987:18). By paying special attention to the way stars' gender, race, class and sexuality is constructed it will be possible to understand what types of social identity the indie public is inclusive of.

Making stars

The characterisation of stars in the music press occurs over multiple articles and in multiple publications. The articles on the case-study bands show that although the tropes through which artists are described and understood are individual to each artist, over time the same themes and motifs recur frequently enough that each band or band-member becomes recognisable and knowable in a certain way. What this chapter will examine in depth, is how intimately the characterisation of stars in the indie public is tied to their gendered identities. Many of the characteristics which make bands special or different, or give them that 'star' quality, relate to their gender presentation or performance. When bands' appeal is discussed in the articles, gender is also an important determining factor there, thus the way in which stars are made available for identification in the indie public is gendered. This aspect of the music press' discourse is most apparent when discussion of the bands is focussed explicitly on their gender presentation, sexuality or sex appeal, however, it also structures discussions on more general traits.

A good example of this concerns the differing ways that both Echobelly and Oasis are characterised as 'confident'. Oasis' confidence manifests itself through descriptions of their self-belief, or as one article puts it, 'blatant arrogance' (*NME* 2/4/94). The band's self-aggrandisement is lauded, for example, it is reported that Noel,

has a song called 'All Around The World' that he wants to enter for the Eurovision Song Contest, because it's as good as 'Hey Jude' and it'll win. And he claims, in thrillingly deadpan tones, that he has known for ages that he's in charge of the best band in Britain (*NME* 23/4/94b).

Their claim to 'be the best' is what most often signifies Oasis' arrogance and confidence so that tales of the, 'latest display of Gallagher gall' (*Face* 11/95) are commonplace. Their bravado is valued as one of the characteristics which makes them special and appealing.

Echobelly's confidence is constructed via displays of lead-singer Sonya Aurora-Madan's self-belief. She is described as, 'devoid of any self-doubt' (*Select* 9/94b), 'self-possession incarnate,' (*Select* 9/94a), and we are assured that, 'one thing you could never accuse Sonya of is lacking confidence' (*MM* 27/8/94).

Echobelly's confidence, however, is not caged in terms of bravado and competition in the same way as Oasis', rather she is characterised in terms of defiance and politicised anger. The articles link her self-belief not only with a more confrontational anger, but with her gender and/or race identity. For example, one interview describes her as an, 'outspoken...warrior with fresh opinions on sexism, racism and the general culture' (*NME* 20/8/94), while another argues that,

Anger is an energy, a bloke with orange hair once said. He might have added that it can also be a burden (Rage Against The Machine), a crutch (Fun'Da'Mental) or a major sorry-that'll-be-my-cab-type cringe (These Animal Men). Wrath, fury and general foot-stamping are such over-used commodities in pop that it's a relief when a band comes along with something real to get snotty about (*Select* 9/94b).

It is Sonya's race and gender identity that constitutes 'something real' to be angry about, and her anger is expressed appropriately in comparison to other 'political' bands. What is more important is the fact that Sonya's confidence is not only inescapably associated with her gendered and raced identity, but with *her* at all. The uniqueness of Oasis' brand of confidence focuses on their belief that they are the best *band*, with the best abilities as musicians and songwriters. While Oasis' brand of bravado constructs their masculinity and class in a particular way, their confidence is never constructed as the result of their social identity. In contrast Echobelly's rage is attributable to Sonya because she is an Asian woman.

If gender plays a role even in the construction of stars' confidence, then it is key when bands are characterised explicitly in terms of their gender presentation and sexuality. One way in which this is approached in the articles is through the topic of sex. Both Suede and Elastica are consistently characterised and described through sexual imagery and metaphor. Suede, for example, are described in one early live review as having the, 'spark to illuminate the dullest of times, the spunk to stain the corporate bedsheets' (*NME* 13/3/93), while guitarist Bernard Butler, 'lazily strokes his strings like a lover's body seconds after orgasm' (*MM* 20/3/93). More literally the band are also consistently described as sleazy, erotic, provocative, debauched, suggestive, glamorous or even as 'Britain's biggest and sexiest rock band' (*Q* 2/93) who 'aren't scared to arouse or confront their audience' (*Select* 5/93). Elastica are similarly associated with sexual imagery, not just in the way they are, for example, described as 'young and exciting and kind of sexy' (*MM* 6/11/93) but also in more metaphorical ways. In discussing the limited edition of the band's debut single, one article decides that, 'as a plan to stifle excitement, it failed miserably. Selling out in two days, the single set up Elastica as an ultimately desirable,

stylishly inaccessible tease' (*NME* 8/1/94). Elsewhere Justine is likened to 'a pigtailed gingham-frocked little girl, hiding a pair of soiled knickers behind her back' (*NME* 20/11/93).

Sexual imagery forms an integral part of how Suede and Elastica are constructed as stars. What the examples above also suggest is that this imagery is not constructed separately from gender. The images of 'spunk', 'staining' and 'stroking' from the Suede articles are conspicuously more active/masculine than the more passive/feminine 'teasing' and 'hiding' ones from the Elastica articles. However, the construction of the gendered identities of lead-singers Brett Anderson and Justine Frischmann does not follow the same pattern, as both stars are characterised by traits usually associated with the 'opposite' sex. Justine Frischmann is routinely depicted as 'languid, intelligent and unusually handsome' (*Q* 5/95). Attention is paid to her masculine style of dress; 'she even wears a shirt and tie down her local. That's class' (*Select* 2/94), or she is dressed in, 'her regulation tomgirl ribbed black leggings, black shirt, black leather jacket tied around her waist and black ten-hole DMs' (*Face* 2/95)

Justine's masculinised gender presentation goes deeper than her wardrobe, however, as several articles link her style to her participation in indie. One interview contains the following exchange,

"Debbie Harry was the first girl I fell in love with," Justine begins. "I had her posters everywhere. She was utterly beautiful. She had a real softness to her, even though she was hard. She managed to use her sexuality and not be criticised for it – but maybe that was the era.
"If someone dressed like that now, they wouldn't get away with it," she continues. "The late Seventies was an era of very provocatively dressed women, and people seemed to be less frightened of their own sexuality than they are now."
"It's more to do with fashion," Donna thinks. "If we went onstage all made up and wearing short skirts, we'd be criticised..."
People would laugh at you!
"They probably would," the guitarist smiles, good-naturedly.
"We'd be seen as bimbos. Nowadays, you're seen as more intelligent if you wear jeans and a T-shirt than if you wear a short skirt and loads of make-up" (*MM* 8/10/94).

The idea that to be in an indie band and wear skirts is inadvisable at best and inappropriate at worst sets a normative style of dress in the indie public. In a subsequent interview Justine is asked again about her style,

So there's no sense in which you play-act the tough-guy?
"I think lots of women do that these days...I don't think I'm exceptional, it's just that most of my mates haven't been very girly. There's lots of young women in London who look and dress like I do"...
So there's a sense that you sartorially avoid the things that signify 'vulnerability' or 'availability'?
"It's just expecting to be treated as one of the lads. You don't want to deliberately remove yourself from being able to be a good bloke" (*MM* 25/3/95).

Here again inclusion (being treated as 'one of the lads') is predicated on the disavowal of femininity. Sonya Madan also echoes Justine and Donna's comments when it is reported that she, 'recommends a haircut, having lost her old long locks: "I didn't want to be too girly. I don't want to be the token female. I can't cut my tits off, but I can cut my hair. I want people to see me as part of the gang"' (*Select* 2/94).

The eschewal of traditional heterofeminine beauty standards and dress codes for women in the indie public may offer a potentially liberating space for (some) female participants. In her article on being an 'indie girl' Laura Lee Davies suggests this was one of the main attractions of indie for her (1995:124), while in a discussion about punk subcultures Judith Halberstam (2005) argues that her participation gave her space to reject 'homophobia, gender normativity, and sexism' (p155). While this may be so, what it also indicates is, if not a disavowal of female femininity in the indie public, then a definite devaluation of it. Indeed, for Elastica and Echobelly it is through their distance from femininity that they are ascribed value. Thus, when Madan later took to wearing more feminine garb, most notably girls' school uniform at one festival appearance, she was subject to open criticism questioning both her motives and her authenticity (see *Vox* 9/97 and *MM* 30/9/95). Feminine dress styles are therefore considered inauthentic, or gimmicky – something which was also reflected in the coverage of more feminine bands like Fluffy in the new band articles – while being 'part of the gang' entails being masculine. However, the characterisation of Echobelly and Elastica in the indie public as masculine is never a totally successful process because as *women* they can never fully be 'good blokes' – real blokes don't ever have to justify their haircuts.

Justine Frischmann's gender (re)presentation is also frequently linked to discussion of her sexuality. Despite the fact that her heterosexual relationships with Brett Anderson and Damon Albarn of Blur are referenced in almost every single article on Elastica, Justine's sexuality is more often discussed in terms of the novelty of her *not* being a lesbian. In various interviews Justine declares that, "'I'm not particularly proud of the fact that I'm heterosexual, 'cos I think it's probably much cleverer to be bisexual these days. But I just can't be what I'm not"' (*NME* 8/1/94) and later that,

"One of my friends is very bisexual, one of my best girlfriends, and I've tried to snog her when I've been drunk and she's like come on, you know, and she is one of the few girls I know who could I have some kind of sexual feeling towards. I've tried to snog her and I just can't so it...I don't think there is any part of me that would choose a woman over a man. I think it's brilliant. It's totally excellent and there is a part of me – because it's kind of not the norm and it's rebellious – it's a lot more exciting in a way to be gay, I think. I'm totally envious sometimes of gay men who seem to be having such a good laugh. As a woman I am totally not invited into a gay male scene on any level" (*Sky* 11/94).

The intriguing thing about these statements is not Justine's ambiguity towards her heterosexuality, but the fact that such utterances were elicited in the first place. In the context of the discursive construction of the indie public, the persistent questioning and

discussion of Justine's sexuality illustrates how, despite validating Justine's non-normative gender presentation, the more hegemonic association of non-feminine women with lesbianism remains intact. However, although Justine's attraction (or not) to other women is mentioned a significant number of times, along with her masculine appearance, the language used to describe these concepts is not a queer one. Justine is 'handsome' and 'androgynous', implying a cross-gender identity, but she is not read as, say, 'butch' which would place her gender presentation in more lesbian-specific terms. Thus while Justine's gendered construction makes available an indie alternative to normative femininity, it is one that is implicitly heterosexual.

While *Elastica* and *Echobelly* are characterised and given value through their distance from femininity, the same is certainly not true of Suede's Brett Anderson. In a reversal of Justine and Sonya's masculinisation, Brett is valued for his feminine qualities. The establishment of Anderson's fey type of androgynous masculinity is the major way Suede are characterised by the music press, and is constructed in three main ways. Firstly his mannerisms and appearance are described in terms of their deviance from heteronormative masculinity. Secondly, Anderson's body is subject to almost constant commentary, and thirdly the articles on Suede are littered with references to gay culture, which in this context helps to reinforce Suede's femininity and their distance from more normative masculinities. The first of these three types of characterisation involves the description of Brett as offering a, 'slew of sexual ambiguity and a pile of pouting images' (*NME* 13/3/93). He is an, 'androgynous star, glowing brighter in a firmament of lesser lights' (*NME* 8/1/94), or he stands like a 'limp-wristed discus thrower' (*Select* 4/94). Not only is Brett himself cast in these terms – as androgynous, ambiguous or even 'hermaphrodisiac' (*MM* 20/3/93), but the band are characterised by adjectives such as 'flamboyant', 'dramatic', 'louche' 'fey' or 'camp' all of which contribute to their constitution as feminised men

The second way in which Suede are feminised is through the very close attention paid to Brett's body. This is a unique characteristic of the coverage of Suede, for no other band or individual is the attention to their physicality so intense, yet Brett's body is subject to scrutiny in the majority of the articles on Suede. In live reviews, Brett is depicted as a 'gauche, young, hip-swiveller... He flicks his fringe, he tries a preparatory wiggle... he jumps, he jerks and points: he shakes, darts and waves,' (*NME* 12/10/96), or he, 'swings his hips like a drunken ballerina and contorts his spindly frame into a supplicant position' (*NME* 8/1/94). The attention to Anderson's body extends into interviews so he is often described arriving; 'in wafts Brett, hair like a cat's cradle, tightly clutching his black overcoat to his body...wearing a t-shirt so tight you can see his nipples' (*TOTP* 3/95). In one case the interviewer observes Brett in his house before she arrives to interview him and notes, 'there is a half naked man tying his shoelaces...he rests his foot on the arm of

the sofa, the skin clings to his boney chest. He looks across the street...he's even wearing navy blue. In the flesh his almost spherical cheekbones are just a pronounced' (*MM* 23/8/97). His behaviour in interviews is reported in detail, one article notes Brett is,

Back with a hell of a wiggle in his stride and not much flesh on his bones...but look at those eyes...the acid-tongued fop rolls and unrolls – and rolls and unrolls and rolls and unrolls – his mauve shirt sleeve...he just pushes his shades up his nose, sticks an arm out... adjusting his shades and popping a leather-clad shoulder...a hand runs swiftly through lank hair as, with another superb arse-propelled wiggle, his Lordship's straightened spine shoots him out (*NME* 27/7/96).

Perhaps the most vivid example of this comes from an *NME* cover feature for which Anderson's body was painted in an homage to the sleeve of the band's debut single. The feature describes how, 'Brett is exotically gilded...no muscle moves, no impatience rises as the make-up woman slowly applies a greasepaint shirt to his skin. Thick blue creases rumple on his elbows, a pale tie twists rakishly across his chest, a perfect pearl button sits in his navel' (*NME* 20/2/93). The pictures that accompany the article obviously put Anderson's semi-naked body on direct display, however, the attention paid to his movement, clothing, hair and facial features in *all* the articles fragments and objectifies him, constructing him as a spectacle to be gazed at. Given the attention paid to his physical form, it is perhaps unsurprising that when Suede's fortunes waned somewhat during 1995 and early 1996, Brett's 'expanding waistline' (*NME* 12/10/96) and 'the grey bags under his eyes...hanging like large sacks of vegetables' (*NME* 14/1/95) were given as visible signs of the band's fall from grace. On their comeback, however it is the band's 'skinniness' that is evidence of their return to form, one reviewer stating that, 'we needed to see it with our own eyes, we needed to see how they looked, how they carried themselves,' (12/10/96) while another states that the, 'the most visible rebirth we are here to witness is Mr Anderson's scarcely visible waistline and extremely prominent biceps' (*NME* 15/7/95).

This kind of attention is not only atypical of the coverage of the other bands in the case-study, but also of men in general. However, in the context of the articles on Suede, the descriptions of Brett's body reinforce his star image as a beautiful, ambiguous, artistic and sexual *feminised* man. Brett's 'unmanliness' is further constructed through frequent references to gay culture. Like Justine Frischmann, whose non-normative gender presentation destabilises her heterosexuality, Brett's distance from normative heteromascularity supports his characterisation as, 'dripping with wayward sexuality' (*Select* 4/93). Brett, 'comes over like a nymphomaniac who can't decide which way to turn in the pursuit of hermaphrodisiac pleasure, the object of his louch, libidinous attentions constantly fluctuating between a 'him'...a 'her'...and, god forbid, an 'it' (*MM* 20/3/93). The band are also likened to prominent/historical bi- and homo- sexuals. Oscar Wilde, David Bowie, Marc Almond, Neil Tenant, Morrissey, Larry Grayson, Joe Orton and Quentin

Crisp (see, *Sky* 2/94, *MM* 20/3/93, *NME* 13/3/93, *MM* 17/4/93a and *MM* 17/4/93b) are all mentioned in the articles on Suede.

The connection of Suede with gay culture in the articles is intriguing. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Suede's early singles 'The Drowners' and especially 'Animal Nitrate' are written from a gay perspective, although Anderson himself is not homosexual, and this fact is a topic of intense discussion in the articles. The references to well-known gay figures and ambiguous sexuality in the coverage of Suede characterises the band within a gay aesthetic, but without queering them as such. Despite the superficial insinuation that Suede are a 'gay band' they are implicitly distanced from 'real' homosexuals. For example in one interview Anderson is asked, 'how did meeting gay people change him?' to which he replies,

"Early on, not that much. One of my friend's brothers, his twin brother, was the first gay guy I met. Via him I was introduced to this world of gay people. It was an incredibly fascinating world, full of life and energy. It did inspire me. There was this gang of gay blokes in Hampstead who pranced around the street in a really kind of – what's the word? – cheeky and kind of...defiant, yeah, a defiant way. They were cheeky and they'd get up on bins and do something from a play. It was brilliantly inspiring, these people getting up and having a laugh and really taking everyone on" (*NME* 5/2/94).¹

Here, the 'world of gay people' is othered – it is not the world that Suede belong to. Elsewhere another article contends that, 'much – far too much, I suspect – has been made of your attraction to forms of sexuality that might be regarded as aberrant in that context. Either explicitly or, more often implicitly, homosexuality and possibly bestiality ("Animal Lover" anyone?) are favoured subjects' (*MM* 17/4/93b). In another, an interview with the band in America, an almost homophobic depiction of gay men is invoked when the writer states that, 'the Metro Club in Chicago is right next door to a club called The Manhole. Mat considers this suspicious especially when he sees a lot of bald, moustachioed men wandering in and out walking chihuahuas' (*NME* 26/6/93). This mockery of gay signifiers and use of the word 'aberrant' to describe both homosexuality and bestiality reinforces the 'otherness' of actual homosexuals and thus restores a normative heterosexuality in the indie public.

Unlike Suede who are characterised by a very feminine masculinity, Oasis' masculinity follows a more traditional path and the band are most frequently characterised as 'lads' – their character based around images of drinking, 'birds' and football. When asked what he does at home, Liam replies,

"I batter me other brother. Meet him (Bonehead) in the pub. Get pissed. Hang out with me mates, chill out, tell 'em all the stories, show 'em all me new trainers, 'cos we're all trainer freaks. I just chill. And chat up loads of birds and fail terribly" (*NME* 30/9/95a).

¹ Anderson makes this statement without he or the interviewer also acknowledging the fact that Suede's drummer Simon Gilbert came out as gay in the music press the previous year.

This 'relaxed' image of the Gallaghers is supplemented by a more debauched one of their on-the-road behaviour. As early as October 1994, it is reported that, 'Oasis had become a byword for sex, drugs, timeless rock'n'roll, wrecked hotel rooms, heavy-duty arrests, on-stage brawls...' (Vox 10/94). The articles on Oasis focus on the relationship between Liam and Noel Gallagher (the other members of the band are largely absent) which is portrayed as tempestuous and often violent. The Gallaghers' verbal and physical fights are reported on, with near glee, as are their 'bad-boy' antics. One interview states that, 'Oasis are already known for being a volatile rock unit. They have been ejected from a Dutch ferry, en route to a concert in Amsterdam, after drinking a bottle of bourbon each and fighting with anyone within punching distance' (NME 23/4/94b), before going on to describe the Gallaghers in action,

Liam Gallagher is poised above his elder brother, pressing his hand into Noel's face, and occasionally barking frantic questions, like the one about whether or not he fancies being pushed through the window.
"Let's f-ing go then, you DICK!" says Liam. "Let's have a f-ing FIGHT" (NME 23/4/94b).

The Oasis articles contrast starkly with Suede's coverage and obviously contain none of the references to gay culture, but also none of the attention to the body or the sexual metaphors which characterise Suede.

The construction of appeal

The way in which Oasis, Suede, Elastica and Echobelly are characterised and constructed as stars in the articles is very closely linked to how their appeal is written about. Therefore, this section is concerned with what it is about these stars that attracts them to the audience and further, who that audience is thought to comprise. In the case of Oasis, for example, the band's *universal* appeal is highlighted and praised. Oasis, it is argued, have resonance for everyone, and because everyone can relate to and identify with them they are the 'people's band' (Sky 3/96). One article notes, 'no other group has anywhere near captured the public's imagination and adulation the way Oasis have' (Vox 6/96), thus positing their general/widespread appeal. From the start of their career Oasis are described, 'even the most casual pin-stickers' dream ticket' (NME 23/4/94b) indicating that their appeal is self-evident and their success inevitable. The band's universality is also often caged in terms of their historical significance so that they are described as 'something properly era-defining' (Select 8/97), with one reviewer declaring, 'seeing Oasis, I saw history in the making. Meeting Oasis, I met history. Supreme' (MM 30/3/96).

Oasis' universal appeal is also constructed through comparisons to bands who fail to adequately represent the experiences of the 'public'. For example, one article states that Suede and Blur are, 'excellent in their own way, but something in there puts genuine vast,

mass lad-appeal out of reach,² whereas Oasis, 'cut right through all the impacted layers of bullshit with a bunch of songs that everyone understands and can sing along to' (*Select* 12/94). In another interview Noel Gallagher describes his own appeal in just these terms saying,

"Damon Albarn and Brett Anderson write songs about going to the dogs and being pantomime horses, which is all very well but it doesn't mean fuck all to me... It probably means loads to people who live in London who go to the dogs and *are* pantomime horses, but it means nothing to 99 per cent of the population. It's too self-centred, to me-me-me. It's why those bands never make it in America, cos it's just not universal enough. I mean, they have songs like 'Animal Nitrates'; we have songs called 'Cigarettes and Alcohol', which means everything to everybody" (*Vox* 10/94)

Another implicit contrast is made to bands such as Suede in a review which describes Oasis as, 'so direct and primordial, *you* wonder when the last time was *you* heard a bunch of songs that actually spoke to *you* without your having to sit down and work them out with the lyric sheet' (*Select* 9/94, my emphasis). This final statement also points towards a second feature of the construction of Oasis' universal appeal, namely the direct appeal to 'you' in the text.

The appeal to 'you' and the assertion of a unified 'we' or 'us' constructs a powerful rhetorical force in the Oasis articles which is largely unavailable to the other bands. In an article dedicated to understanding 'What Makes Oasis Special' the writer asserts that,

Oasis have become a mass human phenomenon because they are a human band, who play top tunes like their lives depend on it. We see in them bits of ourselves, with frailties and imperfections to the fore, and we acknowledge their courage in working out those flaws so publicly, apparently for our benefit as much as theirs. The key is that, three years ago they *were* us. That's a powerful thing (*Vox* 6/96).

The strong link between 'us' and the band is also reflected in a review that states,

Young hearts have always yearned to run free. Oasis realise this, which is why so many of their songs...are written about the desire to escape...This need, desire, feeling of betrayal at the life they've been given, is at the very root of Oasis' appeal. Rock 'n' roll – it's all about living vicariously, remember? We all want to be Oasis, they're the ultimate mates, the big brothers none of us ever had – out on the town, boozin' and whorin' and livin' it up (*MM* 24/12/94).

Oasis are characterised and made accessible via their universal appeal and the way they can communicate with *everyone*. Their construction repeatedly invites identification with the band – the audience/public can easily imagine *being* them because they so closely resemble 'us' and our experiences/fantasies. The terms in which Oasis' appeal is couched appear to be very inclusive. The 'yous' and 'wes', not to mention the 'publics' and even the 'young hearts' seem to have no exclusionary boundaries, no provisos for participation. Oasis are constructed simply as the, 'gang of reckless northern

² The gendering of Oasis' mass appeal as 'mass *lad*-appeal' also adds extra value to the band's ability to attract a populist audience given the general de-valuation of a feminised mass audience. I find it particularly telling that this is considered a great achievement.

reprobates...who you can easily dream of joining' (*MM* 27/8/94). However, the apparent inclusiveness of Oasis' appeal masks an unmarked male subject. In the article cited above, for example, references to Oasis as 'mates' and 'big brothers' subtly imply a male-male bond, especially in the context of 'boozin' and whorin", thus the inclusive/universal 'we' actually excludes women.

This unmarked male subject of identification also emerges discussions of the shared desires and experiences Oasis express in their songs that make them so universal. They offer a, 'sense of possibility, a very real dream of empowerment...look at us! Believe, and it can be yours' (*Select* 9/94). However the notion of 'empowerment' promised in the articles on Oasis is so intensely homosocial that it genders exactly for whom 'it can be yours' for. The assertion in one article that Oasis' 'Don't Look Back In Anger' being played at the cricket World Cup indicated the band had 'taken over the world' (*Vox* 6/96) exemplifies what a masculine version of the 'world' Oasis' universalism encompasses. In another article they are first lauded for their universalism, then praised for their, 'surging ode to laddism and paean to the good times' (*Vox* 11/94) – the universalisation of 'laddism' obscures those identities excluded in its constitution, especially in terms of gender and sexuality. While the articles on Oasis do anything but narrow the basis of the band's appeal, they simultaneously invite identification with a subject whose specificity as male is unmistakable.

In contrast to the way Oasis' appeal is constructed as 'universal' the appeal of Suede and Echobelly, is constituted in relation to a specific audience of 'outsiders'. Oasis' construction as 'like us' attributes their universal appeal to a shared identity with the audience. This is mirrored in the articles on Suede and Echobelly whose appeal to outsiders is possible precisely because they are outsiders themselves. However, there are important differences in the construction of the 'outsider' status of each band, differences based in their gendered and raced identities. Suede's status as outsiders is premised on how they will be/have been perceived by 'straight' society, largely in terms of their style of dress and musical tastes. The coverage of the band contains numerous anecdotes about formative experiences in their home towns, usually involving threats of violence and feelings of isolation brought about by not 'fitting in' to the suburban environment. One interview with the band sums this up perfectly when it says that,

Brett himself was a bit of a loner; nominally aligned to a punk gang at school, but appalled by the violence...At 16 Brett was wearing a tuxedo to school or, failing that, a "yellow Cliff Richard suit", in an effort to get the Bowie blow-dried Let's Dance look. He compounded the effect by dyeing his hair blonde and sporting a bow tie. He sang in a band called Suave And Elegant.

"I was a right ponce actually," he says breezily. But there was fear about. Aside from the very obvious threat of a nuclear war (about which he used to have nightmares every night), the teenage Brett's chief concern was trying to avoid being beaten up, while Simon Gilbert, the drummer, paid the price for being the first 12-year-old punk in Stratford-on-Avon in 1977 by having the shit kicked out of him on almost an hourly basis (*Q* 2/93).

The construction of Suede's 'outsider' identity is rooted in a largely unspecified or unfocussed (teenage) alienation which their audience is supposed to share. Mat Osman of the band says,

"we do feel in touch with our fans who are perhaps experiencing the disappointments of ordinary life... We get lots of letters – normal letters, not just those unhealthy obsessive ones – and people often say we have given them some hope. There's nothing lonelier than small-town England. At school I thought there was no one in the world like me. It's a frightening thought. By liking Suede, some people feel part of a community. They know there're other people like them out there and it stops them thinking they're a mutation or a spy in the midst of the human race. You can find some beauty in a sense of deviance or unhappiness" (*Select* 4/93).

Statements like this construct the idea that because Suede are outsiders themselves, they can represent the experiences of other outsiders and this is frequently repeated in the articles on the band. One describes the atmosphere at a Suede gig saying, 'the spirit feels, perhaps significantly, very much like the relief and emotion of a gathering of exiles...it can only be encouraging that the country's self-styled loners are still congregating around this most self-styled of outsider bands' (*MM* 3/6/95). In another interview Brett comments that, "I think we've always been the outsider band...And it's partly down to me feeling like an outsider, which I have done all my life. And I think people who feel like outsiders empathise with the songs" (*MM* 18/1/97). Again and again Suede's appeal is constructed in relation to this audience of outsiders. Their songs are, 'the rallying cry of the down-trodden' (*Select* 10/94), 'still incandescent with sadness for wasted time, with the rage of the underdog,' (*Select* 4/93) or, 'a call to the lost children of the world starving for kicks' (*MM* 8/10/94). Brett is cast as, 'a twisted pied piper for a permanently lost generation' (*NME* 27/3/93a), while his songs are a 'roll call of the people on society's fringes with whom Brett feels particular kinship' (*NME* 27/7/96).

Unlike in the construction of Oasis' universal appeal, the articles on Suede rarely directly address a 'you' or an 'us', thus Suede's outsider audience is not constructed as who 'we' necessarily are. On rare occasions this is portrayed negatively in the articles. Suede are derided as 'a large cult concern' (*NME* 14/1/95), or it is claimed that they, 'only mean something to an increasingly small constituency of enthusiasts who believed The Smiths would change everything' (*NME* 8/1/94). Suede's ability to represent outsiders in this context constitutes their appeal as detrimentally exclusive. However, what a comparative analysis of the Echobelly, and to some extent Elastica, articles illustrates is how relatively generalised and *inclusive* the type of outsiderdom constructed around Suede actually is.

Echobelly's character and appeal is also constructed around notions of the outsider although unlike Suede, they are not misfits because of their tastes or style of dress whilst at school. Rather, Echobelly's outsider credentials stem from Sonya Madan's race and gender. In one article she is described as a, 'fascinating Indian-born frontwoman, whose

sense of racial rootlessness neatly renews the existentially troubled branch of classic English pop. We're talking nothing less than the Smiths/Suede axis here' (*Select* 12/93). Although Echobelly's inclusion in a lineage of 'outsiders' here makes identification with Sonya more accessible, it is not entirely typical of the way the band's appeal is constructed in the articles. More frequently Sonya's race and gender mark her as a unique kind of 'outsider'. For example, one article states that,

some of the greatest pop ever has spoken to the disconnected, the disillusioned, those who can draw no joy from their fellow person and feel that they're strangers among their own kind. You know: students. But Echobelly are aliens of a far cooler stripe. Disenfranchised but defiant...It's no accident that Sonya has become more of a focus than most singers. Women who are trained (brown belt) kick boxers and Indian by birth are not pop staples. And while rock has always reflected the alien standpoint, from Iggy Pop to Morrissey...the terms are strict, be male, be white and ideally be middle-class. Sonya is none of these things...Glenn is a genius guitarist, Sonya the Perfect Outsider (*Select* 2/94).

Sonya is a 'perfect outsider' not only in terms of mainstream society, but also within the indie/rock sphere. This is frequently reiterated in the articles, one of which tunders that,

some people have suggested that Echobelly are a little too good to be true, a little too cosmopolitan and pan-sexual for hoary old rock...it's tempting to read some sociological import in this eclectic mix of people. Tellingly there is a high outsider quotient. (*Select* 9/94a).

Unlike Suede whose outsider status makes them relevant to, and representative of, a worthy sub-section of the audience, there is doubt in the Echobelly articles as to whether they 'fit' the indie public and also whether they are deliberately exploiting their 'difference' to attract a certain audience. One article acknowledges this by suggesting that,

in the current political climate a polished pop band fronted by an Asian woman is guaranteed to attract all kinds of both good and wholly undesirable attention. Those obsessed with all things (still) considered to be minority issues for the sake of being seen to champion a worthy cause, together with those genuinely hungry for an accurate representation of humanity in music will come running (*NME* 20/2/93).

Although the writer here attempts to universalise Echobelly's appeal by insinuating that they represent 'humanity' the notion that Echobelly's appeal will be based on the attention of those fraudulently supporting a 'worthy cause' is equally represented. The suspicion with which Sonya's outsider identity is constructed not only indicates that artists who are not white or male fit uneasily into indie's scheme, but by highlighting Sonya's difference, and constituting her as an outsider in relation to the scene they maintain rather than challenge the status quo therein.

One article on Echobelly even goes so far as to question why, as a non-white female, Sonya would want to be involved in indie. It explains that she joined a band in order to escape the restricted expectations of Asian women, and states,

that's the world she was trying to get out of, and, having escaped, is attempting to give back what she always lacked – an Anglo-Asian role model.

“We’re getting Asian girls who stand right at the front and they watch everything that I say and do. The fact that anybody’s standing and watching us at gigs is an achievement, but obviously that touches me a bit more...”

It still may not seem clear, however, why Sonya should have chosen as her medium of expression the world of indie rock, normally the preserve of over-indulgent, white boy angst.

“I suppose it’s the sense of alienation,” she says. “Guitar music, rock’n’roll, the classic symptom is that alienation” (*MM* 18/6/94).

Not only does this statement throw into relief how naturalised and legitimate Suede’s participation as (white, male) outsiders is, but it constructs Echobelly’s appeal in even narrower terms; to women and in particular to Asian women. Four separate articles repeat an anecdote about one of Sonya’s fans which is recounted thus,

Earlier this year she received a letter from a young Asian girl whose parents were forcing her towards an arranged marriage while she was in love with her necessarily secret white boyfriend. She found solace and eventually the strength to confront her parents and demand her rights from the Echobelly song ‘Father Ruler King Computer’, a brilliantly flamboyant attack of patriarchy (*Select* 9/94a, see also *MM* 27/8/94, *MM* 18/6/94 and *MM* 5/11/94).

In response Sonya comments that, ‘that is what I care about, the fanaticism of people like that. The joy of playing live to those people, seeing young Asian girls who are defying their allocated roles’ (*Select* 9/94a). While highlighting the significance of Echobelly for Asian women to some extent validates their participation in the indie public, the construction of Echobelly’s appeal in relation to such a specific audience group reduces their relevance to other audiences. Sonya’s appeal is constructed, not as universal as Oasis’ is, nor as representing a constituency of misfits as Suede’s is, but as the indie sphere’s ‘other’. She, ‘takes a particular (female) experience and plugs it in for even us white European males’ (*Select* 9/94b), but is not ‘us’. She is, ‘seemingly purpose-built to tackle issues of race and gender’ (*Select* 12/97), but is not an artist with any resonance outside that remit.

The articles on Echobelly consistently cage their appeal in these terms, so the band’s ‘debut “Bellyache” EP has plenty to say about your life, especially if you’re a woman’ (*Select* 12/93). The importance of gender in the construction of appeal is also evident in the articles on Elastica and specifically in the way both Sonya and Justine Frischmann are posited as role models for other women. One article declares that, ‘Sonya could be a role model for girls for years to come. And a way more positive one than Morrissey was for a generation of sickly, bedsit-ridden males’ (*MM* 27/8/94), while a live review of Elastica states that, ‘hit single-to-be, “Line Up”, continues the feminist fatale theme – Justine’s sultry tones conveying the quiet sophistication of a nascent role model. No boy toy, she’ (*MM* 22/1/94). Both these statements reinforce the idea that as women, Sonya and Justine are most relevant/appealing to other women, just as Morrissey is positioned as a role-model only for ‘bedsit-ridden *males*.’ In another article on Elastica it is Justine’s position as a female role-model which is behind the whole band’s appeal,

It’s this head girl self-assurance which seems to have kept Elastica uppermost in the minds of fans who, in the throes of Noo Wavery, would have otherwise

defected to a world of Shed Sevens and Animal Men. Justine is riot grrrl (remember that?) fully realised but shorn of the pink hairgrip cutesiness and instilled with 24 carat insouciance which makes girls (and boys) actually trust her. Donna may provide the lust factor, but it's Justine who inspires devotion (*NME* 29/10/94).

Justine is ascribed value precisely because she is thought to have risen above the role of mere 'boy toy', to that of role model where her appeal is to girls, not to boys as an object of lust. Surprisingly, given the frequency with which female artists discuss the topics of sex or relationships, talk about the sex *appeal* of Echobelly and Elastica is almost absent from the articles³.

At least, discussion of their sex appeal to *men* is absent, however, in Elastica's case, Justine's appeal to women is an oft raised topic. Justine's sex appeal is occasionally referenced in relation to an audience whose gender is unspecified, for example she, 'smiles more coyly than the front row's hormones can stand' (*MM* 8/1/94), or is described as a 'gloriously cruel tease' (*MM* 22/1/94). More often though Frischmann's sex appeal is caged in terms of her sex appeal to women. One live review states that, 'Justine – with her hair behind her ears the spit of Cindy off Eastenders – sends the hormones of otherwise heterosexual girls into a jumble' (*MM* 6/11/93). Another describes Elastica's debut single as having, 'seethed with a ferocious sexual energy that would raise the hairs on the coldest neck, male or female' (*Select* 2/94), and while one female reviewer prophetically quips that 'Elastica can snap my bra anytime' (*NME* 20/11/93), two later reviews report the frequent occurrence on one American tour of female fans throwing Wonderbras at the band (*NME* 10/6/95, *Diva* 4-5/96).

To argue, however, that the female audience alluded to in these articles is unambiguously a lesbian one would be overstepping the mark. The articles talk of 'otherwise heterosexual girls', and imply that any 'hair raising' is attributable to the band, not the sexual orientation of the listener, thus lesbians are effectively invisible. Whether or not 'appeal' built around this framework is one which excludes lesbians, it certainly again constructs Justine's appeal in terms of other women. In fact neither the articles on Elastica nor Echobelly contain any sustained discussion of their appeal to men in any context. It is ironic therefore that in one of the only discussions about Justine's appeal to a *male* audience the writer argues that,

Justine's not an icon because she's "one of the lads", though; she's an indie sex symbol because there's a certain kind of British male who's really into the girl who looks like a boy. It's almost a form of displaced homo-eroticism, I reckon (*MM* 25/3/95).

Justine can only appeal to 'the lads' as a 'lad' herself. The convoluted construction of Justine's appeal in the indie public disavows the possibility of either relating to, or desiring, stars who are, or present as the 'opposite' sex. But it doesn't follow that this is a

queer thing, rather the absence of references to both lesbian *and* hetero- sexuality position appeal and desire in the indie public as intensely homosocial.

The framing of Elastica and Echobelly's appeal as roles models or even objects of female desire does seem to normalise women's participation in the indie public. Unlike the female bands in the new band articles they are not only portrayed in terms of their sexual attractiveness to men, rather the indie public values them as models of womanhood. However, the fact Sonya and Justine are valued because they are *women*, means that their appeal is caged in very different terms to the male stars'. Both Oasis' universal and Suede's 'outsider' appeal connect them to wide ranging audiences. The same cannot be said of Elastica and Echobelly because their appeal is constructed in gendered terms. There is nothing about the sharing of universal experience or how Elastica and Echobelly will speak to the disaffected, rather Justine and Sonya are singled out as role-models, not because of the kinds of artists they are, but because they are *women*. This significantly limits the scope of their appeal and once again particularises female experiences leaving maleness as the unmarked norm.

Homosociality and the erasure/spectacle of gender

The first sections of this chapter have analysed how the character and appeal of the 'stars' of the indie public are constructed. While both Justine of Elastica and Sonya of Echobelly are characterised as masculine and as appealing to a female audience, the disparity between the characteristics of Suede and Oasis means it is impossible to posit *either* Brett Anderson or Liam Gallagher as an 'ideal-type' star in the indie public. What I would like to argue in this final section is that the articles reveal a gendered division within the male artists in the indie public, and artists are constructed and become identifiable-with through their (dis)identification with one or other side of this divide. One article which attempts to explain Oasis' massive success illustrates the divide as it asks,

Why them? One possible explanation is that there's been a lot of artifice about British pop since the Roses/Mondays axis disintegrated. We've had plenty of Middle-Class Southern Art School *thinking* bands – your Suede and your Blur, with their meticulous agendas and codes of self-presentation...Oasis call them "soft" bands. According to Liam Gallagher there isn't much to discuss. It's all about *doing* (*Select* 12/94).

The split between 'soft' and 'doing' bands implied in this extract divides artists initially in terms of class. As the previous chapter showed, Brett Anderson, goes to great lengths to disassociate himself from a middle-class identity, but he is still cast as middle-class in the coverage of other bands. However, crucially 'class' here seems to have less to do with economic capital (however underprivileged their backgrounds both Suede and more so

³ Passing references to male groupies is really the only context in which this occurs, see *NME* 13/11/93 and *Loaded* 11/94 on Elastica and *MM* 10/2/96 on Echobelly.

Oasis became incredibly wealthy) than with symbolic/cultural capital and the way in which bands present their (masculine) gender.

The split between 'doing' and 'thinking' bands referred to above mirrors the manual/mental labour split Paul Willis identifies in *Learning to Labour* (1977). Willis observes that the counter-school culture of the working-class lads in his study is (dis)organised by the division primarily between mental and manual labour (p145). Like in the indie public where the 'mental' band, Suede are associated with a middle-class feminised masculinity, and the 'manual' band Oasis with a working-class laddish masculinity, Willis argues, 'manual labour is associated with the social superiority of masculinity, and mental labour with the social inferiority of femininity' (p148). Mental activity in this context is not only associated with the unjustified authority of the school and the irrelevance of the qualifications they offer, but is regarded as effeminate (p146/9). Willis reports that what his lads take as mental work becomes, 'mere "pen-pushing", "not really doing things" and, most importantly, "cissy": it is not basically man's work or within the manly scope of action,' and further, those who engage in mental labour can, 'be ignored because the mode of their success can be discredited as passive, mental and lacking a robust masculinity' (p149/50). Willis' observations are particularly salient here because they give a wider resonance to the themes found in the articles on Suede and Oasis and help to explain why even when Suede attempt to claim a working-class identity for themselves, their effeminacy and status as a 'thinking' band associate them in the music press with a middle-class identity.

The existence of the opposition between effeminate and 'manly' bands in the indie public allows for the identity of bands like Suede and Oasis to be constructed through a process of differentiation. Oasis' laddishness is not just a constituent of their star quality, but as the article cited previously illustrates, is indicative of qualities which had been temporarily obscured by 'your Suede and your Blur' and which are now in the ascendant. When Suede rose to greater prominence in early 1993 an almost identical suggestion was made about them. One interview states that, 'they're not a lad's band of the kind that's been plaguing the British music scene for the past few years...they're the opposite of all that, and that's what people have been waiting for' (*NME* 20/2/93). Even before the arrival of Oasis it was precisely the difference and novelty of Suede's *gender* presentation which set them apart from the pack and made them special. By mid-1996 when Oasis were established and Suede were on the come-back trail, it was again their style of masculinity which heralded their arrival. One reviewer declares that, 'the instant I heard 'Trash' I just knew that Suede were back and raring to slap Yob Rock ass' (*MM* 14/9/96 see also *NME* 27/7/96).

I would like to term the framework that is constructed in the coverage of Suede and Oasis as the erasure/spectacle of gender. Masculinity plays such a major role in how both bands are characterised and made knowable in the music press that it is impossible to say in this context that gender is an *unmarked* category, in fact quite the opposite, it is *spectacularised*. A gender binary is constructed between male artists, effecting the *erasure* of women and framing gender difference and evolution in the indie public in terms of 'new' formations of masculinity. This gender dynamic leaves very little space for female artists to 'fit' in the indie public. Willis makes a similar observation in terms of the mental/manual labour division. Mental labour is devalued because it is associated with femininity, thus Willis argues that,

A member of the counter-school culture can only believe in the effeminacy of white collar and office work so long as wives, girlfriends and mothers are regarded as restricted, inferior and incapable of certain things (1977:149).

For Willis it is not just that women are absent, but that they are devalued in order for the division to function successfully. In the indie public, rather than being 'restricted', women are largely ignored outside articles on specific female artists. In the case of Suede the emphasis on Brett and references to gay culture (and it is *gay*, not lesbian culture) focus the discussion very heavily on men and maleness, whilst curiously Oasis' laddism is also constructed less in relation to women and more in terms of the connections/division between men. In any case, a system of gender difference based entirely on competing versions of masculinity will be strongly homosocial.

As it is constructed through the characterisation of the band in their music press coverage, Oasis' world is overwhelmingly homosocial. Noel's description of the good life, for example, involves, 'cigarettes and alcohol, a f-ing bag of drugs, a ghetto blaster and your mates' (*NME* 23/4/94b). Women are posited as far from the centre of Oasis' consciousness and on the rare occasions they are mentioned they are spoken of in exceedingly sexist terms. Liam Gallagher demonstrates;

In a break from touring Liam is happy for the ample shagging time, but he'd rather be performing... But surely Liam enjoys all the adoration of female fans and the variety of choices touring brings?
"Birds are all right. They're all pink on the inside. Any bird who's fit is all right, unless she's nicked or ugly and she speaks backwards to you. If she thinks I'm boss, then thumbs up. Chicks in Japan don't even ask your name, just 'Can I sleep with you tonight.' Certainly my dear. I like American birds till they open their mouths. Then they annoy me. But if they're fit, they're fit" (*Sky* 3/96 see also *Vox* 10/94).

This article constructs women as a source of indifference at best and (exotic) sexual objects at worst. What is far more prominent in the characterisation of Liam is how entirely peripheral women are in his world and how his use of women actually relates more to other males. In one conversation with Noel, the following exchange occurs,

Liam: "...The Mondays were NOT about 'We're hard'. It was like 'we like having loads of Es, being in a band, shagging loads of whores..."
Noel (evidently getting the wrong end of the stick): "No, YOU like shagging loads of whores."

Liam: "Yeah, I did...Look, all I've got to say is, I'm just having a crack. It's not doing anyone any harm. John Lennon used to do loads of mad things..." (*NME* 23/4/94b).

Liam defends his behaviour with reference to the Happy Mondays and John Lennon, who act not only as revered and higher status *males*, but as precedents from rock's canon that justify his sexism.

A much reported incident between Justine of Elastica and Liam Gallagher exhibits a classic instance of how homosocial desire structures the construction of Oasis' relations with women. Liam's lecherous comments to Justine at the 1995 Mercury Music awards which both bands were nominated for were widely reported.⁴ Liam recounts the incident thus:

"I was double rude to her last night, going, 'Go and get your tits out'. It's her boyfriend innit, 'cos I love getting him at it 'cos he's a dick. If anyone said that to my bird I'd chin the c-. But I fancy her big time!" (*NME* 30/9/95a).

The tension here between Liam and his rival, Damon Albarn of Blur (Justine's boyfriend) is exemplary of Sedgwick's (1985) formulation of homosocial desire. She states women's status as "being ostensibly the objects of men's heterosexual desire and being more functionally the conduits of their homosocial desire toward other men" (p57). More generally the articles on Oasis construct their self-aggrandising 'lad' identity through comparisons with other men. One interview reports a typical example of this,

"Being a lad is what I'm about," declares Liam, though it's scarcely a revelation. "Define lad? I don't define anything. I'm just me and I know I'm a lad. I can tell you who isn't a lad – anyone from fuckin' Blur, anyone from Inspiral carpets, any band at all today. There are no lads in bands today, end of story. Johnny Marr's a lad. The Stone Roses are lads. Bez and Ryder were lads" (*Vox* 10/94).

Statements such as this position Oasis' in a completely homosocial framework. With gendered difference conceptualised *within* maleness and with women so inconsequential to both the models of available masculinity, female artists' participation in the indie public becomes extremely difficult.

I would like to suggest this is why Justine and Sonya are so invested in being 'one of the lads', because it offers an available, if uncertain, mode of participation in the indie public. Where Suede and Oasis are constructed as recognisable 'types' with established canons, styles and rivalries, Elastica and Echobelly are far more individualised. As women they are not invited or allowed to identify with either of the masculine star types, but no equivalent models exist for female stars. This is illustrated in the way in which Echobelly and Elastica are disassociated with the contemporary riot grrrl scene. An early interview with Justine Frischmann contains the following reassurance,

Neither is her music part of any current feminine movement.
"Do you mean Riot Grrrl? I'm sure we're nothing to do with that. A lot of the Riot Grrrl bands I've seen have made me feel ashamed to be a girl. It seems stupid to me to be in a band if you've no actual talent or gift for it." (*Select* 9/93).

Echobelly are also situated in relation to riot grrrl and then distanced from it. For example one article states that

As well as the desire to become actively involved in indie, Sonya's equally strong passion is feminism, not of the riot grrrl variety which degenerated into a means for anoraks and fanzine writers to throw rocks at the music press – which in their distorted worldview, loomed as large and as evil as a multinational corporation – but out of empathy with her Arab and Asian sisters, whose everyday repression is more than rhetorical (*MM* 18/6/94).

Although these comparisons take place within a female homosocial framework where female artists are defined in opposition to other female artists, Justine and Sonya are not constructed as 'types'. In both examples riot grrrl is devalued, ridiculed and over-simplified in order to ascribe value to Justine and Sonya but in so doing they are produced as individuals, with no apparent links to other artists or styles, female or otherwise.

This puts female artists like Echobelly and Elastica in a difficult position with regards to the *indie* public. As this chapter has shown, the construction of male stars positions them squarely within the genre of indie in terms of pre-identified styles and 'ways of being', but they also contribute to its development and evolution. As new stars Suede and Oasis are constituted as artists that will break new ground; they are characterised by their difference from what has come before, but their appeal is constructed around types of audiences, be they 'everyone' or 'outsiders' which already exist so that they acquire the double distinction of standing out *and* fitting in. The construction of female stars like Elastica and Echobelly and their appeal, on the other hand, does not follow the same path. Their position in the indie public is as women – they are angry, sexy, role models, appealing because they are women. It is certainly true that Justine and Sonya's masculinised gender presentation, and outspoken characters make available female social identities which are perhaps unavailable elsewhere, particularly in mainstream pop. Additionally Elastica and Echobelly are not generally constructed in terms of their (hetero)sexual appeal to a male audience, rather their main appeal is thought to be as positive role models for other women. However, it is precisely their characterisation and appeal as *women* which limits and particularises them, producing them as anomalies and excluding them from the discourses that construct stars in the indie public. Furthermore, the female indie public participants who are invited to identify with female stars are themselves marginalised through their attachment to stars who are also not full participants in the sphere. Male artists, though they may or may not either appeal to or offer identification to women, certainly are not constructed as requiring or receiving their participation in order to be constituted as stars in the indie public. Women are thus once again excluded from the indie public as a male star with a male following is constructed as the norm.

⁴ See *NME* 30/9/95a and *Face* 11/95 on Oasis and *Face* 6/96, *Diva* 4/96 on Elastica.

Will I belong dear?

National identity in the indie public

Artists and stars are not only constructed in the indie public through discourses of gender, class, sexuality and authenticity because that public operates as a national public sphere. Unlike some other forms of music mediation, and indeed the record industry itself, the print music press is a curiously insular affair, geographically speaking. Address in the indie public is to a British audience even when the bands being written about are not. What it means to be 'British' in this context and how that identity is constituted is therefore of utmost importance in understanding the processes of inclusion and exclusion in the indie public. The assumption of shared notions of Britishness and national identity comprises one of the ways in which inclusion is fostered in the sphere. The values and understanding ascribed to Britishness invite participation and construct a rhetorical 'we' which identifies and characterises the indie public. The address to a national audience in the articles on Suede, Elastica, Oasis and Echobelly takes both implicit and explicit forms. For example, the universal appeal of Oasis discussed in the previous chapter can also be read as implicitly national. They are described as the 'people's band' (*Sky* 3/96), are thought to have, 'captured the public's imagination and adulation' (*Vox* 6/96), or are said to have the, 'trust and the belief of the nation in their hands like no other group in the country' (*NME* 18/11/95). As Michael Billig argues in *Banal Nationalism* (1995), 'the "people" is not "the people" of the whole world: it is the people of the particular democratic state. As Hall and Held (1989) have argued, in modern democratic politics "the people" is a discursive formation, which is used synonymously with the nation' (p94). Oasis' appeal then is based on shared characteristics of the British people which endear the band to them.

That Oasis' appeal is linked implicitly to the tastes of the 'nation' is unsurprising given that the statements above were made during the height of 'Britpop'. What is more surprising in terms of the articles on Elastica, Suede, Oasis and Echobelly is how relatively infrequent discussions of Britishness and national identity are, and how narrow the scope of the discussion that does take place is. One explanation for this is that explicit discussions of Britishness in the music press took place, not in articles on individual bands, but in 'feature' pieces which attempted to forge a scene from a loose group of British bands who shared certain aesthetic qualities, and ascribe a collective cultural superiority to them.¹

¹ See, for example, S. Maconie 'Who Do You Think You Are Kidding, Mr Cobain?' (*Select*, April 1993), A. Smith & R. Benson 'Talkin' About My Generation' (*The Face*, July

However, this is in no way to imply that the articles on the case-study contain no explicit references to national identity. The ascription of certain British or English qualities to the bands, descriptions of them as representing certain versions of Britishness, and the negotiation of artists' own national identity all feature in the articles.

This chapter identifies and analyses three major discourses through which national identity is constructed in the indie public. Firstly British or English national identity is constructed in opposition to America and Americans and especially the early 1990s grunge scene. Secondly Britishness is evoked through the citation of a canon of British artists into which new bands are positioned, and in relation to various clichéd images of British culture, history and way of life. Thirdly in the articles on Echobelly, and specifically Sonya Madan, Britishness is constructed through discourses of race. The focus throughout will be on the character of the national identity constructed around the bands in the study and how 'we' are invited to share that identity. As Billig states, 'the speaker who explicitly addresses 'us', claiming to know 'our' interests, simultaneously depicts 'us', whether or not elaborate, laudatory descriptions are used' (1995:98). This chapter's aim is to understand who the 'us' of the indie public includes and excludes.

Britain Vs America

One important way in which Britishness is defined in the music press is through its opposition to Americanism, and in particular to American grunge bands of the early 1990s like Nirvana and Pearl Jam. Both Suede, and later Oasis, are hailed as a new vanguard of 'home-grown' talent on hand to see off the American 'invasion' of the previous years.² Suede, for example are described in one article as, 'far more than just a foppish pop cavalry, they spearhead a burgeoning British movement that turns up its nose at witless slacker culturecide and waggles its arse at Uncle Sam' (*Select* 4/93). Oasis are similarly cast as 'an invigorating blast in a decade that's too used to the introspection of Grunge' (*Vox* 11/94). As well as individual bands, British music as a whole is praised over American music. One article on Oasis asserts that,

it's simply, rather gloriously true that British pop, from the High Llamas to the Chemical Brothers, hasn't been this fabulously fertile in years. Apart from some actionable borrowings from the mighty Wire, there's not even much wrong with Menswear that a few plays of Soul Asylum or Counting Crows won't help you warm towards (*Select* 8/95).

The same article contrasts, 'the flannel-shirted lumpen-bourgeois gracelessness' of grunge with the 'personality, likeable savvy and pop of an older sexier, nobler vintage' of Britpop (*Select* 8/95). In these descriptions a whole range of British bands, even the less

1994), D. Bennun, T. Parkes, D. Simpson & P. Lester 'Britpop' (*Melody Maker*, 22 July 1995), J. Harris 'Modern Life Is...Brilliant' (*NME*, 7 January 1995).

critically acclaimed Menswear, are valued positively against what America has to offer the indie scene.

The dichotomy between British and American bands is also reinforced in another Suede article where the writer asks,

Isn't it time for the Suede backlash? Haven't we had our fling with nouveau decadence for another few years? And shouldn't we put tortured romantics on the back burner for a while so we can pin our hearts onto the sleeves of another gang of pretend rough American boys? (*NME* 20/2/93).

While this still implicitly devalues American bands, it frames an opposition in the indie public where 'quality' is an either/or choice between British and American alternative rock acts. Contained within this opposition are two important implications. First the acts will be male. There are no female acts referenced as bearers of national culture in any of the extracts cited above, and the reference to the 'flannel-shirted-ness' of grunge also masculinises it – female grunge acts were not known for their embrace of flannel. Secondly such an opposition frames indie as *the* source of British music, and implies that 'we' the British audience would not look outside the indie sphere for the next 'big thing'. Cloonan (1997) notes how this is invariably the case and that 'artists who are held to encompass a form of Englishness are overwhelmingly white, male, and working in the rock/pop idiom where lyrics are important' (p47). This has an added dimension when British, male, indie bands are compared to American, female, pop acts, such as one article which not only lauds Suede for taking a, 'stand against senility and Americanisation', but posits them as, 'the Anti-Madonna. The antithesis of her neurotic exhibitionism, her lurid in-your-face sexuality, her crap records, her Americanism' (*Select* 4/93). Here, the definition of Britishness as anti-American also helps distinguish indie from an increasingly Americanised and feminised pop market, thus indie Britishness is produced as male.

The construction of difference between British and American bands helps foster a closeness between the British bands in the case-study and the audience through a presumed shared British identity. Kumar (2001) describes this kind of nationalism as a, 'populist doctrine, in the sense that it asserts a natural bond between *all* the members of a nation (however defined). If blood, or language or religion, or history, defines the quality of belonging, then all who share in it must be admitted as members of the nations' (p44). The discursive construction of national identity in this way then clearly fosters inclusiveness in the indie public. 'We' – the bands, the journalists and the fans/audience – are all British and therefore share a worldview and understanding of 'our' indie music. This shared identity is persuasively reinforced in the articles that are written about the bands when they travel to America (at least one such article for every artist has been

² The fact Oasis are heralded in this way such a short time after Suede had supposedly 'defeated' grunge just illustrates the extremely short-term memory of the music press.

analysed here). These articles routinely comment on the difference between American and British audiences and frequently ridicule the Americans' responses to 'our' bands. In one article on an early Suede tour of the U.S. Brett Anderson expresses his amusement of a review of the band. The article reports that, 'what gives him the most pleasure, though, is the description of him as "A porcelain doll version of Winona Ryder" and the critique of Mat which reads, "Osman's clothing (is) ugly, unbuttoned wide lapel shirts that went out of fashion with punk"' (*NME* 26/6/93).

In the case of Elastica an article about their time in the States comments on the media coverage they received there and notes that,

replacing the Damon questions are barrages of even more irritating Women in Rock questions. For reasons that remain unclear, Elastica are considered a novelty 'chick band' here, whereas in Britain no one ever seemed to notice. "I think we were never really conscious of being girls in a band," suggests Justine, "so it never came out in our image or music...But in America I guess the male idea of rock is totally built into the culture so I can imagine women in bands in America have to put up with seriously ignorant, sexist people" (*NME* 10/6/95).

Not only does this construct the American press as 'irritating' and failing to 'get' the band, but it casts the British music press as more progressive/gender-blind when it comes to the coverage and representation of female artists. This is despite the irony that the Americans' questions about 'Women in Rock' are said to replace questions about Frischmann's relationship with Damon Albarn, thus failing to recognise how such questions are only asked of 'girls in a band'. Sonya from Echobelly makes some similar comments about the American media when she says that,

"People expect some sort of role-model status here," she explains during a respite between interviews with the US media. "They've all read the British press, so they're quoting the same stuff about racism. I'm thinking: 'Hold on a minute, at the end of the day we're a rock 'n' roll band.' Of course I care, of course I don't want certain things to go on in the world, but stop making me and the whole thing into a platform for politics. It's not about that. If they asked all the bands these questions, then fair enough. But I don't want to get lumbered with this shit. It's beginning to piss me off. It's like tokenising me all the time. Sometimes I think it would be easier to do a St Etienne or whatever. Meaningless lyrics that sound nice; it's all pleasant and poppy and aren't we lovely" (*Vox* 10/94).

She speaks to the journalist during a 'respite' from interviews with US publications, as though the interview with the British paper is hardly like talking to the media at all, and more like confiding in a friend. This confidential tone of Sonya's remarks again constructs the British music press as offering a more authentic truth of the band because a shared national identity means that in their own country the band will be understood and represented more accurately. Like Justine, Sonya's comments disavow the way in which the British music press also expect her to be a role-model and to talk about race, racism and politics, as we have seen in the previous two chapters here. National identity then, seems to be invoked in the articles specifically to aid construction of the bands as 'like us' and to make the artists in question knowable and familiar.

Canon and cliché

While the construction of Britishness in opposition to Americanism certainly helps foster a strong sense of inclusion for the (British) indie public participant, the sense of 'us' constructed in the articles discussed above provides little indication of 'our' character, other than not being American. The second way in which Britishness is constructed in the articles illustrates more fully the type of national identity 'we' share and which Americans do not. Ideas of Britishness circulating in the music press can be linked to the positioning of bands within a canon of British greats which privileges a certain type of 'British' band. One Suede article contains the following exchange, "we always knew the kind of band we'd be," states Suede bassist Mat Osman categorically through long, thin hair, "which was an important, celebratory, huge rock band. A really old-fashioned thing. A great British rock band" (Q 2/93). Such statements strongly link nationality to musical genre. They suggest that there is indeed a canon of British rock, that *British* rock will have a particular character, and that Suede can be slotted into it. Later in the same article the writer suggests that Suede could,

become Britain's biggest and sexiest rock band of the 1990s in record time...re-familiarise a jaded nation with glamour, sex and songwriting class on a scale not seen since Roxy Music, Marc Bolan and the finest inter-galactic hour of Bowie himself (Q 2/93).

In yet another, the band are said to 'stand revealed as the heirs to a lineage that includes The Beatles, The Kinks, the Buzzcocks, The Fall and The Smiths' (*Select* 4/93). The comparisons being made here may be partially aesthetic, but are also based on a shared national identity.

In order to be produced as British, bands, in this case Suede, are said to possess some characteristics, also possessed by the canonical luminaries, which allow them access to a timeless *British* greatness. This greatness is also discursively constructed as something which has been lost in recent years, but which a band like Suede will be able to restore. This is a common rhetorical tactic evident in much populist nationalist discourse which presents images of 'the nation' that often evoke a lost past – Suede will 're-familiarise' the jaded nation with qualities 'not seen since' the golden era, they will be an 'old-fashioned' thing. Similarly in the Oasis articles quoted previously the band are said to be part of a British pop scene that hasn't been this fertile 'in years', and that Britpop is recalls an 'older vintage' of music (*Select* 8/95). This past is something which has been temporarily lost but which, as Billig notes, 'is to be regained. The enemies, who would separate 'us' from 'our' glorious destiny and 'our' unchanging identity, must be defeated' (1995:101). It is precisely the 'unchanging' static-ness of this version of national identity which makes its construction in the music press problematic. By situating artists in a canon which stretches back to the early 1960s and implying that there is a uniformity in the essence of 'Britishness' embodied by certain bands, the music press fails to account for the changing nature of British society. As Bennett (2000) notes,

in Britain, the last 50 years have seen rapid changes in the nation's cultural character. On the one hand there has been a steady increase in the influence of US culture while, on the other hand, various immigrant and post-immigrant populations have introduced aspects of their own cultures into the everyday life of modern Britain (p191).

The way the canon is constructed around a static idea of Britishness not only fails to acknowledge how Britishness has changed over time, but there is also no recognition of the fact that the acts that Suede and Oasis are likened to in terms of a British canon are entirely white. Nowhere in the articles is it suggested that this lack of diversity lessens those bands' ability to represent the totality of Britishness, if such a thing were possible. In terms of the construction of the indie public this is another example of how unmarked whiteness is in the sphere, both in terms of personnel and aesthetically. Zuberi (2001) describes the canon drawn upon in the articles on Suede and Oasis as 'white guitar music robbed of any black influences' (p66), and both Bennett (2000) and Hesmondhalgh (2001) make similar observations about Britpop. The narrow scope of referents of Britishness in the music press' canon contributes to the construction of national identity as an exclusionary category in the indie public, which is highly salient when that public is addressed as a *national* audience. The significance of a *national* canon is explained by Kumar in his discussion of the 'elaboration of a national tradition of literature' in the nineteenth century (2001:48). He argues that,

this provided one of the most influential and long-lasting definitions of Englishness. English culture, at its deepest level, is seen as created by a series of great 'national' poets, dramatists, and novelists. Their writing embodies values, whole ways of life, which express the aspirations of the national culture at its best and highest (p49).

The canon into which Oasis and Suede are written by the music press signifies whose 'values' and 'whole ways of life' the indie public's notion of national identity is based in. The music press' discourse is superficially inclusive – it seems to address and include anyone 'British' – however the analysis of the articles shows that the version of Britishness on offer is in fact highly racialised.

What Bennett, Zuberi and Hesmondhalgh fail to comment upon in their discussions of the ethnic homogeneity of Britpop and its canon is the fact that this canon is also entirely *male*. Hesmondhalgh, for example, outlines 'three main ways in which Britpop discourse failed to recognise, and served to downplay, the complexity and multiplicity of 1990s British culture,' all of which focus on the way that, 'the Britpop history of rock saw British musical identity as not forged out of a cosmopolitan interaction with other cultures, but as made up of a limited number of essential national characteristics and music traditions' (2001:278). Hesmondhalgh's critique is undeniably valid, but it does illustrate the way gender is generally absent from the discussions around Britpop, nationality and race. My analysis shows that not only does the construction of Britishness in the music press exclude non-white people, but also non-male people. It is true that Elastica and Echobelly

are frequently compared to other British acts in the articles, however, the nationality of these acts is not mentioned and the comparisons made aesthetic. Nowhere are they placed in a historical lineage of specifically British acts in the way that Oasis and Suede are. Elastica and Echobelly are more likely to be compared to and grouped with other contemporary *female* acts, for example, one article comments that, 'ever since Echobelly...emerged alongside *female-fronted* indie outfits like Elastica, Sleeper and Salad back in 1994...' (*Vox* 8/97). I have discussed previously how the lack of a female canon and the tendency for bands not to be compared across gender means that female artists are excluded from the legitimacy and value conferred by a position in the canon. In the case of a specifically British canon, not only are British women's contributions to national popular music culture over the previous forty years completely erased, but the contemporary invocations of 'Britishness' will also continue to be based on an implicitly male national subject.

The erasure of both women and non-white cultures and people from the construction of Britishness in the music press, continues in the use of clichéd images of 'Britishness' in the articles, particularly those pertaining to war, sport and, of course, drinking tea! For example one Elastica album review states, 'the conquering of America has become British rock's holy grail, a *Rolling Stone* cover the equivalent of indie music's Cup Final' (*NME* 11/3/95), a declaration which encompasses nationalistic combativeness, myth and football connotations in one fell swoop. Such imagery is rarer in the articles on Elastica and, especially, Echobelly but common for Suede who are even described using Arthurian imagery. In one article the writer asks, 'whatever Excalibur-like implement it takes to cut it as a genuinely massive British rock band of the '90s, Suede have been handed it' (*Q* 2/93), and in another the band are described as, 'still more like King Arthur's knights... the men who have come to save pop are using as their weaponry certain qualities, certain characteristics of English culture that have lain dormant since the heyday of The Smiths' (*Select* 4/93). Heroic, mythologised images such as these are used alongside more mundane evocations of 'British life'. We learn that,

On the wall of Brett Anderson's dingy, claustrophobic Notting Hill first-floor flat hangs a poster of David Bowie. A pretty cool idea. Millions have had it before him. Anderson likes to contemplate the picture while he sips his tea (*Q* 2/93).

Elsewhere Brett is said to be, 'nonchalantly sipping tea' (*Q* 2/93), and again, 'sipping at his tea in the freezing cold basement of a veggie café in Carnaby Street' (*Select* 4/93), while in another Elastica interview it is said to be 'tea time in Camden' (*Loaded* 11/94). Mentions of Notting Hill, Carnaby Street and Camden add a sense of location to these images. This is also a feature of some of the articles on the other bands. One Elastica interview opens with a description of,

A cold, still, bright day on top of Primrose Hill. Tourists dawdle before the panoramic view of London. Joggers pant and trundle up and down the slopes. Hundreds of pedigree dogs lollop away from their terribly genteel owners to enthusiastically sniff each other's arses. Very peaceful' (*NME* 4/1/97).

One Oasis interview takes place in Noel Gallagher's adopted neighbourhood, 'God's hippest acre, Camden Town, NW1' (*Select* 8/95), while in another 'Oasis...gather outside Manchester City's Maine Road stadium for a photo session' (*Vox* 10/94). These descriptions place the bands in familiar and iconic British locations, thus increasing the association of the band with certain cliched images of Britain.

This is most apparent in an interview with Suede from *Select*'s April 1993 issue. The cover of this issue features Brett Anderson against a Union Jack background and inside devotes twelve pages to a discussion of the resurgence of British indie/rock and interviews with the new wave's brightest stars, including Suede. The scene for this Suede interview is set thus,

the men who have come to save pop music are draped around the reading room of a gentlemen's club in London. It is a queer room, half-lit by the watery sunlight of a Soho afternoon. There are rocking chairs, chaises longues, tea trays and, on the walls, lurid, over-priced pastel drawings of Auberon Waugh and various assorted nobs. It's shabby genteel, weird and secret and very English, and somehow funny. Perfect (*Select* 4/93).

That this interview was written explicitly as part of a celebration of Britishness makes the characteristics of Britishness it constructs particularly important, and the setting of the Suede interview certainly casts a particular image of the nation. That the band are pictured and interviewed at a *gentlemen's* club is especially poignant given the exclusivity of such establishments in terms of class, gender and race, and it appears that that exclusivity is replicated in the music press' construction of national identity. What it also illustrates is how easily it conflates Britishness with Englishness. The cover of the magazine prominently features a Union Jack flag, but inside Suede are described as 'very *English*'. In fact all the cultural references the music press uses to signify Britishness are specifically English which belies a definite English bias in the articles. As Kumar notes, 'non-English members of the United Kingdom rarely say "British" when they mean "English", or "English" when they mean "British"' (2001:41, see also Cloonan, 1997:52).

In addition to this, the somewhat traditional nature of the references to King Arthur, tea drinking, gentlemen's clubs and the such is perhaps more surprising given the music press' supposed counter- or sub- cultural character. Certainly the citation of these images in the music press may be ironic, especially in the early 1990s, but as Kumar again observes,

Englishness, as it has been handed down and celebrated, is today an embattled concept and practice. It is out of touch with many of the ideas and much of the reality of contemporary British society. But it would be foolish to think that it cannot still generate enthusiasm and mobilise considerable support, at all levels of society (2001:53).

On the evidence of the articles analysed here this would seem to extend to the indie public and its somewhat cliched notions of English/Britishness. There are some distinct

similarities, for example, between the evocations of Britain in the indie public and in other public spheres. Consider this extract from an Oasis feature,

British pop music hasn't been this exciting in years. The Tories are falling into disarray and a frenzy of self-mutilation, and Dominic Cork has just bowled the West Indies right back into the Lord's pavilion. Shit might happen. But not today (*Select* 8/95).

The celebration of Britain here bears a remarkable similarity to a speech John Major gave on April 23, 1993 in which he claimed that Britain would continue to be, 'the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers' (quoted in Billig, 1995:102). The kinds of cliched images Major invokes are like some of those used in the music press, and in both cases the audience is invited to identify with the images because they represent who 'we' are.

However, it would be erroneous to suggest that the music press' discourse of nationhood is identical to more right-wing conceptualisations of Britishness. The national characteristics defined by the music press are not identical to Major's and the articles construct national identity in part in *reaction* to more patriotic and conservative/right-wing versions. The indie public is about the underdog, not the Bulldog. For example, the way in which Suede's Englishness is constructed is in relation to a hidden 'truth' of the English experience. One review argues that, 'it's Suede's passion for tackling John Bull taboos – undermining and questioning the whole rain-soaked, reserved, sex on Sunday starchiness of your average bloke in the street – that makes them top social-sex-rebel stars' (*Select* 5/93), while another contends that, 'their debut album... will feed appetites in you that you'd forgotten you had; for English music that reflects brilliantly the joy, viciousness and melancholy of life on these shores' (*Select* 4/93). These statements include 'you' and construct a 'we' that shares a knowledge of what living in England is *really* like. This definition of national identity is not unambiguously celebratory or patriotic. Suede *tackle taboos*, they *undermine*, they represent not unabashed national pride, but the *viciousness* and *melancholy* of England. It powerfully constructs the sense in which 'we' are British in the indie public. This is what, if anything, is specific to the indie public's definition of national identity and how it is different to the kind of nationalist rhetoric employed by those on the political right.

The specificity of the construction of national identity in the indie public is evidenced again in the way, as Hesmondhalgh notes,

Britpop discourse was easily mobilised to support the opinion of [John] Redwood and his fellow Conservative opponents of British-European integration that increasing links with Europe were a threat to British culture (2001:277).

Initially this seems to suggest that right-wing and Britpop rhetoric were interchangeable. What my analysis of the articles shows is that within the discourse of the music press the issue of Europe was entirely absent and that the only conceived threat to British identity came from American alternative *rock* culture. In the music press British characteristics are

typically defined only through the assurance that they are not American. British identity is never opposed to any European or other national identities but America. For example *Select's* April 1993 feature on the new wave of British bands, discussed previously, uses military – specifically World War Two – imagery in order to signify a 'war' with America despite the fact that Britain and America were allies. Described as the 'Battle for Britain' the feature uses the headline 'who do you think you are kidding Mr Cobain?' and is accompanied by a military map graphic similar to the animation used in the title sequence of the sitcom *Dad's Army*. That this discourse, constructed around the privileging of British indie music over American alternative rock, was resignified in the service of upholding British sovereignty in an integrated Europe illustrates that the indie public's construction of national identity was not couched in terms that were necessarily circulating elsewhere.

What is problematic about the discourses of national identity within the indie sphere is that they are still exclusionary in nature, even while they constitute an alternative to more political or populist versions. In relation to the Major speech referenced previously Billig argues that,

as with all such metonymic stereotyping, the representation involved exclusion. Major's descriptions are very English: the lack of county cricket in Scotland merits no mention. His exemplars are masculine: he evokes beer and cricket, not sweet sherry and needlepoint, thus corroborating Stuart Hall's (1991b) comment that the national type is always an *Englishman*, never an *Englishwoman*. Major mentions the suburb, but not the inner city; the cricket ground, but not the football stadium; the dog lover but not the unemployed. This evoked nation is empty of motorways, mine-shafts and mosques. An artfully partial, and selectively idealised, Britain stands for the whole (1995:102).

Of the same speech Kumar also notes that it 'seemed to exclude not just Welsh, Scots, and Irish, but most women, the bulk of the English working class, and the vast majority of the non-white population' (2001:53), and this is precisely the problem with the music press' construction of national identity as well. The appropriation, however ironically, of either war or sporting imagery in this context associates Britishness with an implicitly white, straight and male subject, as well as a very public conception of Britishness. Any ideas about who 'we' are based in this scheme cannot, therefore, be said to be inclusive of all the indie public's potential participants.

The definition of national identity in terms of opposition to America, a British canon and certain national clichés does not apply equally to all the bands in the case study. There are two very notable exceptions. Firstly, while there are a few rare allusions in the *Elastica* articles to London and other clichés such as drinking tea, the band are rarely explicitly discussed in relation to either 'Britishness' or 'Englishness'. Although *Elastica* are squarely situated in the contemporary Britpop scene (see Harris, 2003, *Melody Maker*, 22 July 1995) discussions relating to how their music embodies a 'British' sound or to the national identity of members of the band is absent from the music press

coverage of the band themselves. In the articles on Suede, and to some extent Oasis, the construction of familiar, if ultimately narrow and exclusionary, forms of national belonging make identification with the bands available through a shared understanding and recognition. The white, masculine nature of the images and allusions drawn upon in the articles on Suede and Oasis not only stand for a universal, de-gendered, de-raced Britishness, but as the articles on Elastica and Echobelly show, are not so readily applied to female artists in the indie public. As such, the Britishness that 'we' are invited to identify with has no female presence or influence, thus kind of nationalised familiarity available to the male artists here is much less accessible to the female artists.

Echobelly, race and nation

While neither Elastica nor Echobelly are routinely discussed in relation to the discourses of national identity through which Suede and Oasis are constructed, unlike Elastica, Echobelly's national identity *is* subject to intense scrutiny in the articles but the discussion is caged in very different terms to those previously identified here. The overwhelming focus of the Echobelly articles in this area is not historical/cultural invocations of England or Britain, but Sonya Madan's race identity. The whiteness of artists like Suede and Oasis is completely unmarked in their music press coverage, and their ability to both be and represent Britishness is unquestioned. In the articles on Echobelly, on the other hand, Sonya Madan's relation to a British national identity is constantly negotiated and renegotiated. In an early interview with the band the writer discusses one of the band's songs, saying,

The mournful and longing "I Don't Belong Here", which might simply be about Anglo-Indian alienation, in fact suggests far more.

"I went to India two years ago," says Sonya, "and for the first time, I realised I was more English than Indian. When you're here, you're constantly told that you might be British but you're not English, and the colour of your skin affects you all your life. But the song's not just about Anglo-Indian alienation, it's about a general sense of young people feeling a need to belong" (*MM* 6/11/93).

Similarly, in another article Sonya is reported as saying that,

"A friend told me that we sound very English. That means a lot to me. I may come from India, but London is home. I'll never be English though, only British...When I went to India years ago, I was an outcast there too. Which was sad. So I haven't got a home" (*Select* 12/93).

These extracts exemplify two important elements of the construction of national identity in the music press and in relation to Echobelly themselves. Firstly, they hint at the distinctions between being 'British' and being 'English' and hint that 'Englishness' is a more exclusive category dependent on race and heritage. The fact that Sonya states she is 'only British' constructs it as a more accessible, if less highly valued, identity (Kumar, 2001:41-2). However, the articles on Suede and Oasis fail to construct any such distinctions and, when considered alongside Sonya's comments here, the extreme

English-centredness of the purportedly 'British' images and cliches (not to mention the canon) used to characterise those bands' national identity is revealed.

Secondly, the extracts above indicate Sonya's inability to identify with either a 'British', 'English' or 'Indian' national identity. In his book *Brimful of Asia: Negotiating Ethnicity on the UK Music Scene* (2004), Rehan Hyder examines the careers of four Asian bands (Cornershop, Fun^{Da}Mental, The Voodoo Queens/Anjali and Black Star Liner) and notes how members of those bands are also unable to identify as either English or Indian. He argues that,

this does not reflect the articulation of any kind of "identity confusion" so much as the inadequacies of discourses of race and ethnicity which fail to provide a suitably complex vocabulary able to express the elaborate processes at work in the negotiation of self-identification (Hyder, 2004:166).

In the case of Sonya Madan, the fact of her non-whiteness is used to problematise her own sense of national identity, which in turn affects the way Echobelly's Britishness is constructed in the music press. Echobelly cannot be easily placed in a canon of British 'greats', for example, because they themselves cannot unproblematically be considered British. More pertinently the benefits of a shared understanding of national identity signified by the images and cliches used in relation to Suede cannot be extended to Echobelly. National identity is not constructed in their coverage as something which 'we' share and which 'we' can identify with. Rather it is individualised as Sonya's personal 'struggle' between her race and her British 'home'. There is no sense in which 'we' are thought to share Sonya's dilemma – she says '*I may come from India.../I'll never be English.../I haven't got a home*' and even provides an interpretation of her song which makes it more accessible to an implicitly white audience who wouldn't necessarily identify with the racial lyrical theme. The 'elaborate processes at work in the negotiation of self-identification' referred to by Hyder above are certainly present, if not fully articulated, in the articles on Echobelly, however, what is clear is that they are absent from the coverage of the other white bands. Their entitlement to the category of 'British' (or 'English') and the way that that identity is made available reveals the implicit whiteness of the indie public participant.

The articles on Echobelly are further characterised by two seemingly contradictory discursive constructions of national identity which help set the terms and conditions for identification and inclusion in the indie public. Echobelly are at once hailed as perfect representatives of Britain and especially Britpop, a scene which is enriched and diversified by their participation, whilst at the same time their distance from Britishness and the other Britpop bands is highly marked through the attention to Sonya's raced identity. Here I would like to examine these two constructions of Echobelly's relation to national identity using the model of 'de/re-racialisation' outlined in Anne-Marie Fortier's article 'Pride Politics and Multiculturalist Citizenship' (2005). Fortier's argument is made in

the context of the British print media's reaction to the publication of the Runnymede Trust report 'The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain', also known as the Parekh Report, published in October 2000. While the report's main remit was to make social policy recommendations aimed at countering racial discrimination and disadvantage, Fortier observes that the media response, 'ignored all matters of social policy' and focused instead on the report's comments about the exclusionary nature of the category 'British'. In response to the report's contention that both 'Britishness' and especially 'Englishness' contain unspoken racial connotations, making them exclusionary of non-white Britons, the media accused the report's authors of making unwarranted claims of racism (p562-3). The media's counter-argument was, as Fortier puts it, that,

Britain and Britishness are and always have been inherently multicultural...The retort was clear: how can 'we' be racist if we've always been multicultural? 'We' are proud of 'our' inherent cultural diversity and recognise that it 'strengthens' and 'enriches' the nation...Mixing is a key principle of multicultural Britain, and is widely hailed as the antidote to segregation (p560).

Part of the media's reaction to the report was to prove that Britain is 'in fact a great place to be "ethnic"' (p570) by eliciting statements of national pride from non-white people, including public figures such as the athlete Kelly Holmes. These statements were 'deployed as counternarratives to the perceived accusation of Britishness as racist' (p570). Fortier argues that pride statements such as Holmes' effect, 'a kind of deracination – not from "roots", but from the historical conditions that "other" her skin colour; that is, that have rendered her skin colour the constitutive other of Britishness' (2005:569).

This kind of 'deracination' is also evident in the articles on Echobelly. In the comments about the song 'I Don't Belong Here' referenced earlier the importance of race is de-emphasised in order to re-situate the song as being about 'a general sense of young people feeling a need to belong'. This is indicative of the way in which Sonya is often disassociated with 'Asian' culture in a way which constitutes her as 'like us'. The oft repeated anecdote in the Echobelly articles about an 'Anglo-Asian teenager booked for an arranged marriage who told her parents where to stuff the idea after hearing "Father Ruler King Computer"' (*MM* 5/11/94 see also *Select* 9/94, *MM* 18/6/94 and *MM* 27/8/94), is one such example. The fan's, and Sonya's eschewal of Asian tradition is applauded, the reviewer noting that, 'there's just no arguing with things like that. Echobelly are definitely *useful*' (*MM* 5/11/94). Sonya even comments that, 'that is what I care about, the fanaticism of people like that. The joy of playing live to those people, seeing young *Asian girls who are defying their allocated roles*' (*Select* 11/94, my emphasis). There are also several references in the articles to Sonya's own parents' reaction to her embrace of white subcultural styles whilst a teenager. For example she says that, "'when I was at school I used to daub my clothes with paint and wear skirts with string holding them together because I couldn't sew. The family reaction was typical for an Asian family"' (*Vox* 9/94a). Through the rejection of certain cultural traditions and expectations characterised

as 'Asian' Sonya is constructed as both less racially 'other' and more assuredly 'British', but crucially the two identities are produced as mutually exclusive.

The process of de-racialisation that Fortier theorises operates along the same lines as those described above in the Echobelly articles. Fortier argues that for non-white Britons, 'belonging to the national community is about choosing to ignore the concealed markings of 'race' and the very historical conditions that have brought some citizens to speak as 'other' in the first place' (2005:573). Sonya not only 'ignores' markings of race such as arranged marriage and family expectation, but also articulates her entitlement to 'belonging'. In a discussion about a photo shoot in which she had worn a t-shirt emblazoned with a union jack and the slogan England Swings over which she had written 'my home too', Sonya says, "what happens if you're black, you're born, raised and happy here?...Can you not have the flag near you? I am doing it for controversy, but I want to help take away the racist connotations of the flag too" (*Select* 12/93). Elsewhere she says of the same t-shirt,

"this T-shirt is a reaction to the BNP. I wanted to make it clear that I won't be put into a victim role. Nobody's going to kick me out of the country. I want people to know I'll fight these Nazis. For an Asian girl to wear a Union Jack is obviously going to spark discussion. I like to piss people off by taking something that's sacred to them and throwing back the true meaning in their face" (*Vox* 9/94a).

All these statements construct British/Englishness as a characteristic worth possessing – the Union Jack is a symbol worth reclaiming and its 'true meaning' includes her in the nation. Fortier argues that these types of 'pride' testimonies helped circulate, 'an iconography of Britishness that put skin colour at the *forefront* of the meaning of Britishness' (p569).

It is not just Sonya's comments about her own national identity that construct Echobelly as representative of Britishness in the articles on the band. Echobelly are frequently and explicitly stated to be part of a British movement, their inclusion in such a phenomenon is qualified, but absolutely guaranteed. Consider, for example, this extract from a review of the band's debut album,

"Everyone's Got One" is a Great Modern British Pop Record. It's a Great Modern British Pop Record like "Eight Legged Groove Machine", "Lovely", "Pop Said", "Velveteen", "Suede" and "Parklife" are Great Modern British Pop Records. It could have come from nowhere else (the cultural diversity of Echobelly's members notwithstanding), it's riddled with references and mannerisms from Britain's uniquely self-reflexive pop cultures (*MM* 13/8/94).³

Although the 'Great Modern British Pop' canon referenced here is considerably more obscure, more female, just as white, and arguably less culturally validating than the one invoked in the Suede and Oasis articles, Echobelly *are* included in a nationally defined

³ The albums referenced here are by The Wonder Stuff, The Primitives, The Darling Buds, Transvision Vamp, Suede and Blur respectively.

lineage, but not without a reminder of their mixed racial and national backgrounds.

Another interview with the band states that,

Two years ago, British guitar pop was a moribund, sickly thing clinging to life by a thread. Practically every band were charmless chumps to a man and there was more glamour and pathos in an episode of *Peak Practice*. Nowadays we can almost be forgiven for feeling a little smug. NWONW⁴ aside, British guitar pop looks smarter and carries itself with an élan that was impossible to manage in the days of long shorts and Thousand Yard Stare T-shirts. Yes Blur, yes Suede, but also Echobelly.

Echobelly are unlikely torch bearers for a new British pop aesthetic, one of them is a Swede, one of them is an Asian woman, one of them is a black lesbian. Oasis they are not (*Select* 9/94).

In this account Echobelly are undoubtedly included in the new resurgence of great Britishness, but it is equally acknowledged that they do not fit the expectations of a 'British' band, a type exemplified here by Blur, Suede and Oasis – all white, male artists. However, however 'unlikely' Echobelly are as 'torch bearers for a new British pop aesthetic' they are validated as such.

Another article on the band not only situates Echobelly within a national music scene but praises them for being representative of Britishness in general. The writer attributes Echobelly's significance to,

a bizarre mixture of timing, hard graft, catchy pop singles and having the right unassailable image in politically correct times. Glenn Johanson, Alex Keyser, Andy Henderson, Sonya and recent recruit Debbie Smith may have been going for 18 months, but they're as much a slice of '94 Britain as the multi-cultural voyages of Trans-Global Underground. Having a Swedish person, two Englishmen, a black British woman and an Asian British woman in the group reflects a cross-section of society. To accusations of contrivance, Sonya insists that they do things in a slightly haphazard manner and are as surprised as anyone else, and yet demand MORE!

Echobelly also matter very much right now because of the breadth and scope of their music within the limited palate that is rock (*NME* 20/8/94).

In this version Echobelly's ability to diversify the indie scene is praised (their 'breadth and scope' within the 'limited palate' of rock), and they also gain legitimacy from the fact that they represent the multicultural reality of contemporary life in Britain. Further than that their ability to represent British diversity is seen as on a par with that of Trans-Global Underground, a more dance-oriented and Asian influenced act. There is a matter-of-fact acceptance that both Trans-Global Underground and Echobelly can and do represent Britain.

The construction of Echobelly as able to represent and embody Britishness and the British music scene seems to both foster their inclusion in the indie public and open up and expand the boundaries of national identity. It appears initially that despite the ways Britishness is constructed in the articles on the other bands, i.e., as being based around a white, male history and subject, the coverage of Echobelly attempts a resignification of

those discourses and constructs a Britishness which invites identification for a wider range of participants. However, such a resignification may not be fully effected because Sonya's ability to represent an expanded notion of Britishness is reliant precisely on her position as 'other' in terms of national identity. It has been noted that Sonya is significantly de-racialised in the articles and actively dis-identifies herself with Asian culture. Such a move serves to preserve a static and implicitly white category of 'British'. However, Sonya's de-racialisation is never fully achieved because as a non-white artist her race is still consistently marked, which discursively preserves the sanctity of the universal, disembodied, unmarked white subject (Fortier, 2005:573). In the examples cited above Echobelly's racial otherness is always highlighted even as they are held up as paragons of Britishness, thus Sonya is simultaneously re-racialised. Fortier explains this process thus;

One must be *seen* and *heard* to declare her pride in Britishness in order to achieve un-marked status. An 'achievement' that is endlessly deferred, as the non-white skin is never fully peeled off, in a continuous process of de/re-racialisation... conceptions of the universal formless citizen are in tension with the ascription of embodied and particularised 'otherness' to ethnic minorities, who must *stay in place as 'other'* in order to claim the *multi* of multiculturalism. In the process, Britishness-as-whiteness is re-naturalised through the re-affirmation of the legitimacy and belonging of the unmarked subjects (2005:573/4).

Sonya, *seen* in her customised Union Jack t-shirt and *heard* 'sounding English' and declaring her national pride is therefore marked as 'other'. The way in which issues of race and national identity are a constant presence in the articles on Echobelly, whilst being largely absent or discussed through different discourses in the articles on Elastica, Oasis and Suede, supports Fortier's theory of the preservation of an unmarked white British norm in the indie public. As Fortier further notes in terms of the national pride of non-white Britons, 'the very act of hailing 'them' as 'ethnic' – which in Britain still means 'immigrant' and 'non-white' – also produces them as already suspect of *dis*-identification...their allegiance to the nation is something to be achieved and repeatedly tested' (2005:571). In terms of the indie *public* Fortier's comments again lend credence to the idea that the sphere's claims of inclusivity, in this case through a universal 'Britishness' that 'we' share, are actually predicated upon the exclusion of the particular, in this case non-white, subjects. However, it is not just through the dual process of de/re-racialisation that an unmarked white subject is re-inscribed as central to Britishness.

The articles on Echobelly, and the other case-study bands define Britishness in relation to British music and the indie scene in general. Therefore, the positive associations of Britishness are intrinsically linked to the discursive constructions of authenticity, 'good' music and the artist through which value is ascribed in the indie public. In the extracts quoted previously Echobelly are able to represent Britain because their 'good' music

⁴ New Wave of New Wave – the short-lived term for certain British bands, many of whom

authentically represents the multicultural reality of Britain's population. They are, in this respect 'all about the music' and there is the further implication in the articles that drawing attention to the band's racial difference is tantamount to 'making a fuss about nothing.' This is a tendency which in the articles on Echobelly is reflected in the comments about other Asian bands and forms of Asian music. One striking example of this comes from an interview with the band that states,

Being derivative is one thing, adding another gem to the great pop/rock tradition is another... This is what Sonya always wanted – not to titillate cultural tourists by farting about with tablas and sundry ethnic exotica on the avant-garde peripheries but to get right in there...

"To me, indie rock was like a window I looked out onto from a locked room," she says... [so eventually she] did what she had always wanted to do – form a classic indie/pop band, no more, no less (*MM* 18/6/94).

This statement not only suggests that Asian-influenced music is mere 'titillation' for cultural tourists, i.e., white people, thus denying that white audience any scope for a depth of understanding of 'other' cultures, not to mention discounting any relevance or significance such music might hold for a British-Asian audience, but it also grossly privileges 'indie rock' as a more authentic and valuable cultural form (it is unlikely that 'farting about with tablas' would lead to one 'adding another gem to the great pop/rock tradition'). More importantly such a statement constitutes those who *are* 'farting about with tablas' as not being 'all about the music'.

This is reiterated in another interview,

"We're misunderstood!" says Sonya. "Pop music in the West is a white thing. You get trashy Asian bands who make a noise and say political things, but at the end of the day..." She stops herself, but the word 'Cornershop' is written all over her face (*Select* 2/94).

Cornershop here are cast as a band whose commitment to art is lacking because they privilege their race politics over their music. Statements like this construct 'others' who articulate race in an unacceptable way, their focuses – on politics or making 'ethnic' music – construed as illegitimately making an issue out of something which is deemed by the music press to be irrelevant in the context of a multicultural Britain. Fortier highlights the way that the media frequently deflect accusations of racism that might be levelled against them or the notion of 'Britishness' through the identification of truly racist 'others'. She notes that,

the well-intentioned liberalist turn towards tolerance, inclusion and diversity is characterised by a disaffiliation from the more overt forms of racism and racial violence associated here with the white working-class BNP activist or football hooligan' (2005:567).

In the articles on Echobelly cited above it is not 'racists' but other Asian bands that are disaffiliated in order to allow both Echobelly, the music press, and 'us' to emerge as non-racist, tolerant and inclusive. The principle is the same because by disavowing an

were later recast as Britpop, e.g., Echobelly, Elastica, Gene, Supergrass.

irrational, irrelevant fringe, 'we', here the indie public, are produced as rational and natural.

The articles also construct 'others' in the audience, especially those that judge Echobelly 'differently' on the basis of Sonya's race, rather than their music. One article claims that,

in the current political climate a polished pop band fronted by an Asian woman is guaranteed to attract all kinds of both good and wholly undesirable attention. Those obsessed with all things (still) considered to be minority issues for the sake of being seen to champion a worthy cause, together with those genuinely hungry for an accurate representation of humanity in music will come running (*NME* 20/2/93).

This kind of statement implies normative standards about how to appreciate Echobelly, and those who are politically motivated are devalued in favour of those responding to a universalised interpretation of the band's music. One final example of this theme in the Echobelly articles illustrates the point further – the band are said to be,

alone and gloriously unfashionable among this year's new crop. Not only do they Believe in Things but they also have the cheek to write about them, and in more elevated terms than just banging on about how they'd like to kill Gillian Shephard. This and their supposedly exotic personnel (in fact no more or less cross-cultural than the average inner-city primary school) has earned them a reputation as mavens of PC. But Echobelly are giant steps on from the cause-of-the-month cattle bands, and in 'EGO' they've consummated a joyous dream date between political honesty and the instant heart-rush of pure-pop romance (*Select* 9/94b).

The references here to Echobelly's 'supposedly exotic personnel' and the assertion that they are 'in fact no more or less cross-cultural than the average inner-city primary school' attempts to construct those who privilege and highlight racial difference in assessing the band as 'wrong' and 'other'. Both this extract and the previous one reinscribe the idea that 'it's all about the music' by highlighting Echobelly's artistic contribution and dismissing interpretations of the band that privilege their racial difference as something which makes them either superior or inferior.

Many of the articles also draw attention to media coverage the band has received elsewhere and criticise it for focussing too heavily on Sonya's Asian identity. One interview, for example, opens with the declaration that Sonya, 'likes boys, sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll and yet is always being asked for her political views. She just wants to rock 'n' roll like everyone else and yet has to deal with being an Asian role-model and spokesperson for women' (*NME* 20/8/94a). In a similar vein another interview with the band goes through a list of reasons the band have been criticised in media coverage elsewhere before pointing out how other (male, white) bands get away with the same transgressions. It then argues that,

in other words, the only real differences between Sonya's mob and their widely-lauded peers are gender and skin colour. Hmmm... let's not go overboard with accusations of racism or sexism here, but surely our old friend Captain Double Standards has played his mischievous part in this debate? (*NME* 24/9/94).

Yet another article casually comments that, 'while rock has always reflected the alien standpoint, from Iggy Pop to Morrissey...the terms are strict: be male, be white and ideally be middle-class. Sonya is none of these things' (*Select* 2/94). In all these examples an 'other' is constructed and negatively evaluated in terms of its relation to race (and gender). This allows the article in question, its writer and 'us' to eschew the negative associations of the 'other'. So in the extracts above 'we' would never ask Sonya about her political views or expect her to be a role model just because she's Asian, 'we' would never apply racist or sexist double standards to our evaluation of the band and 'we' stand outside an ideology of rock which supposes a white, male, middle class rockstar. This persuasive rhetorical device strengthens the connection between Echobelly, the music press and 'us' and implies a shared set of values and meanings.

However, the analysis in this chapter, and the previous two, shows clearly that the music press more often expresses the values that are constructed here as belonging to less tolerant, less 'right-on' 'others'. Fortier also notes this in her analysis of the construction of racist 'others' in the media coverage of the Parekh Report. She argues that,

the confinement of shame and guilt on to individual bodies allows for the nation and its 'decent majority' to emerge as naturally tolerant and inclusive. Wider questions of collective accountability and self-examination are concealed, indeed evacuated in the creation of injurious subjects (2005:567).

This is precisely the process at work in the music press' construction of 'others', be they overly political Asian musicians or misguided journalists on rival papers. By highlighting the shortcomings of these 'others' the music press need not reflect on its own practice. Thus the articles about Echobelly include the band in a British scene, and critique 'others' who construct either rock or Britishness as white and exclusionary, but without acknowledging their role in both the construction and dissemination of those same exclusionary discourses. Furthermore the critique of the narrowness of definitions of Britishness offered by the Echobelly articles is completely contained within those articles and is totally absent from the articles on Oasis, Suede and Elastica – all white artists whose national identity is constructed as natural and unproblematic.

Conclusion

The two very different constructions of national identity offered in the articles on Echobelly as opposed to those of Suede, Oasis and Elastica reveal much, not only about the character of Britishness in Britpop, but the character of the indie public itself. This chapter has shown that the music press employs a distinctively narrow outlook on issues surrounding the national identity of the artists it praises and the public it constructs through an inclusionary mode of address. Writers such as Cloonan (1997), Hesmondhalgh (2001) and Harris (2003) draw links between the resurgence of the celebration of national culture in Britpop and wider social and political phenomena

(multiculturalism in Britain, ethnic 'cleansing' and the rise of far-right groups in Europe, the BNP, football hooliganism, European integration and the dawn of New Labour for example). The music press makes none of these connections, aside from some oblique references to 'Nazis' in the articles on Echobelly. Rather its frame of reference of Britishness is located entirely in relation to the rock canon and timeless, clichéd images of Englishness. Such formations posit a normative national identity which is white, male and definitely English rather than British.

The positive evaluation of bands, like Suede and Oasis, who fit into the music press' definition of Britishness not only devalues bands that cannot fit those criteria, but also sets terms and conditions for participation in the indie public. Britishness is not just an aesthetic quality of the bands, but a set of values that 'we' all share and which 'we' celebrate. The exclusion of non-white Britons from this construction is particularly obvious and is evidenced in the articles on Echobelly which contain the only problematisation of the whiteness of Britishness. However, discussion of Sonya Madan's racial identity is individualised, and she is not constructed as one of 'us', but as an 'other' whose otherness at worst excludes her from Britishness and at best constitutes 'our' diversity. Thus while the construction of national identity in the indie public appears to invite identification and to include participants through a shared identity and understanding of what it means to be British, inclusion is once again predicated on an unmarked white, male norm.

Here they come, the beautiful ones...

Audiences and fans in the indie public

It is very difficult to write about how and to whom stars in the indie public appeal, or who is able or invited to identify with them, without talking about the audience on the other end of that appeal. Through the discussion and construction of how artists appeal to audience(s) the articles on the case-study bands already help construct that audience as participants in the indie public. This final chapter analyses the discourses constructed around, not the bands featured in the articles, but their audience. This group constitutes the implied 'us' of the indie public, it is who 'we' are, and often includes those writing for the music press in a community which shares a passion for and understanding of indie music. Identifying who is included in this group can thus enhance understanding of the terms and conditions for participation in the indie public. In order to accomplish this analysis I engage with the existing literature on fans, a body of material which is highly relevant for two main reasons. Firstly, as an alternative cultural public sphere, debate in the indie public is not on topics of 'general' or universal interest, nor is it directed towards a general or universal audience, rather discussion in the sphere is particular and interested and participants are required to have high levels of specialised knowledge. In this respect those participants share some commonalities with fans who also constitute an interested and specialised audience. Indeed part of the rationale for examining fans comes from the fact that, for some of the time, participants in the indie public are likely to *be* fans, if not of indie as a whole, then of certain bands or artists. In addition to this the articles on the case study bands contain frequent references to the activities and identities of the audience and fans of each of the bands.

Secondly, counter public spheres and fandoms share in common a dissociation with the type of rationality that characterises Habermas' original bourgeois public sphere. What is excluded from Habermas' sphere is precisely the emotive, affective element that fandom presupposes. In this respect the literature on fandom provides a theorisation of media-audience relations where emotion, affect and the particular are worked *with*, rather than relegated to the realm of the irrational. In his discussion of counter-cultural identities Kevin Hetherington (1998) also suggests a link between groups such as fans and the media when he says, 'groupings and lifestyles that are strongly associated with feeling and emotion tend to be feared as leading to massification and a herd mentality' (p42). This provides a direct link to Habermas' fears about the effects of the mass media (that they will produce a passive, undifferentiated pseudo-public), and of the gendered hierarchy that privileges a masculine rational individual over a feminised, emotional mass.

These issues are both concerns for the theorisation of fandoms, and may also assist in exploring how the indie public is addressed and constituted – how can the indie public maintain a masculine constitution based on the exclusion of a feminised mainstream, with its attendant uncritical/hysterical mode of fandom, whilst at the same time be a counterpublic sphere based in the rejection of masculine disinterest?

This chapter will address these questions and analyse how the music press creates an included 'us' and an excluded 'them' which construct identity in the indie public. The analysis is divided into two main sections. In the first the representation and construction of fans in the articles on the case-study bands will be examined, especially for the way in which the category of the fan is gendered, and whether male and female fans engage in different types of fandom with regards to the bands in the case-study. The notion of the hierarchisation of different types of fandom will also be addressed in order to understand how the indie public differentiates itself from 'lower' forms of fandom, especially those associated with the feminised mainstream. Identifying the kind of fandom that is validated in the indie public will illustrate more of the terms and conditions for inclusion in the sphere. The second part of the chapter will discuss the way the music press reports the opinions of those outside the indie public in order to further illuminate 'right' and 'wrong' ways of appreciating indie. Many of the articles are written in response to the erroneous views of unspecified 'other people' – mainstream audiences, industry hype-mongers and other media sources, especially the tabloids. The wrongness of 'other people's' opinions are frequently held up to scrutiny and ridicule in the articles and through disidentification with the opinions of these others, 'we', the normative indie public participants, are identified and validated. This chapter does not, and indeed cannot, examine the responses and activities of actual fans and audiences of the case-study bands, but examines how they are constructed through the discourse of the music press.

The gender of fans

Academic writing on fandom almost always begins with a lurid description of the negative treatment fans have received in other literature on the topic. Fandom, we are told, does not merely signify an enthusiasm and/or attachment to a particular star, activity, or genre but a blind devotion or dangerous obsession fuelled by a mass-media able to manipulate fans into acts of mass hysteria or individual violence. In this picture fans have no critical distance from the object of their attachment, and are probably involved in an intense fantasy relationship with a celebrity. Joli Jenson (1992) describes how, 'the literature on fandom is haunted by images of deviance. The fan is consistently characterised (referencing the term's origins) as a potential fanatic. This means that fandom is seen as excessive, bordering on deranged, behaviour' (p9). Henry Jenkins (1992) reinforces this picture noting that,

the fan still constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire. Whether viewed as religious fanatic, a psychopathic killer, a neurotic fantasist, or a lust-crazed groupie, the fan remains a 'fanatic' or false worshipper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of 'normal' cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality (p15).

While they were heavily referenced, discourses of psychotic and crazed fans were usually mentioned in the literature so that they could thereafter be thoroughly critiqued and dismissed. There are still aspects of the 'crazed' fan which gain attention, notably the associations of low-culture, lack of critical distance and passive/excessive consumption with (young) women's fandom, but on the whole fans are approached in contemporary literature as a type of 'skilled audience' that is, as Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue, 'not unthinkingly accepting of what is produced for them...[but] actually discriminating in their approach...active in their appropriation of texts and in their critical understanding of them. Fans are also productive in a material sense.' (p121/125). Despite the re-assessment of fans in academic literature, the representation of fans in the articles on Elastica, Suede, Oasis and Echobelly more closely resembles the original fan-as-deranged-fanatic view. This takes a number of forms in the articles, in some there are direct mentions of 'positively demented fans' or 'nutty fans' (*NME* 13/3/93), but in general the comments are more suggestive, but no less constitutive of the figure of the 'fanatic'. In one of the early articles on Elastica, for example, the band are said to be,

almost painfully aware they're at a stage where things are serious, on the edge of out of control, scary.

"We're starting to get fans who follow us round," says Donna.

"There's this guy who works at Heathrow called David, and he wants to start our fan club. He hitched all the way up to see us in Manchester...It's weird to think that we can make someone do that." (*NME* 29/10/94)

The behaviour of fans like "David" is characterised as irrational and obsessive, thus marking it as abnormal. Another Elastica article describes the writer's attempts to get an interview with the band, which initially failed so he recruited a fanzine writer, also coincidentally called David, to do the interview for him. It states that,

the following day I wake up to discover the light flashing on my ansaphone. It's our friend David the fanzine editor: "Good morning," he declares triumphantly, "I won't be coming in with the transcription. In fact, I won't be coming in to the Melody Maker at all. I think the whole thing sucks. I was just having a little game with you."

I phone him back and we talk further. He reckons that, as a former fanzine editor, I've "sold out to The Man", and that his double-bluff was a sock in the eye to the horrid, corporate, fascist Melody Maker (the same Maker whose Reviews Editor he's spent most of last year pestering for work). So there. (*MM* 8/1/94)

Descriptions like this not only construct the fan as hypocritical and ridiculous, but also position fan production, here fanzine writing, as inferior to the 'official' music press. There is a similar instance of this in an article about Suede's first American tour which reports that,

One guy wearing socks and open-toed sandals hands Bernard a Morrissey fanzine – a Morrizine – and asks him to sign his Morrissey T-shirt. Bernard coldly declines and signs his jeans, “I am not Morrissey, love Bernard.”

The guy... asks if he can hang around on the steps listening to the soundcheck and when the band run through ‘Animal Nitrate’, he freaks right there in the alley, in broad daylight... the guy in open-toe sandals and the Morrissey T-shirt comes rushing over.

“THEY WERE UNF-INGBELIEVABLE! DID YOU HEAR ME? AFTER THE FIRST SONG, I SCREAMED, ‘BRETT WILL YOU MARRY ME?’ I’M SORRY BUT I DID!” He’s hysterical. “THEY TRAMPLED ALL OVER THE CORPSE OF MORRISSEY – PUT THAT IN THE *NME!*” (*NME* 26/6/93).

This fan’s behaviour is not only inappropriate – he fails to separate his Morrissey obsession from the band he is actually meeting – but over-emotional and excessive. The repeated descriptions of his ‘open-toed sandals’ indicate his ill-judged taste, while the reporting of his speech in capital letters, and the description of him as ‘hysterical’, further reinforces his lack of control. These examples show how thoroughly the music press constructs the fan as the ‘other’, a ‘them’ in relation to an unmarked ‘us’. Even where the fan is not as pilloried as in the examples above, it is always an alien figure. In an article on Echobelly the writer states that the band are, ‘currently inspiring an astonishing amount of loyalty in an ever-growing number of fans,’ and later that, ‘their performances immediately elicited sackloads of letters from angst-ridden young things, proclaiming undying love for the band and asking for advice and opinions on just about everything from boy-girl problems to race and racism’ (*MM* 6/11/93). Nowhere in this statement is the insinuation that the reader is one of those ‘angst-ridden young things’ – ‘we’ are merely observing the antics of the fan, not participating in them.

The construction of ‘fans’ as irrational and ‘other’ in the articles on the case-study bands not only limits forms of acceptable participation in the indie public, but genders them. The literature on fandom and audiences is careful to detail the ways in which male and female fans are differently treated and addressed and how different types of fandom are gendered and valued according to those associations. The literature pays so much attention to the activities, identity and *devaluation* of female fans, and the type of hysterical fandom represented in the extracts above, that it is often difficult to discern exactly what it is male fans do and how masculine forms of fandom came to be so highly valued! It is even possible to argue that the very category of ‘the fan’ is implicitly feminine. Jenkins notes that the classic image of the ‘psychotic’ fan, if it is portrayed as masculine’ is frequently de-gendered, asexual or impotent (1992:15). The few descriptions of male fans there are in the articles on the case study bands support the idea that the male fan is emasculated. In one article Oasis guitarist Paul ‘Bonehead’ Arthurs opines that,

“I get pissed up students with round glasses and spots coming crawling round me doorstep at 3am, knocking milk bottles over. They robbed me f-in’ door-knocker!... I’m wondering what he’s doing with my door-knocker. Something double weird, I’ll bet. He’s probably mad for shagging me but the nearest he could get was my door-knocker” (*NME* 30/9/95a).

The masculinity of the fans in this description is undermined firstly by the fact that they are students, and unattractive ones at that, and secondly by the insinuation that they are less than fully heterosexual. Given the way that Oasis' masculinity is constructed in the music press through the valuation of the body over the mind, it is clear that the fan's masculinity is deficient in comparison to the band's. Male fans, however, are not just emasculated by the standards of Oasis' laddish masculinity, but also next to Suede's effeminacy. A fan is described in an article on Suede thus,

Downstairs in the lobby, Steve has been waiting patiently. Under his arm he has a huge scrapbook filled with just about every bit of press Suede has ever done. Steve is from Fremont, California and as Brett and Mat sign autographs, he explains that he got into Suede when he heard that Morrissey had been playing this song called 'My Insatiable One' live. He dutifully sought out the Suede singles on import and fell in love. "I have four of these on Morrissey," he says pointing to his scrapbook. "And another on River Phoenix."
"Really? You should get out more," laughs Brett (*NME* 26/6/93).

In both these examples male fans are 'weird' or sad, and are positioned as such both by the articles' writer and through the comments of the bands themselves. The descriptions of the form their fandom takes are delegitimated and made inappropriate, and this is in part achieved through undermining the male fan's masculinity.

Male fans' feminisation not only emasculates/devalues them in terms of gender, but associates them with the irrationality, passivity and inauthenticity of mass culture (Huysen, 1986). The association of the feminine with mass cultures is vitally important in the indie public which is constituted precisely in opposition to the 'masses' and its attendant forms of fandom. While the literature on fandom does focus more heavily on feminine forms of fandom, masculine forms *do* exist, and one of the most frequently discussed is the fan of 'serious' music. This type of fan is particularly salient to the analysis here because it most resembles the kind of fandom that is validated in the music press. However, the serious music fan is also constituted as both male and mature. In her article on the representation of women in the British music press, Helen Davies (2001) argues that the music press, 'often fail to acknowledge that female fans of "serious" rock music exist at all' (p313). The fact that the very concept of 'serious' rock music is constructed against a feminised mainstream means that female fans not only engage in the wrong kind of fandom, but they are fans of the 'wrong' kind of music. For the music press, teenyboppers are constructed as the 'other' against which 'we' are distinguished. However, the articles on the case-study bands suggest that it is also teenyboppers' 'teeniness', their youth, as much as their gender which excludes them from the indie public. The reason age enters into the equation is hinted at by Straw (1997) in his comments about the most cited account of male fandom, Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*. Straw argues that fandom represents a choice for men between, 'the *immature*, homosocial world of the record store' and 'entry into a world of *adult* sexuality' (p11, my emphases).

The close relationship of age and gender in fans is frequently referred to in the articles. In one Brett Anderson claims that, “the reason we stood out when we started was we were the first alternative band to write a f-ing tune for four years. Now EVERYONE writes pop songs. We got teenage girls interested in guitar bands again. We made bands think about image again” (*NME* 15/7/95). This is telling because it suggests not only that teenage girls are interested in guitar music, but that between 1993-1998 more of them made up the audience for indie music precisely because it became part of the mainstream pop scene. However, Anderson’s statement clearly attributes the band’s appeal to teenage girls to their accessible tunes and considered image, the two elements which are commonly thought to endear teenyboppers to the objects of their fandom and the reason that type of fandom is devalued in the indie public. These teenage girl fans are not being constructed as the alienated ‘outsiders’ that Suede are supposed to represent, nor are they responding to the authentic expression of Suede’s working class suffering. Another article on Suede describes their fans as being, ‘as close to a frenzied teenage exorcism as could be imagined. As with most of Suede’s performances, the audience is disconcertingly young, behaving with all the entranced passion of devout enthusiasts’ (*NME* 14/1/95). The adjectives used to describe this audience – frenzied, entranced, devout – again suggest irrationality and blind devotion. Like the sad, desexualised male fans, teenage fans are constructed as ‘other’. They are undeniably present at the gigs being reviewed, but they are not ‘us’, and not part of the indie public.

The presence of ‘frenzied teenagers’ causes a tension in the articles between the desire (and in some cases, success) of bands to attract a mainstream pop audience, and the construction of such audiences are unworthy and uncritical. For example, in the course of one interview Justine Frischmann, notes that,

“We’d love to be popular but it’s the same old story: if the masses suddenly loved everything we do it would be great, but it would also be a miracle. I just can’t imagine secretaries at our gigs or 13-year-old girls buying our records” (*Dealine* 10/94).

Elsewhere, while talking about Blur’s forthcoming album, Frischmann says that, “what Damon’s doing musically now is not going to appeal to 12-year-olds so much, and I think that’s a good thing” (*NME* 4/1/97). Liam Gallagher expresses similar sentiments when he tells how he has to, “sign loads of autographs for four-year-old kids who haven’t got a f-in’ clue what we’re about, but they’re into it” (*NME* 30/9/95a). Although Frischmann and Gallagher’s statements seem contradictory, they both connect a youthful, and feminine audience with a lack of understanding and present the new pop fans as an ‘other’ audience. They are not constructed as the ‘natural’ audience for indie; that position is occupied by a largely undefined, but definitely mature and masculine constituency, and the implication is that ‘good’ music will attract this kind of ‘good’ audience. In this context not only is the indie public able to disassociate its form of fandom from feminised,

hysterical and irrational pop fandom, but also from the immaturity associated with Straw/Hornby's characterisation of the 'homosocial world of the record store'.

The indie public's female audience

The conflation of a young, teenybopper audience with a female audience explains one aspect of women's exclusion from the indie public. But what about female fans who cannot be classified as teenyboppers? Davies explains that women are commonly thought not to be interested in serious rock music and that evidence of this is provided by the fact that the music press is neither aimed at them, nor read by them in large numbers (2001:313). This spurious line of reasoning is compromised, Davies further argues, by the revelation that actually as many as one third of music press readers are female, 'a significant proportion considering that the music press is clearly not designed to appeal to them' (p313). Davies concludes that,

Female fans are unwelcome. Female serious music fans are treated as much of a perpetual novelty as female performers...women and girls are expected to like teenybop music, and those who choose to listen to rock music are constantly suspected of liking it for the "wrong" reasons...women who like intelligent music are frequently assumed not to really understand it, with their fandom explained by sexual attraction to a male musician...The music press views the music it covers as serious and cerebral and women as inherently not serious and not cerebral. It therefore cannot accommodate women in the discourses surrounding 'serious' music fans (p313).

The analysis of the articles on the case-study bands both supports and complicates Davies' conclusions. Her argument is too closed in that it disallows the possibility of thinking about what it is about the music press that appeals to the female third of its readership – it cannot, for example explain figures like Justine Frischmann and Sonya Madan who are presented in the music press as role-models for other girls. Nor can Davies' perspective account for the praise and validation Oasis receive precisely for not being cerebral.

However, Davies does highlight one crucial point about female fans which is that they are presumed to like artists for the 'wrong' reason, which invariably turns out to be linked to their sexual attraction or desire for a (male) artist. Cheryl Cline (1992) articulates this 'wrongness' very well when she says,

To so much as mention Bruce Springsteen's biceps is to leave yourself open to charges of immaturity, bad taste, politically incorrect thinking and general mush-mindedness...If you admit to lusting after Bono or David Byrne, that's still no good, because U2 and Talking Heads are serious bands, and women who happened to notice that David Byrne is an anatomically correct male are misguided at best. Not wanting to be on the wrong end of the pointing finger of scorn, we keep our lips buttoned and lust in silence (p70-1).

The idea that women's fandom is not motivated by the 'right' reasons is borne out by the articles on the case-study bands. It is not just that fandom based on physical attraction to

a male star is portrayed as wrong, but this is almost the *only* way in which female fandom is portrayed. In one live review of Oasis the (male) writer asserts that,

“Shakermaker” is equally fine. “Shake along with me,” the man sings, knowing *we’re* powerless to resist, knowing he has *us* all spellbound and half-naked in the lap of his baggy sweater. “Shake along with me.” Liam’s eyebrows are sending young *girls* into spasms (*MM* 24/12/94, my emphasis).

While the response of the whole audience in this extract seems to be partially sexualised, the ‘we’ invoked is reacting to Liam’s voice, while the ‘girls’ that are mentioned, and who are not included in the ‘we’, are reacting to Liam’s eyebrows, i.e., something about his physical appearance. A live review of Suede talks about the fans as, ‘dozens of dampened Suedettes’ (*NME* 13/3/93) which again alludes to the sexual response of the female audience,¹ and which is reinforced by the revelation that Brett, ‘loses the shirt off his back every single night to various claws in the front row’ (*NME* 13/3/93).

The descriptions of the (re)actions of female fans to the bands when they are on tour tell the same story. An article about Oasis’ international touring in late 1994 contains the following,

Oasismania has reached fever pitch in Sweden... the show at the Tivoli turns into some kind of a hometown triumph. The crowd go completely and utterly bananas from Note One... when they touch down in Tokyo, there are girls waiting for them at the airport. When they speed into the hotel, the same girls have somehow beaten them there... Oasis wander about in a daze, giggling girls following them from shop to hotel... every night, they’re mobbed, by Japanese girls with Man City shirts on... everyone is inundated with presents, some bang on, some embarrassingly expensive... the hotel turns into a madhouse. The girls in the foyer can tell band or crew their room number quicker than the receptionist. They know the whole tour schedule off by heart... but by the final gig in Nagoya, flu is taking hold. The girls are suffocating them, giving them hand massages in the middle of bars for Christ’s sake, bringing them ever more bizarre gifts. It’s all getting too much. They’ve crossed the line. (*Select* 12/94)

In a very similar account, Suede provide details of some of their fans,

What must Suede-mania feel like from the inside?

“It’s like being the The Pope,” laughs Mat Osman, after yet another in a procession of hyperventilating girls (and boys) gets down on one knee to kiss the bassist’s hand... “And there were people in tears...”

Yeah, I saw a few tonight.

“No, not at the gigs: in the streets!” There was one girls who got a restaurant table next to ours and just broke down: ‘(sobs) I just can’t handle it!’ They had to carry her out, with her heels dragging on the ground”... Brett Anderson wanders over, disarmingly un-sexgodlike in a battered blue snorkel jacket, his fringe swept off his face, and apologises for not having been able to talk to me yet. I understand, I tell him, as a teenage girl and her autographed cleavage wanders grinning into the night, while two self-proclaimed “white witches” refuse to loosen their grip on the impossibly patient singer’s wrist (*MM* 17/4/93a).

The actions of the fans in these extracts are constructed as extreme, hysterical and sexual. Their devotion to the bands is unrequited and presented as an unwanted symptom of their increasing fame. In both examples the word ‘mania’ is used to describe

¹ The feminine ending of *Suedette* definitely connotes female fans of the band (see Feigenbaum, 2005:45).

this type of following and labelling it as such sections 'manic' fans off from the 'real' fans, or 'us'. Female fans' behaviour is once again othered and constructed as being motivated by the wrong reasons. This is replicated later in the article when Suede's fans are polled at a gig on why they like the band. The article reports,

What have Brett and Co got that the others haven't? Words like "charisma", "glamour", "presence" and "raw power" occur regularly. "Bernard's gorgeous, and a brilliant guitarist," explains Sarah, 18, from Shotts. "He stole the show. And Brett's vocals are just unique. But I think Mat looks like a sloth". Kerry, Karen and Monica, all 18, from Wishaw, are unanimous: "Sex appeal!" Several kids too young to remember The Smiths claim *them* as their favourite band prior to Suede. "Suede are the best there is around," comments James, 18, of Wishaw, "but they're nowhere near as good as The Smiths" (MM 17/4/93a).

The female fans here cite physical attractiveness and 'sex appeal' as the reasons they like the band, whereas the male fan, while he is mocked for his immaturity, still basis his appreciation on *musical* criteria.

Indeed in most accounts, fandom for girls and women is intimately tied up with (hetero)sexual desire, while this plays a negligible role in accounts of male fandom. The association between female fandom and sexual desire can be interpreted both positively and negatively. At the negative end of the spectrum it casts all female fans as 'groupies'. Groupie is, officially, the term given to people (usually women) who pursue (and engage in) sexual liaisons with rock stars. Cline warns that it is a, 'slippery term' which is, 'used more or less synonymously with "girl Rock fan", "female journalist", and "woman Rock musician"' (1992:77). 'In the minds of far too many Rock critics,' Cline continues, 'female fans are automatically groupies, because, as the critics rather smugly imply, you just can't get around the old man-woman thing' (p79). While groupies undoubtedly do exist, tarring all female fans as groupies is inevitably damaging, translating, as Cline delicately puts it, as 'we're really all just sluts' (p83). Cline sees the groupie image as 'a strictly masculine daydream – *Them* as the rock stars surrounded by *Us*, the groupies' (p73). Its status is as a profoundly sexist put down (Garratt, 1990:407), and results in the trivialisation and dismissal of female fandom. The point here is not whether or not female fans' attachments *are* based on sexual attraction to male stars, but that their fandom is consistently portrayed as such and consequently as the 'wrong' reason for being a fan. While this view prevails it will always be perceived that boys are fans of music, while girls are fans of boys, and that in the indie public the fan of music is privileged and legitimated.

Gendering the audience

It is, therefore, a male perspective which characterises fandom in the indie public while the female audience is frequently erased. This is also true of general descriptions of audiences in the articles on the case-study bands – the people described in the crowd at gigs, or addressed in reviews are implicitly male. For example, one interview with Oasis

says, 'Noel made it known that "Morning Glory" was to be "more mature", which means lots of slowies – not necessarily the kind you can cop off to. These ballads are built for young men to get tearful to, for "you're my best mate" moments' (*Select* 11/95). It is not just the 'young men' that are male here, but also implicitly the audience members not 'copping off' to Noel's ballads. The songs are described purely in terms of the male audience members addressed by the 'you' who would otherwise be 'copping off' to ballads. In most cases in the articles the audience is characterised as male through casual comments on the crowds at gigs. A live review of an Oasis gig states that,

a Manchester band blowing the Hacienda's roof off counts as an ultimate pop moment. Five years ago The Stone Roses finally convinced music biz sceptics there really was something going on, by ramming the same venue with a joyful, partying mass. Tonight, the same kids have returned, fatter and balder, mixing with the shiny new teens for Oasis – the hottest ticket on the block (*Vox* 11/94).

The audience represented is implicitly yet clearly male, unless of course Mancunian *women* go bald. The reviews of Oasis' gigs at Earl's Court during 1996 paint a similar picture. One reviewer describes the fans getting to the concert saying,

The Oasis-ites who've invaded Earls Court tonight...swagger and cheer their way from the tube station to the gig in varying shades of dressed-down normality. The younger ones skin up and stumble out of off-licences in group-sized packs, the older ones squeeze themselves into every pub in a mile radius and holler along to the Oasis songs on the jukebox until their pints get spilt (honestly). That is until they get to the electric-blue glow of the venue and while away the 20-minute queue to get in with a touchingly sozzled male chorus of "Wonderwall" (*NME* 18/11/95).

The way the crowd 'swaggers' and 'hollers' genders it masculine even before the mention of the 'sozzled *male* chorus'. As previous examples have illustrated, it is not that women are absent from the audience, rather that when it comes to describing that audience in general terms, the male experience is universalised.

A review of a Suede concert exemplifies this as a male reviewer comments that, 'your feelings now find themselves in something of a state, and your stomach is under the mistaken impression that you're about to embark on a date with the prettiest girl in your class' (*NME* 12/10/96). The final comment clearly marks the heretofore gender-neutral 'you' out as male. Similarly in a review of Suede's debut album the reviewer claims that, "'Animal Nitrate" does indeed make you want to wear a silk shirt (shock admission)' (*Select* 5/93). This comment is clearly only applicable to male audience members because the reviewer is trying to indicate how Suede would influence an otherwise masculine man to sample Brett Anderson's style of masculinity. Wearing a silk shirt would not symbolise the same degree of gender transgression for the females in the audience. Also in relation to styles of dress, another review of Suede states that,

those gigs I went to proved that you – Brett, in particular – have already reached that iconic elite (Robert Smith, Morrissey) that has followers turning up dressed as them, wanting to be them.
"Uh," says Mat. "If it's a carbon copy, then there's no point because you'd never get it right. It's impossible, that's the whole point of it. But if people turn up to our gigs looking fantastic, that's great. But I hope our inspiration goes further than

people buying Les Paul guitars and funny shirts. Otherwise there's no point." Brett seems genuinely startled by this idea. A self-conscious giggle makes itself heard. Eventually he declares that... "I'm flattered, and quite titillated, but worried that I could be described in such a superficial way."

SO what happens when – and it will happen – you meet someone like this guy I saw at the Sheffield gig, with the effete fringe, the lacy shirt, the beads, the doubtful trousers?

There's a thoughtful pause.

"I'd...I'd tell 'em to get a life, I think" (*MM* 17/4/93b).

Not only does this reiterate the wrongness of obsessive fandom, but it again posits a male audience member – the description of the fan seen by the writer and the 'followers' who dress up like the band are both clearly male. In general descriptions of the audience, where they occur in the music press, a universal, unmarked subject is constructed which masks its original male referent. While female members of the audience may be present as screaming fans or crazed would-be groupies, they are always marked out as such and distanced from the 'we'/'us' of the indie public participants.

'Other people'

Through the devaluation of an irrational/hysterical type of fandom and a consistent address to a mature, and music-oriented audience the indie public constructs its participants as inherently masculine. This in itself constitutes who 'we' are in terms of the indie public, however, there is one further important way in which the articles are structured in terms of promoting the shared understandings that invite participation in the sphere. The final section of this chapter examines how inclusion and exclusion in the indie public is structured through the discursive construction of 'other people' in the articles on *Elastica*, *Suede*, *Oasis* and *Echobelly*. These 'other people' function in the music press as examples of how *not* to interpret or appreciate indie/the bands, and in doing so provide an object of disidentification against which 'we' are defined. We have already seen, where fans' mode of engagement with stars is portrayed as excessive and obsessive, how disidentification with 'others' in the form of fans provides one way in which acceptable indie public participation is constructed. The 'other people' invoked elsewhere are equally damned for relating to the bands in an inappropriate manner. An early article on *Elastica* for example states that,

soon you'll be sick of hearing that *Elastica*'s every shimmy and sigh marks the onset of the Second Coming. The rush to lionise them will embarrass you and you'll blush when you read the reviews. But if you have a soul, you'll love them. Isn't it wonderful? (*MM* 3/7/93).

This statement construes the 'Elastica-as-second-coming' school of thought as over the top and so often repeated as to have become empty and inauthentic. The focus on the band's 'every shimmy and sigh', rather than some more worthy facet of the band, suggests the misdirection and ridiculousness of this evaluation of *Elastica*. The direct mode of address, to 'you', clearly includes the reader, inviting his/her collusion with the

writer's sentiment and at the same time othering those who have taken part in the 'rush to lionise' *Elastica*. The final two sentences initially seem to undermine the first two, but they are indicative of a common rhetorical form in the music press. The extract is not saying that the 'other people' who have lauded *Elastica* are wrong and that the band are actually no good. Rather it asserts that 'they' have gone about it the wrong way, i.e., 'they' have been gushing and overstated, whereas 'your' appreciation of the band will be natural and simple.

This formation, of describing the wrong way of liking a band, dismissing it and then reinstating the way that 'we' like them as correct, is common in the music press. It is also very similar to a process Roland Barthes describes in *Mythologies* (1993) which he says can serve to shore up existing views of any institution from the Army to margarine.

Barthes describes the process as one where you,

take the established value which you want to restore or develop, and first lavishly display its pettiness, the injustices which it produces, the vexations to which it gives rise, and plunge it into its natural imperfection; then at the last moment, save it *in spite of*, or rather *by* the heavy curse of its blemishes...it is a kind of homeopathy... one inoculates the public with a contingent evil to prevent or cure an essential one (p41-2).

This process of inoculation is heavily present in the articles on all the case-study bands where the established value, that a band is good, is reinforced through the devaluation of other people's interpretations or expressions of that goodness. A live review of Oasis illustrates the point further. The writer spends over three-quarters of the review criticising the band and characterising in very unfavourable terms the 'other people' associated with Oasis' rise to fame. It states that,

there are some very sad people out there. People who get teary-eyed about The La's 'There She Goes' ("a classic") because it proves that bands these days can write them like they used to, whatever Dad says. People who always considered Ocean Colour Scene "sadly underrated". (That bunch of dismal losers are supporting tonight, irony of ironies.) People who've spent five years actually giving a shit whether The Stone Roses ever make a comeback... You know who I mean. The Heavenly/ Creation mafia... and their press buddies. From the inside it's sinister stuff. When the Oasis rumours started spreading this spring, front covers were being pencilled in months ahead, before a record had even been released... Oasis have hitched a ride on the southern bourgeoisie's patronising romanticised adoration of straight-talking northerners (*MM* 20/8/94).

The idea that the opinions of other people are wrong is forcefully established throughout the article and the accepted explanations given for Oasis' growing popularity and appeal are thoroughly critiqued and negated, their legitimacy rejected. 'Liam Gallagher's supposed "charisma", "attitude" etc has been misdiagnosed,' the writer later explains. 'His eyelids don't open all the way and in *some people's* thesaurus, that spells cool. In fact, his stage presence has little to do with arrogance' (*MM* 20/8/94, my emphases). Having thoroughly rubbished the accepted views of Oasis, the article's outcome does not dismiss Oasis themselves, just the interpretations of *other people*. At the article's conclusion the writer finally claims that,

what saves Oasis is all the other stuff they've absorbed like some giant Pop Nappy...there's no point denying it. Oasis are as good as a band obsessed with the Beatles can be in 1994. Which is...pretty good, actually (*MM* 20/8/94).

The writer asserts his interpretation of Oasis as the correct one, one that is more insightful and true than those espoused by other people, but the overall message is the same; Oasis *are* good.

The frequent mentions of other people and 'their' opinions naturally poses the question of who these other people are. The analysis showed that while they were largely unidentified, when 'other people' are referred to explicitly they are largely cast as cynical industry insiders or people in the media, rather than members of the audience. The extract from the early article on Elastica cited above (*MM* 3/7/93) supports this. It is unlikely that you become 'sick of hearing' about Elastica through personal conversations – rather this state is reached via exposure to sycophantic media coverage, the reference to being embarrassed by *reviews* confirms that it is other people *in the media* whose opinions 'we' do not share. The same is true of 'other people' statements elsewhere. In one interview with Suede, Brett Anderson opines that, '*they* try to portray us as some sort of fey group who stride around reading poetry and wearing tuxedos. It's just the fact that we've actually got the scope to do more than one sort of music, to write more than one f-ing type of song' (*NME* 14/1/95, my emphasis). Similarly in a live review of Echobelly the writer notes that, 'The Authenticity Police have branded Sonya Aurora Madan the Emma Thompson of rock, going through the emotions to hoodwink The Kids out of their hard-earned rock dollars' (*NME* 24/9/94). In both these cases it is opinions that have appeared in media coverage of the bands that are referred to.²

The suspicion and mistrust with which media and industry insiders are treated within the music press not only constructs them as a demonised other, but performs the task of making the music press appear transparent, objective and truthful in comparison. By highlighting the distance between themselves and the machinations of the profit-driven music industry the music press aligns itself with its public, the indie public, thus constructing an inclusive 'us' based on a mutual rejection of inauthentic 'hype' and the promotion of bands for any reason other than the quality of their music. The following extract from a review of Oasis' debut album exemplifies this,

there are those who are convinced that an evil cabal of journalists and record execs routinely invent pop groups and then devise ways of tricking otherwise sensible people into giving them money just for the hell of it, who believe they are being sold a pup here and would like to see Oasis fall flat on their lippy Mancunian arses...in short, they smell hype and they think it stinks. The funny

² The exact source of this 'other' media coverage is mostly unspecified, and somewhat mysterious given the relatively unknown status of some of the bands at the time such statements are made. It may therefore be fair to conclude that oftentimes the music papers (specifically the *NME* and the *Melody Maker*) are competing with each other over evaluations/insider status on these bands. This doesn't detract from the power of such statements or my overall point.

thing is, they may have a point. But such an analysis omits one vital detail from the equation: Oasis make records, write songs, stick 'em down on tape and then put them out to stand or fall in posterity's cruel gaze. And the fact is that too much heartfelt emotion, ingenuous belief and patent songwriting savvy rushes through the debut Oasis album for it to be the work of a bunch of wind-up merchants. They're too good. And yes, they really do mean it, man (*NME* 27/8/94a).

Here, the writer is once again promoting the idea of Oasis as good, whilst debating the terms of that goodness as articulated by 'other people', in this case those 'who believe that are being sold a pup'. The article partially accepts this viewpoint, but in order to sidestep the cynics and address 'us' it refers to Oasis' music, and in reassuring us of the purity of Oasis' intentions (their music is too good for them to be manufactured), it confers authenticity on itself as well as the band and the people who like them. The effect is inclusionary and conspiratorial – the rejection of others' views and the revelation that 'the *fact*' Oasis are 'for real' conveys a sense that 'we' are privy to a truth that others have missed. Thus the music press constructs a 'we' which is not only inclusive, but superior. A similar example appears in a live review of Suede where the writer says that,

the world is now so bequeathed, nay, enriched in Suede, it's actually getting boring...but...to be bored with Suede you're on the media payroll – you're fed up because you can't think of anything else to write about Suede...so let's drop in on Suede's 'coming out' tour, and see if the public at large are *bored* with Suede... Mmmm, doesn't look like it, perhaps some of them aren't columnists or editors or showbiz correspondents. The losers (*Select* 6/93).

The knowing sarcasm of this argument creates a strong connection between the writer, his paper and the audience whose agreement and inclusion is assumed. The writer distances himself from the inauthenticity of other media and positions himself as one of 'us'.

The idea that the music press' discourse is the most authentic and truthful is also reinforced through references to media coverage the bands have received from outside the niche music press. One article on Suede lambasts the coverage the band have been receiving in the media and asks,

Have you noticed the way all these glossy magazines belatedly running their first Suede features feel obliged to lace them with a heavy measure of sham "let's-wait-and-see" scepticism? "The new Smiths or just pretenders?" asked a recent *Face* cover, while *Time Out* prefaced their interview with the disclaimer "Drooling hacks and swooning fans have touted Suede as the future of British rock for a year – and their debut album is only just out. Is Brett Anderson the genuine article, or just fringe theatre?" Very witty, I'm sure, and a perfect example...that, for a long time now, Suede's coverage has been Hype About Hype. What this also indicates is an uneasy jealousy that, once again, the "drooling hacks" have discovered a winner (what do you call Hype if it's right? Can't we have a new noun, please?). For Christ's sake, wake up: your cultivated disbelief is obsolete. The time to "wait and see" has gone...This is no "maybe". This is as real as it gets (*MM* 17/4/93a).

The direct address to 'you' at the beginning of the paragraph inculcates a shared sense of righteous indignation at the poor quality of coverage in other publications. The writer is then able to present his views as authentic and containing real insight – his version is

superior because he has observed something the others have not, and what's more he has done it before them.

Statements such as these powerfully constitute the music press' discourse as authentic and exemplify how the indie public is constructed around a shared interpretation of the bands. In order to further exclude competing versions of 'our' bands, the articles on Suede, Oasis, Elastica and Echobelly all explicitly refer to other media sources and subsequently contest or ridicule their coverage of the bands. This is most vicious when the bands' coverage in the national broadsheet or tabloid press is discussed. In one early live review of Oasis, for example, the writer describes an interaction he has at the gig with another journalist,

The man from the quality newspaper says he wants to know what we think of Oasis. He's a liar. Even before we've opened our mouths, he's saying, yeah, OK, they were pretty good but...He's saying he thinks tonight was an anticlimax. We ask him why. Because no-one twatted Noel? Because nothing untoward went off? Because there wasn't any violence? We say he's just looking for trouble but he's not listening. He doesn't want to know what we think. He just wants to make his mark on someone else's little bit of history. He just wants his pound of legendary flesh. He just wants to deflate our fun with his cold, hard, misery. Prick (*NME* 27/8/94b).

The virulence and contempt with which the broadsheet journalist is treated signals a very strong disidentification with any evaluation of the band which does not prioritise the quality of their performance and music. The distinct separation between him and 'us' is further stressed by the repeated use of the words 'we' and 'our' to signify a constituency of people with which the writer shares a common understanding. Statements such as 'he just wants to deflate *our* fun' very strongly signify a sense of cohesion and inclusion in the indie public based on a shared understanding of the bands.

The articles frequently mock or highlight the way in which other media have misunderstood bands and produced erroneous or humorous interpretations of their meaning and value. One interview with Suede opens with the following,

Tony Parsons has forgotten more about rock journalism than most of us will ever know. But when, in expansive mood and trying to convey the impact of Suede to readers of his posh newspaper column recently, he said that their imminent first LP would be "the most long-awaited debut album since 'Never Mind The Bollocks'". Boy, did he get it wrong...What Tony *meant* to say was "the most eagerly awaited debut album since 'The Smiths'," a comparison that makes much more sense (*Select* 4/93).

The writer here asserts a superior understanding of Suede, one that has been overlooked by writers, like Tony Parsons, who are not (or in Parsons' case, no longer) one of 'us'. When the articles refer to the coverage the bands have received in the tabloids, the emphasis on the inaccuracy in their representation is even more pronounced. A live review of Suede, for example, mentions how, 'it's the people who work *with* the band who are on a star trip, not the "rowdy gay rockers" themselves (couldn't let this pass without a quote from *The Star's* Linda Duff' (*Select* 6/93). The mocking tone is obvious, implying

the miscomprehension of those outside the indie public. In two reviews of Oasis' B-sides compilation 'The Masterplan' the tabloids are again referred to. The first notes that where Oasis and the media are concerned, 'the music nowadays comes second to the soap opera' (Q 12/98) while the other argues that the release of 'The Masterplan' will accomplish the task of, 're-routing popular discourse, away from the latest poolside high jinks at Supernova Heights and back to, well, Oasis for a change' (*Select* 12/98). Both these instances implicitly criticise the tabloids' focus on Oasis' hedonistic lifestyle rather than their music, whilst also re-installing discussion of the music as the normative mode of evaluation.

The music press also uses descriptions of the tabloids' inaccuracy in order to construct their version as more truthful. Justine Frischmann explains in one interview how, 'some inaccuracies have been printed about the way we live, but you hope that anyone with half a brain will realise they're not true' (*MM* 25/3/95), while another discusses her relationship to the tabloids saying,

Justine has not enjoyed her dalliances with the British tabloids. The piece she hated most was one about their house, which made her out to be a spoilt little rich girl...A few days after our New York jaunt, Damon appears on the cover of the *NME*. In the interview he...declares that "we've both slept with other people...we can sit in the bath together and talk about it." It is this which makes the tabloids. Dirty Damon Tells All, adjudges *The Star*. We Sleep Around: Damon and Justine's Love Life Is A Blur, off the *Daily Mirror*.
...Is this an accurate picture of the two of you: sitting in the bath discussing who you've shagged?
She laughs. "No, it's not that accurate" (*Face* 6/96).

What statements such as these accomplish is a sense that the music press provides a more direct link between the bands and the audience than other media sources, and this is because they are 'our' bands.

This function was particularly important during the mid-1990s when the popularity of Britpop propelled indie artists like Oasis and Elastica into sections of the media they had hitherto not had access to. The music press constructs this new coverage of the bands as superficial and inauthentic, in order to posit its coverage not just as better than the rest, but the only source that truly understands these artists. A good example of this appears in an article on Oasis which refers to the rivalry between the band and Blur which came to a head in the Summer of 1995. Of that time the article notes,

the tabloids have a field day, analysing the rivalry between the two bands in the most basic terms – the North/South divide, Man City vs Chelsea, and so on – but the upshot is massive exposure for that up-to-now nebulous musical form called 'Britpop'. Suddenly everybody and anybody has a valid opinion on it all, and both bands are quite clearly public property (*Vox* 6/96)

Not only is the tabloid coverage summarily dismissed as 'basic', but there is an acknowledgement of different public spheres with the implication that Britpop has moved beyond its natural constituency in the indie public. By analysing and commenting on tabloid coverage, especially where the artists themselves are asked about their

experiences with the mainstream media, the music press is constructed as truer and more authentic – it is providing the reader with the inside story, the real picture. As Liam Gallagher notes, “the majority of the press we’ve had makes us out to be these madheads who only appeal to dickheads who’d stick a bottle over your head” (*NME* 30/9/95a). It is clear that the music press is not included in this ‘majority of the press we’ve had’, rather Liam’s ability to let us in on the ‘facts’ behind Oasis’ media image fosters a closeness between band, paper and audience which is unavailable anywhere but in the music press.

The construction of a shared, almost conspiratorial, understanding of the bands is also evident in the Echobelly articles where Sonya Madan discusses how she is treated elsewhere in the media. In the case of Echobelly it is the way the media treat Sonya as an Asian woman that is criticised. For example, in one interview she rails against the way that,

“A lot of journalists are the same. If you’re in a band and you’re a reasonably attractive woman – and I assume that I’m a reasonable attractive woman – they want to put you in a sex category, although I don’t really have big enough tits for them. But they still want me to model underwear for their lads’ mags” (*Select* 9/94a).

Here it is the ‘other’ media’s sexist treatment of Sonya as an object of lust which is criticised and distanced from the more politically correct treatment which it is implied she will receive/is receiving in the music press. In another feature Sonya also says that, “most of the interviews I have to do are so tedious, they ask the same questions, and I’m so sick of talking about me being an Asian woman. We’re a f...ing band, for God’s sake. I suppose journalists think they’ve got an angle, but do they have to milk it forever? There are other elements of Echobelly” (*MM* 15/10/94). Considering the analysis of the last three chapters, Sonya’s criticism is valid, but what this reveals is the complete lack of self-reflexivity the music press has when it comes to the evaluation of its own discourse. Although Sonya’s statement above seems to suggest the music press are equally guilty of portraying Echobelly in such a narrow fashion as any other media, there is never any admission of this, implicit or otherwise.

Another interview makes the same assumption when it describes how Sonya has been giving interviews all day and, ‘all have asked her about her sincerity, her politics, her feistiness – throwing the sort of question her way that *Menswear* (say) just wouldn’t get’ (*MM* 30/9/95). Here the writer distances himself and his article from this kind of representation of the band which in turn fosters a closeness between the band and the paper. One final example from the articles on Echobelly illustrates this further – Sonya is asked about her experience on the late-night Channel 4 entertainment show *Naked City*;

The *Naked City* incident is far more disturbing in the way it shows the reductiveness of television as a medium and what the producers can get away with by using some sleight-of-hand.

Sonya and Aki from Fun-Da-Mental were invited to the studios to discuss the disturbing rise of racist activity and the increased profile of race-hate organisations. What transpired was telling, to say the least.

"We were interviewed for 20 minutes. And it got quite heated. At some point we were disagreeing, and if they'd kept it, the piece would have been brilliant, one of those things people say, 'oh, did you see that last night?'"

"What *Naked City* did was cut it down to three minutes, kept in what Aki had to say and cut out everything I had to say. Not only did they cut it, they wasted time showing these 'pretty girl' shots of me when they could've had what I was saying. And they had me nodding in agreement – which they edited in – to something I'd actually disagreed with.

"I was absolutely livid. I was furious. They wanted me to be a 'pretty girl' – that's what they wanted – they didn't want what I actually had to say" (*NME* 20/8/94a).

The construction of other media in this extract as not only manipulative, sexist and inauthentic but also as having lost out on the opportunity to present something 'brilliant' through their own stupidity very clearly positions the account you are reading as the opposite of that. The fact that we are privy to the inner workings of other media constitutes what is written in this article as rigorous and above all truthful.

The construction of 'other people' is a particularly persuasive feature of the music press for a number of reasons. Primarily it allows for the constitution of an 'us' and a 'them' as two opposing groups struggling over the interpretation of bands. This is vital to the indie public, where the specificity of that public is based in its discourse, the way in which it understands and ascribes value to the bands. However, in the specific case of bands such as Oasis, Suede, Elastica and Echobelly it serves a further purpose which is to preserve the validity and primacy of the music press' evaluation, even when discourses from outside the indie public are praising and validating 'our' bands. By dismissing not the sentiment, but the *terms* of this outside discourse the music press is able to construct itself as the authentic source of discussion on bands. This is a particularly important process in the context of the reputation and role of the media in general. In a discussion about film stars Richard Dyer (1987) notes that,

the fact that we know that hype and the hard sell do characterise the media, that they are supreme instances of manipulation, insincerity, inauthenticity, mass public life, means that the whole star phenomenon is profoundly unstable. Stars cannot be made to work as affirmations of private or public life. In some cases the sheer multiplicity of the images, the amount of hype, the different stories told become overwhelmingly contradictory (p16).

With stars like the ones discussed here appearing in a wide range of publications; from tabloids to broadsheets, lads' mags to women's fashion glossies, teenage pop publications to the style press, Dyer's observations hint at why the music press would be so invested in constructing its discourse as truth in the face of competing versions.

The analysis here shows that the construction of 'other people' both makes the indie public inclusive and participation meaningful. The discursive construction of 'other people' tells us how not to evaluate bands in the indie public. It says, 'we understand these bands when no one else does, and as such we have access to the truth of them.' This is crucial

to what makes a public sphere – a certain criteria of evaluation, a shared knowledge and understanding constructed against an inauthentic and devalued ‘other’. Discursive constructions, such as ‘other people’, exemplify the how appealing the idea of belonging and inclusion in the indie public is. The lure of a sphere of shared understanding and appreciation of something the rest of the world is oblivious to is what makes the music press so seductively persuasive. If you accept the logic of the indie public – whether it be the idea that bands must be authentic, that Britishness is defined through whiteness or that girls only like pop music – then participation is made possible for you, *whoever* you are. However, as those examples show, the very factors that make the indie public inclusive and meaningful are also those which make participation possible only under certain conditions. The construction of ‘other people’ might shore up ‘our’ identity, but as the previous four chapters have shown, the identity being made available to ‘us’ is built around discursive formations of gender, class, race, sexuality and national identity that are fundamentally exclusionary, man.

Make a cup of tea and put a record on

Conclusions

By putting the music press at the centre of a public sphere formed around indie this research has been able to show how the construction of a music-based culture is deeply informed by discourses of gender, as well as those of class, race, sexuality and nationality. These discourses circulate in the indie public informing the way value is ascribed to music, people and fans and constituting not only the genre of indie itself, but the identities available to those who participate in it. This concluding chapter will review the findings of the research in relation to participation in indie in four broad areas; the public sphere, the definition of indie, the homosociality of the indie public and the shift from indie to 'Britpop' between 1993 and 1998.

The public sphere

The formulation of indie as a public sphere has not only allowed me to explore indie through its media, but given that exploration a double purpose. I have been able to understand both how indie was constructed between 1993 and 1998, and also how a cultural counterpublic sphere operates. The principle of universal access that is central to Habermas' theory of the bourgeois public sphere is necessarily compromised in a counterpublic like the indie public because the communication within it concerns specific topics and addresses a specific audience. In the indie public address to a rhetorical 'we', constructs an identity shared by participants at every level of the sphere. Participants are able to join this select group through the acquisition of specialised knowledge about indie – knowledge that is constructed and communicated by the music press. The cohesion of those who share this knowledge is further facilitated by a series of disidentifications with opposing groups, be they pop fans, Americans or tabloid readers. In this sense then, the indie public is indeed exclusive. It actively fosters the exclusion of certain groups of people, artists or ways of understanding music in order to bring itself into existence. However, it is this kind of exclusion which makes participation in the indie public meaningful in the first place. It offers 'us' an identity, a place of belonging, a sphere where 'our' music is prioritised, celebrated and positioned at the centre of the universe.

Access is formally guaranteed in specialised counterpublics for anyone sharing that specialist interest, in this case, indie music. What the analysis of the indie public has shown is that such guarantees can easily be rendered void. The indie public fails to be

inclusive of everyone whose interest is indie because the music press constructs a 'we' that is not only interested in indie, but is male, white and heterosexual. In this way the indie public, strangely, shares certain similarities with Habermas' conception of the bourgeois public sphere. That sphere presupposed an autonomous individual engaging in rational-critical debate, an identity which masked a universalised male subject. The indie public is based on a series of identities which are similarly implicitly male – the artist, the 'right kind' of fan, even the impartial music critic. It is not only the form of the debate in the indie public which resembles that of the bourgeois public sphere, but the content. Where the 'general issues' permitted for discussion in the bourgeois public sphere excluded 'women's issues' on the grounds that they were particular rather than general, discussion in the indie public also particularises women and their issues. Talk about such subjects as sexuality, relationships, haircuts, and sexism is confined to the articles on female artists. Meanwhile, the themes that occur most regularly in the articles on male artists – for example, suffering for one's art, musical inspirations, artistic intentions/integrity – are the ones which ultimately define what indie is.

On the basis of this evidence it is entirely pertinent to ask whether any public sphere can be inclusive or whether, as a concept, they are doomed to repeat the failures of Habermas' original model. While the example of the indie public seems to suggest the worst, formulating a public or counterpublic sphere as discursively constructed means that resignification and change are always possible, however remotely. The theory of the public sphere was an appropriate frame for this research partly because it could accommodate change over time in the indie public. For example, when distance from commerce was so vital to the definition of indie prior to the Britpop period, the re-articulation of the art/commerce divide between 1993 and 1998 illustrates that fundamental changes can occur in the sphere. Admittedly, the constitution of the indie public as profoundly masculine makes changes in the qualitative inclusion of women a rather optimistic outcome. However, the fact that there is potential for change serves to de-naturalise the exclusion of women; there is nothing inevitable about the situation. The indie public also exemplifies the way in which seemingly progressive or liberal counterpublics are not necessarily any more inclusive than general spheres. Overall, the methodology used to interrogate the indie public has been able to successfully identify how that sphere is constructed, how participation is possible within it and how it functions to include and exclude participants through the creation of legitimised subject positions. Where Warner's (2002) theorisation of counterpublics lacked concrete examples which would ground them and expose any internal contradictions, my analysis of the indie public has shown an actual public sphere in operation. This model could also be applied to other mediated counterpublic spheres in order to understand how inclusion and participation operates in them.

Definition of indie

The indie public is not just the sphere where indie music is discussed, but where the genre itself is discursively constructed. By analysing the repetition of key themes and tropes in the music press, it has been possible to show what defines indie, its artists, their appeal, and the audience. This was one of the central aims of the research because it is through the definition of the category of 'indie' that the music press establishes the boundaries that exclude women from full participation. One of the major areas in which the music press does this is in the creation of the artist. Artists are validated and legitimated in the indie public through fulfilling certain criteria of evaluation. First and foremost bands must be shown to be 'good', and in general a good band is an authentic band, one that is original, sincere and uncontrived. Obviously, to a greater or lesser extent all the bands whose coverage I have analysed are produced as good and authentic, as their very inclusion in the press implies they have met certain standards. However, what the analysis reveals is the way in which gender effects how bands are written about. Due largely to the explicit marking of gender in the articles on female artists, they less frequently meet the criteria of evaluation employed by the music press than their male counterparts.

Although female artists are discussed through the same key concepts as male artists, their gender is constantly highlighted and marked, and rather than being talked about as artists, women are simply talked about as women. For example, while most bands attest to their commitment to art by describing some form of suffering they have endured, male artists' experiences usually involve their music-related experiences. Female artists, suffer as women – they talk about gender discrimination, or failed relationships, issues that are not connected to them as a band, but as women. It is not that they have not 'really' suffered, but that they have suffered in a way that does not exemplify their crucial commitment to art. The analysis reveals that female artist' gender is privileged over their musicianship. Female artists are individualised and discussed as women, whereas men are discussed almost entirely in relation to their music. Indeed, when in writing the separate chapters on 'Authenticity' and 'Stars' I was struck by how interchangeable the discussions about Elastica and Echobelly's authenticity were with the ones pertaining to their personalities, and vice versa for Suede and Oasis.

The construction of female artists in this way contravenes the central rule that 'it's all about the music.' A band can be produced as both good and authentic if music is their be-all-and-end-all. When female artists are so infrequently discussed in terms of music it is extremely difficult for them to gain access to the authenticity ascribed through this trope. This extends to the way contemporary bands are fitted into a canon of authentic, good, or better still 'classic' bands. However, where male bands are compared musically to canonical acts, female bands are more likely to be compared to other female acts,

even if the music they make is radically different. Comparisons across gender are very rarely made, and none of the male acts in the research samples were compared to another act where the singer was a woman. The paucity of female artists within the rock, and more so indie, canon has two consequences for the female artists whose coverage I analysed. Firstly, they were compared to fewer other artists overall meaning that they were not ascribed authenticity through association with more established acts. Furthermore, because the range of female canonical acts they are compared to (usually Siouxsie Sioux or Blondie) is so narrow it serves to homogenise female artists. Secondly, the female artists in the samples were more often compared to female mainstream pop acts than male acts from within their genre. This again privileges gender and does nothing to aid their construction as authentic within a genre that defines itself in opposition to the vapidness, commercialism and above all inauthenticity of the mainstream.

The analysis also reveals that female artists' gender forms an explicit theme in the music press. The contrast between female and male artists in the samples is stark in this respect as the only male artists to repeatedly discuss gender and sexuality are Suede and the topic is otherwise absent from the coverage of male artists. Female artists are often asked about their personal lives and this is perhaps most prominent in the articles on Elastica – the overwhelming majority of which mention Justine Frischmann's relationships with Brett Anderson of Suede and Damon Albarn of Blur before they say anything about her band. Additionally, the headlines, enlarged quotes and photo captions in the articles on Echobelly and Elastica are likely to have sexual connotations – two of the Elastica articles are entitled 'Pulling Power' (*Select* 8/93, *Vox* 2/94), while one Echobelly interview goes under the headline 'Get Yer Sonyayas Out' (*MM* 15/10/94). Such discussions construct women as not only heterosexual but as being motivated by sex, not music. This is mirrored in the construction of female fans. When they are not being constructed as hysterical teenyboppers (an 'unfortunate' side-effect of gaining popular appeal), the female audience is constructed only in terms of fandom based on the sex appeal of male stars. Through positioning these female fans as 'other' the music press devalues them and constructs an accepted version of fandom which, like the bands themselves, must be all about the music.

The sample of new band articles, along with the extended coverage of Elastica and Echobelly plainly shows that women are present in the music press. The 'exclusion' of women in the indie public is thus not literal and total, but rather operates at the level of discourse. Women can form bands, and they can be written about in the *NME*, but what they cannot do, it seems, be judged by the criteria that constitute the indie artist. They are excluded from being discussed as musicians, being situated in a canon, and being 'all about the music'. Female artists are instead constructed in terms of being women. I would like to be able to argue that female artists are produced as authentic through their ability

to represent the realities, complexities, or joy of being female, or even through some form of authentic female/feminist rage.¹ Bands like Oasis and Suede, who it is claimed represent the realities of working-class experience, are constructed as authentic as a result of it, but the same privileges do not extend to gender. Indeed, while the music press highlight the gender of female artists as the most remarkable thing about them, they simultaneously construct that gender as an explicit source of inauthenticity. The stand out example of this is the new band article on Fluffy (*Select* 9/95) wherein the band's feminine gender presentation is construed as a 'gimmick'. While this is an extreme manifestation of this trope in the music press, the other female artists studied are much more frequently accused of plagiarism, of being contrived or 'too perfect', or of having been undeservedly hyped than are male bands. The irony of this is lost on the music press, which in general exhibits a complete lack of self-reflexivity. When female bands are consistently less successful than male bands and less valued by the press, why on earth would anyone 'contrive' one?

The devaluation of femininity in the construction of the artist in the indie public implies that there are terms and conditions attached to women's participation in the sphere. As two of the most prominent and successful female-fronted indie bands of the 1990s I find it particularly pertinent that both *Elastica* and *Echobelly* are, to a degree, masculinised in the music press. This is achieved through rather superficial discussions of Justine and Sonya's appearance, for example how having short hair helps them to become 'one of the lads'. On top of this, both bands, unusually, were routinely compared to male acts in their coverage, *Elastica* to *Wire* and the *Stranglers*, and *Echobelly* to the *Smiths* and occasionally *Suede*. They also both disavowed any similarities to or connections with other female acts. All three elements seem to act as attempts to distance the bands from the inauthentic taints of femininity. It seems that women's only route to inclusion in the public sphere is through the disavowal of their femininity and the erasure of gender difference. The subject positions made available in the indie public are the mutually exclusive identities of 'artist' and 'woman' and only the former is valued.

Homosociality

Analysing how inclusion and exclusion are possible in the indie public, rather than just the representation of women in the music press, allows a deeper understanding about how gender informs that sphere. The limitation of studies of the music press that only look at articles on female artists is that they assume a certain level of uniformity in the

¹ While this idea is not sustained by the evidence of the bands I have analysed here, there are other female artists, PJ Harvey in particular springs to mind, who seem to be ascribed authenticity in this way. It would certainly be interesting to investigate Harvey's canonisation over the past five years in this light.

construction and reception of male artists, against which the sexist representations of women are positioned. Analyses of gender in popular or rock music discourse that point out, for example, the emphasis placed on women's bodies, or their association with the physical, make wholly valid critiques, however the frameworks they construct cannot account for some of the patterns found in the articles on male artists in my research. For example, the construction of Oasis' authenticity through discourses of feeling and emotion and their association with the body and not the mind seems to have more in common with the ways in which women are constructed in popular culture. The construction of Brett Anderson's star qualities around detailed descriptions of his body, mannerisms and dress style also seem to align him with the feminine side of a gendered mind/body binary. However, neither of these artists are devalued as a result of these traits and the reason for this stems from the specific generic context in which they are constituted, i.e., the indie public. The characterisation of Oasis and Suede, along with the conclusions drawn above about the exclusion of women from the category of artist are best understood in the context of the intense male homosociality that characterises the indie public.

The homosociality of the indie public is one of the most fascinating, illuminating and yet ultimately depressing aspects of the sphere revealed in the analysis. It is fascinating because the form it takes is unusual and helps to define indie in unique ways, and illuminating because it helps make sense of why women occupy such a marginal position in indie. Lastly it is depressing because it makes that marginalisation all the more deep-seated and difficult to challenge. The homosocial character of the indie public is initially manifested in the articles analysed in purely numerical terms. Around 75% of the bands featured in the new band articles were all or predominantly male, while 76% of those articles were written by male writers. Similarly, 89% of the 160 articles analysed on the case-study bands were also written by men. While these facts alone point to the male-centredness of the indie public, describing the sphere as homosocial has additional connotations. For example, the way in which bands' appeal is constructed, as well as the address to an implicitly male audience, orients the indie public around relations between men. In particular it is the value ascribed to Oasis', 'mass lad-appeal' (*Select* 12/94) that stands out. Their ability to attract a large *male* audience contributes significantly to the construction of their 'universal appeal' and their ability to represent 'us', but this is an 'us' that clearly excludes women.

No where is this more apparent than in the way the indie public maintains a gender binary that operates *without* women; gender difference in the indie public is that which exists between men. Although the gender of male artists is not marked in the same way as female artists', for example via self-reflexive discussions about 'being a woman', it is central to their definition as artists and stars, and more importantly to their constitution as

'indie'. I have termed this feature of the indie public the erasure/spectacle of gender. Male gender is spectacularised in indie and male artists compare themselves, and are compared to, or (dis)identified with other male artists. Whether they are characterised as effeminate and fey, like Suede, or aggressive and laddish, like Oasis, male artists' masculinity is intimately linked with their musical style. The differences between these two main masculine types not only defines male artists, but also new directions and innovations in the genre. The differences between men and women are therefore erased, as female artists cannot be understood in relation to these masculine types. Because of this, and their relative rarity in the genre, female artists are ultimately peripheral to the definition and redefinition of indie. Their gender presentation is discussed, not in relation to their status as artists, but their identity as women. This is, perhaps, the most fundamental way in which women are excluded from the indie public. Striving for better, or less sexist, representations of women in the music press will do little to disrupt the logic of the erasure/spectacle of gender.

What is also remarkable about the kind of homosociality that characterises the indie public is the fact that, unlike the homosociality theorised by Sedgwick (1985) or Storr (2003), it does not rely heavily on the reinforcement of sexist or homophobic rhetoric. Storr argues that in most homosocial environments, 'homosociality must always clearly distinguish itself from homosexuality: thus homosocial institutions tend to be strongly homophobic, precisely because homosexuality is an ever-present threat' (2003:40). One other way in which the 'spectre' of homosexuality is kept at bay in male homosocial settings is through talk about women which confirms the heterosexuality of male participants. However, the analysis of the music press did not find this to any great extent. Aside from a few remarks made (mainly) by Liam Gallagher on the subject of groupies, the articles analysed were not overtly sexist or homophobic, but the absence of overt sexism is accompanied by the absence of discussion about women in any terms. However, the articles on female artists are littered with references to men, as partners, objects of lust or influences, the articles on male artists rarely mention women at all. Thus not only is female homosociality in the indie public largely precluded through the intense heterosexualisation and individualisation of female artists, but the constant references to men and sexuality further construct them as signifying 'sex' rather than music/musician. It was precisely because they signify sex that women threaten the male homosociality of the indie public which staves off the 'spectre' of homosexuality by not talking about sex. Straw (1997) has suggested that homosocial 'worlds' like the indie public are constituted in opposition to the 'world of adult sexuality' (p11). Women's presence thus deeply disrupts the cohesion and foundation of the indie public.

From indie to Britpop

The popularisation of indie during the period covered by my research fundamentally threatens the homosocial construction of the indie public because it introduces the sphere to the feminised nature of the mainstream pop audience. References to (teenage) female fans in the articles analysed confirm their existence during the Britpop era, however they are invariably constructed as the 'wrong' kind of fan within the music press's discourse. The fact that female fans' participation in the indie public is dismissed and largely ignored is evidence of the fact that, indie's movement into the mainstream did little to destabilise the gendered terms of indie's constitution within the indie public. In other words, although indie was initially constructed in opposition to a devalued feminised mainstream, it succeeded in maintaining its masculine, homosocial character and its value even as it became a central part of that mainstream. While the terms of the art/commerce binary were resignified in the music press' discourse so that artists' huge commercial success could be reconciled with their construction as authentic, the fact that it was *Britpop* that propelled indie to the top of the charts is not co-incidental in understanding the continuing exclusion of women from the indie public. The construction of national identity in the indie public is based on entirely masculine traits and associations and an exclusively male British canon. Thus Britishness in the indie public is implicitly male.

Further than this, the whiteness of the signifiers of Britishness valued in the music press also serves to exclude non-white indie artists from the indie public. The analysis shows that national identity is frequently discussed in relation to Echobelly's Sonya Madan, however that discussion takes place in different terms to that in the articles on white artists. Madan was the only artist for whom national identity was linked to race, and linked in a very personalised way so that the articles privileged her individual struggle with Asian/British identity. Sonya's racial identity was marked both by her disavowal of aspects of Asian culture, and her essentially raced 'otherness' which contributes to the diversity of an implicitly white centre. The ubiquity of Britpop in the mainstream during 1995-7 means that the construction of indie as masculine and white not only excludes female and non-white participants from the indie public, but that the celebration of Britishness which started as a backlash against the American domination of the indie scene in the early 1990s ended half a decade later as a means to narrowly define national culture in a much wider context.

This definition is not only narrowly defined in terms of race, but also gender. Artists such as Suede are ascribed a high level of authenticity on account of their ability to represent the realities of British life, and it is their evocation of Britishness which is posited as their contribution to the progression of the indie genre. That female artists are excluded from these discourses is highly significant because they are unable to be fully identified with the traits that define 'good' (authentic, innovative, current) music at that moment.

Furthermore, while the indie public maintained an essentially homosocial character throughout the period 1993-1998, the shift in the dominant masculine indie identity from the fey outsider to the 'universal' lad eased the link to more populist discourses of national identity, which in turn secured indie's 'fit' in the mainstream. The laddishness of bands like Oasis, along with their posturing arrogance, debauched lifestyle, derogatory attitude to women, and immense commercial success, pushed indie towards the discourses that have traditionally constructed rock not pop. As a part of the mainstream indie became more masculine, eschewing the characteristics that once positioned indie *between* rock and pop. This is one more possible reason behind the forestalling of women's progressive inclusion in the indie public.

Postscript: indie and beyond

The conclusions reached by this research appear at times dishearteningly bleak – women may be present in the indie public, but they are rarely included in any qualitative, meaningful sense, and worse still, the situation does not seem to be improving with time. However, I would like to offer a more positive postscript to the story of women and indie. The feminist indie/punk scene 'riot grrrl' caused only a brief sensation in the music press during 1992/3 and was thereafter ridiculed, dismissed and quickly forgotten. However, for the women involved in riot grrrl it has had a far greater impact on their ability to participate in a music-based culture. Following the theoretical framework of this research, the post-riot grrrl culture that exists today could be considered a kind of feminist indie counterpublic. A sphere that exists, in part, as a reaction to the exclusion enshrined in the indie public. This counterpublic places female artists, mediators and fans firmly at its centre, and fosters a strong sense of female homosociality. Its public communication is facilitated by zines, websites and gatherings such as Ladyfest (the international phenomenon of locally organised feminist music festivals, several of which have taken place in the UK since 2001). Through these organs it constructs new criteria of evaluation, styles of dress and gender presentation, and its own feminist politics. However, while involvement in this sphere offers women a more meaningful mode of participation, it is in no way comparable to the indie public in terms of size, influence or reach. Until it is, women's exclusion from the indie public constructed on the pages of the *NME* remains a serious problem, and one that is certainly *not* all about the music.

Appendix 1

New band articles

Sample articles

The sample of new band articles analysed in Chapter 4 are listed here in chronological order by publication.

Sally Margaret Joy, 'Voodoo Queens' *Melody Maker*, 20/3/93

Sharon O'Connell, 'Revolution 9' *Melody Maker*, 20/3/93

Jon Selzer, 'Neurosis' *Melody Maker*, 2/10/93

Jim Arundel, 'Delicatessen' *Melody Maker*, 5/3/94

Ngairé-Ruth, 'Bandit Queen' *Melody Maker*, 5/3/94

Jennifer Nine, 'Weird's War' *Melody Maker*, 8/10/94

Stud Brothers, 'Nilon Bombers' *Melody Maker*, 25/3/95

Jon Selzer, 'Jack' *Melody Maker*, 25/3/95

John Robb, 'Mansun' *Melody Maker*, 7/10/95

Dave Jennings, 'Linoleum' *Melody Maker*, 13/4/96

Dave Simpson, 'Kula Shaker' *Melody Maker*, 20/4/96

Dave Simpson, 'Space' *Melody Maker*, 20/4/96

Daniel Booth, 'Ballroom' *Melody Maker*, 15/3/97

Paul Mathur, 'Hurricane #1' *Melody Maker*, 26/4/97

Jade Gordon, 'Eska' *Melody Maker*, 27/9/97

Ben Myers, 'The Crocketts' *Melody Maker*, 14/3/98

Robin Bresnark, 'Gomez' *Melody Maker*, 21/3/98

Peter Robinson, 'Sing Sing' *Melody Maker*, 3/10/98

Simon Williams, 'Fretblanket' *NME*, 6/3/93

Iestyn George, 'Credit to the Nation' *NME*, 24/4/93

Ben Willmott, 'Blessed Ethel' *NME*, 18/9/93

Mark Sutherland, 'Gene' *NME*, 23/4/94

Ian Fortnam, 'Mantaray' *NME*, 3/9/94

Paul Moody, 'Supergrass' *NME*, 15/10/94

Stephen Dalton, 'Goya Dress' *NME*, 8/4/95

Mark Sutherland, 'Powder' *NME*, 8/4/95

Fiona Shepherd, 'The Delgados' *NME*, 16/9/95

Fiona Shepherd, 'Pink Kross' *NME*, 24/3/96

Simon Williams, 'The Warm Jets' *NME*, 21/9/96

Mark Beaumont, 'Symposium' *NME*, 26/10/96

Mark Sutherland, 'Snug' *NME*, 19/4/97
April Long, 'Catch' *NME*, 27/9/97
Jim Alexander, 'Theaudience' *NME*, 25/10/97
Jim Wirth, 'Annie Christian' *NME*, 14/3/98
James Oldham, 'Clinic' *NME*, 14/3/98
John Mulvey, 'Electric Sound of Joy' *NME*, 24/10/98

Steve Lamacq, 'Cornershop' *Select*, April 1993
Andrew Perry 'The Boo Radleys' *Select*, September 1993
Andrew Collins, 'Senser' *Select*, September 1993
Sian Pattenden, 'My Life Story' *Select*, March 1994
Sian Pattenden, 'The Flamingoes' *Select*, March 1994
Gareth Grundy, 'Electrafixion' *Select*, September 1994
Petrina McFarlane, 'Cast' *Select*, April 1995
Sian Pattenden, 'Fluffy' *Select*, September 1995
Roy Wilkinson, 'Northern Uproar' *Select*, October 1995
Roy Wilkinson, 'Plastic Fantastic' *Select*, March 1996
Roy Wilkinson, '60ft Dolls' *Select*, April 1996
Ian Harrison, 'Gold Blade' *Select*, September 1996
Eddy Lawrence, 'Tampasm' *Select*, March 1997
Emma Morgan, 'Embrace' *Select*, April 1997
Sam Upton, 'The Beta Band' *Select*, September 1997
Ian Harrison, 'Black Box Recorder' *Select*, April 1998
Roy Wilkinson, 'Baby Birkin' *Select*, September 1998
Steve Lowe, 'Straw' *Select*, October 1998

Sample statistics

The statistics below provide a numerical overview of the gender of bands and writers in the new band articles sample. Percentages rounded to the nearest 1%

1. The bands in the sample can be divided into 6 categories as follows:

Type of band	Frequency	% of total
All male bands	36	67%
Predominantly male bands (the majority of the band are male and occupy the most prominent roles – singer, guitarist, songwriter)	4	7%
All female bands	5	9%
Predominantly female bands (the majority of the band are female and occupy the most prominent roles – singer, guitarist, songwriter)	3	5%
Female-fronted bands (there is one female band-member, the singer)	3	5%
Mixed gender bands (the prominent roles are shared by male and female members of the band)	3	5%

- There are a total of 18 (33%) bands with female members.

2. When the total number of band members is counted, the gender make-up of the bands is as follows:

Gender of band member	Frequency	% of total
Male	181	83%
Female	37	17%

- 40% of the total number of female band members are singers, but only 19% of the total number of male band members are singers.

3. The gender of the articles' writers is as follows:

Gender of writer	Frequency	% of total
Male	41	76%
Female	13	24%

- 38.5% of the articles written by female writers were about all or predominantly female artists, while only 24.4% of the male writers' articles were about female artists. 56% of all the articles in the sample are written by a male writer about an all male band.

Appendix 2

Case-study bands

Suede

Biography

Suede formed in early 1990, the core of the band being Brett Anderson (vocals), Mat Osman (bass) and Justine Frischmann (guitar). School friends Brett and Mat met Justine at university in London where Brett and Justine became a couple. The trio recruited Bernard Butler (lead-guitar) and Simon Gilbert (drums) and played their first gig in June 1990. The following year Frischmann left the band, and Anderson, and the four piece limped on to little critical or popular acclaim. However, in January 1992 they played an *NME* 'On' new bands night at which Saul Galpern of Nude Records saw them and soon signed the band. Just before the release of the debut single 'The Drowners' in May 1992, the *Melody Maker* put the band on their front cover alongside the slogan 'Suede: the best new band in Britain'. Their second single 'Metal Mickey' (Sept 92) reached the top 20 and the band made their debut appearance on *Top of the Pops*, the following February 'Animal Nitrate' entered the chart at 7. Suede performed the single at the Brit Awards, but were not allowed to open the show for fear of alienating the ITV audience!

Their debut album, *Suede*, was released in March 1993 and sold over 100,000 copies in its first week of release. As Harris (2003) notes, 'for a group drawn from the world built around the music press and night-time radio, this was almost unprecedented' (p86). Suede headlined the second stage at Glastonbury and toured in America before returning to the studio to record their second album. During this time Bernard Butler left the band acrimoniously and recording was completed without him. *Dog Man Star* was eventually released in October 1994. In order to be able to tour the album the band recruited guitarist Richard Oakes, an A-level student from Poole, Dorset. But Suede's moment seemed to be over as they were eclipsed by Blur and Oasis. Although *Dog Man Star* entered the charts at 3 it didn't linger long and the singles taken from the album failed to get any higher than number 18 in the charts.

Suede were largely absent from the high period of Britpop during 1995/6. They re-emerged in September 1996 with a new keyboardist, Neil Codling a cousin of Simon Gilbert's, and a new album, *Coming Up*. The single that preceded it, 'Trash' charted at number 3, and the band's more upbeat and accessible sound, combined with the popularity of British guitar music at the time, saw *Coming Up* become their most

successful album, eventually spawning five top 10 singles. Suede headlined the Reading festival in 1997 when former band-member Justine Frischmann joined them on stage. At the end of the year they released a double album of b-sides entitled *Sci-Fi Lullabies*.

Post 1998

Suede released another two albums, *Head Music* (1999) and *A New Morning* (2002) but neither proved as popular as their previous work, yet the band retained a strong fanbase. In September 2003 they played a five night residency at the ICA in London, performing each of their albums in entirety on consecutive nights. Despite its unpopularity at its time of release, the night they played *Dog Man Star* was by far the most oversubscribed, with fans paying touts hundreds of pounds for tickets. At the end of the year the band finally split up, releasing a singles compilation before they went. In 2005, having not spoken for the best part of a decade, Brett Anderson and Bernard Butler reunited to form The Tears, and an album *Here Come The Tears* was released in June 2005 accompanied by a top 10 single 'Refugees'.

Discography

Singles:

Title	Release date	Highest UK chart position
The Drowners	23 May 1992	49
Metal Mickey	26 Sept 1992	17
Animal Nitrate	22 February 1993	7
So Young	17 May 1993	22
Stay Together	14 February 1994	3
We Are the Pigs	12 September 1994	18
The Wild Ones	14 November 1994	18
New Generation	30 January 1995	21
Trash	29 July 1996	3
Beautiful Ones	14 October 1996	8
Saturday Night	13 January 1997	6
Lazy	7 April 1997	9
Filmstar	11 August 1997	9

Albums:

Suede	29 March 1993	1
Dog Man Star	10 October 1994	3
Coming Up	2 September 1996	1
Sci-Fi Lullabies	6 October 1997	9

Sample articles

The articles on Suede analysed in Chapters 5-8 are listed below in chronological order.

- D. Cavanagh (1993) 'Whatever Happened to the Teenage Dream?' (interview), *Q*, February.
- J. Mulvey (1993) 'Latter-Day Nitrate Fever' (interview), *NME*, February 20.
- S. Williams (1993) 'A Hard Day's Nitrate' (live review), *NME*, March 13.
- S. Price (1993) 'The Fabric Four' (album review), *Melody Maker*, March 20.
- S. Sutherland (1993) 'One Day, Son, All This Could Be Yours...' (interview), *NME*, March 20.
- K. Cameron (1993a) 'A Very Brettish Coup' (album review), *NME*, March 27.
- S. Sutherland (1993b) 'Alias Smiths and Jones', (interview), *NME*, March 27.
- S. Maconie (1993) 'Gentlemen Time, Please' (interview), *Select*, April.
- S. Price (1993a) 'Suede Mania' (feature), *Melody Maker*, April 17.
- A. Mueller (1993b) 'Suede Mania' (interview), *Melody Maker*, April 17.
- M. Bell (1993) 'Who Loves A Lad In Suede?' (feature), *Vox*, May.
- S. Lamacq (1993) 'Ooooooh!' (album review), *Select*, May.
- A. Collins (1993) 'The Hype Report' (live review), *Select*, June.
- S. Sutherland (1993) 'They Trampled All Over the Corpse of Morrissey' (interview), *NME*, June 26.
- D. Fadele (1994) 'Figgy Star Lust' (live review), *NME*, January 8.
- S. Witter (1994) 'Pale and Interesting' (interview), *Sky Magazine*, February.
- G. Martin (1994) 'The Band That Rocks The Stable' (interview), *NME*, February 5.
- A. Higginbotham (1994) 'Seasidal Tendencies' (live review), *Select*, April.
- S. Sutherland (1994) 'Bernard Hated Us, The Tour and Everything' (interview), *NME*, September 3.
- D. Cavanagh (1994) '3 Unlimited' (interview), *Select*, October.
- D. Stubbs (1994) 'Let's Get Sirius' (album review), *Melody Maker*, October 8.
- P. Moody (1994) 'Teen Genie' (interview), *NME*, October 29.
- S. Malins (1994) 'Bark Life' (album review), *Vox*, November.
- S. Maconie (1994) 'Bark Psychosis' (album review), *Select*, November.
- J. T. Conway (1994) 'Untitled' (live review), *Melody Maker*, December 24-31.
- J. Harris (1995) 'Horse and Hounded' (interview), *NME*, January 14.

- S. Dalton (1995) 'Hair of the Dog Man' (live review), *NME*, February 11.
- G. Smith (1995) 'The Unlikely Lads' (interview), *Top of The Pops Magazine*, March.
- A. Mueller (1995) Untitled (live review), *Melody Maker*, June 3.
- M. Sutherland (1995) 'Toilet Ducks' (interview), *NME*, July 15.
- T. Kessler (1996) 'I'm Stronger Than Ever, I'm Afraid' (interview), *NME*, July 27.
- E. True (1996) 'Trashed!' (album review), *Melody Maker*, August 24.
- P. Moody (1996) 'Highs and Mighty' (album review), *NME*, August 31.
- S. Price (1996) Untitled (live review), *Melody Maker*, September 14.
- R. Wilkinson (1996) 'Top Gear' (album review), *Select*, October.
- J. Oldham (1996) 'I'll Forget You Butler' (live review), *NME*, October 12.
- D. Cavanagh (1996) 'We Have Re-Entry', (interview), *Select*, November.
- S. Price (1997) 'Saturday Night Fever' (interview), *Melody Maker*, January 18.
- S. Pattenden (1997) 'Staying Pout For The Summer' (interview), *Melody Maker* August 23.
- J. Harris (1997) Untitled (album review), *Select*, November.

Elastica

Biography

Having left Suede in 1991 Justine Frischmann graduated from UCL with a degree in Architecture in the summer of 1992 and then formed Elastica. The line-up, recruited through friends and the *Melody Maker's* backpages, was Frischmann (vocals and guitar), Donna Matthews (guitar), Annie Holland (bass) and Justin Welch (drums). The band played their first gig, under the name Onk, in early 1993 prompting an A&R bidding war to sign the band. They eventually signed to Steve Lamacq's Deceptive Records label. Elastica recorded their first John Peel session in September 1993 and released their first single 'Stutter' on limited edition 7" (1,500 copies only) in November. The single sold out immediately not nearly satisfying demand. Their first widely available single, 'Line Up' was released in February 1994 and charted at number 20. The band appeared on *Top of The Pops*, and then in a move that was to become their trademark, kept a low profile through much of 1994 while recording their album. A third single 'Connection' was released in October 1994, reaching number 17 in the charts, but their debut album, *Elastica*, did not come out until March 1995.

When it did it became the fastest selling debut album in chart history, beating the record set previously by Oasis' *Definitely Maybe*, and went on to sell over a million copies worldwide. Just prior to its release the band paid an out of court copyright settlement to the Stranglers and Wire because of the 'similarities' between their work and the Elastica singles 'Waking Up' and 'Connection'. For the remainder of 1995 and into 1996 the band toured the world exhaustively. After a headlining slot on the second stage at Glastonbury 1995 the band replaced Sinnead O'Connor on the American Lollapalooza tour. The strain was to prove too much for bassist Annie Holland and she left the band part way through. Back in the UK in spring the band recruited keyboardist Dave Bush, a former member of The Fall, and bassist Sheila Chipperfield. With this line up Elastica recorded a session for *The Evening Session* and played at the V96 festival in the Summer of 1996, but this was the last that was heard of the band for some time. From then on only rumours of the band's dysfunctional relationships, especially between Frischmann & Matthews, their prodigious drug use and aborted recording sessions surfaced. It wasn't a good time to be an Elastica fan, let me tell you.

Post 1998

The whereabouts of the second Elastica album was a music press joke until the band finally made their comeback at the Reading festival in 1999. Now a six-piece, Donna Matthews and Sheila Chipperfield had left the band the previous year, while Annie Holland had rejoined along with replacement guitarist Paul Jones (formerly of indie band Linoleum) and second keyboardist Mew. The band released a 6 song, chart ineligible EP,

which included 'How He Wrote Elastica Man' featuring Mark E Smith of The Fall, in August 1999. They finally released a second album *The Menace* in April 2000, but both critical and commercial reception was lukewarm. It charted at number 24 and spent only two weeks in the top 75. In 2001 Elastica released a final single and an album of BBC sessions, and then split up. Since then Donna Matthews played in the short-lived band Klang while Justine co-hosted two series of BBC3's architecture programme *Dreamspaces*. She did not, to my knowledge, engage in any dancing about architecture.

Discography

Singles:

Title	Release date	Highest UK chart position
Stutter	4 November 1993	-
Line Up	31 January 1994	20
Connection	10 October 1994	17
Waking Up	13 February 1995	13

Albums:

Elastica	13 March 1995	1
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Sample articles

The articles on Elastica analysed in Chapters 5-8 are listed below in chronological order.

- J. Mulvey (1993) 'Giddy Lippy Shake' (live review), *NME*, June 26.
- A. Smith (1993) Untitled (live review), *Melody Maker*, July 3.
- S. Maconie (1993) 'Pulling Power' (new band article), *Select*, August.
- J. Harris (1993) 'A Twang on the Ear' (new band article), *NME*, August 21.
- D. Cavanagh (1993) '4-Non Blondies' (live review), *Select*, November.
- S. Price (1993) 'At Full Stretch' (live review), *Melody Maker*, November 6.
- P. Mathur (1993) 'The Future Sounds of London?' (interview), *Melody Maker*, November 6.
- J. Harris & S. Williams (1993) 'Wine Women & Snog' (interview), *NME*, November 13.
- B. Bandyopadhyay (1993) 'This Charming Twang' (live review), *NME*, November 20.
- J. Mulvey (1994) 'Mad About The Boing' (interview), *NME*, January 8.
- P. Paphides (1994) 'Elasticagate!' (feature), *Melody Maker*, January 8.
- I. Watson (1994) Untitled (live review), *Melody Maker*, January 22.
- A. Mair (1994) 'New Faces' (new band article), *iD Magazine*, February.
- S. Pattenden (1994) 'The Bash Street Kids' (interview), *Select*, February.

- L. Verrico (1994) 'Pulling Power' (interview), *Vox*, February.
- E. True (1994) 'From Hype To Eternity' (interview), *Melody Maker*, October 8.
- P. Moody (1994) 'The Boings Are Back In Town' (live review), *NME*, October 29.
- A. Mueller (1994) 'Rubber Band Girls' (live review), *Melody Maker*, October 29.
- M. Holden (1994) 'Elastica Band' (interview), *Loaded*, November.
- K. Krizanovich (1994) 'Between The Sheets' (interview), *Sky Magazine*, November.
- J. Panic (1994) 'Elastica: Stretching the Limits' (interview), *Deadline #65*, October/November
- P. Gilbert (1995) 'Elastica' (feature), *Record Collector*, February.
- A. Raphael (1995) Untitled (interview), *The Face*, February.
- T. Kessler (1995) 'The Exploding Elastic Inevitable' (interview), *NME*, February 11.
- M. Sutherland (1995) 'Wakey Wakey' (interview), *Smash Hits*, February 15-28.
- D. Stubbs (1995) 'Biff! Twang! Wow!' (album review), *Melody Maker*, March 4.
- J. Dee (1995) 'Children of the Cornwell' (album review), *NME*, March 11.
- S. Reynolds (1995) 'Twang Twang You're Cred' (interview), *Melody Maker*, March 25.
- P. Loraine (1995) 'Elastic Band' (interview), *Top of the Pops Magazine*, April.
- S. Maconie (1995) 'Brisk' (album review), *Q*, April.
- S. Malins (1995) 'She's Got Control' (album review), *Vox*, April
- S. Pattenden (1995) Untitled (album review), *Select*, April.
- J. Cigarettes (1995) 'Rubber Ultra' (live review), *NME*, April 1.
- A. Mueller (1995) 'Wide Awake In America' (interview), *Top Of The Pops Magazine*, April 2.
- A. Deevoy (1995) 'You're Never Alone With...' (interview), *Q*, May.
- J. Cigarettes (1995) 'Atlantic Quaffing' (interview), *NME*, June 10.
- L. O'Brien (1996) 'Justine Frischmann' (feature), *Diva*, April/May.
- C. Heath (1996) 'Famous International Playgirls' (interview), *The Face*, June.
- A. Male (1996) 'One-Two-Three-Four...Five?' (live review), *Select*, October.
- J. Mulvey (1997) 'Fame! I'm Gonna Be Livid Forever' (interview), *NME*, January 4.

Oasis

Biography

Oasis were formed from the remnants of small-time Manchester band The Rain. Lead-singer Liam Gallagher's brother Noel joined up and swiftly took over all song writing duties as the band renamed themselves Oasis. The line up of Noel (guitars and vocals), Liam (vocals), Paul 'Bonehead' Arthurs (guitar), Paul 'Guigsy' McGuigan (bass) and Tony McCarroll (drums) signed to Creation Records at the end of 1993 and put their first single, 'Supersonic', out in April 1994. It charted at number 31. In August they released their debut album *Definitely Maybe* which sold 100,000 copies in its first four days making it the fastest selling debut album in the history of the British charts.

By the end of the year they were on their fifth single and up to number 3 in the charts, having spent the year garnering a reputation for their chaotic and debauched on-the-road antics, and in-fighting. In the first half of 1995 Oasis toured the US, sacked their original drummer McCarroll, replacing him with Alan White and released 'Some Might Say' their first number one hit. By the summer of 1995 'Britpop' was in full swing and on the 14th August Oasis and Blur both released singles prompting a media frenzy over who would win the 'race' to the top of the charts. Blur won selling 274,000 copies of 'Country House' to 216,000 copies of Oasis' 'Roll With It'.

Oasis' second album, (*What's The Story*) *Morning Glory?* was released in October and became the fastest selling album since Michael Jackson's *Bad* selling nearly 2 million copies by the end of the year. In February 1996 Oasis won three Brit Awards for Best Video, Best Album and Best Group. April saw them play two huge gigs at Manchester City's Maine Road venue, at which Noel Gallagher played a guitar painted as a Union Jack. The size of these events paled in comparison to the two dates they played in August at Knebworth Park, Hertfordshire, to a total of 250,000 people. Applications for tickets were even more staggering; 2.6 million, one in every 24 people in Britain wanted to go and see Oasis play.

In the months afterwards Liam announced his engagement to actress Patsy Kensit and, following a tour of the US Noel walked out on the band (as he had on several previous occasions) after a fight with Liam, only to make up again weeks later (as he had on several previous occasions). Oasis spent the next year living the high life, and having it written about in the tabloids while Noel also found time to write their third album. *Be Here Now* was released in August 1997 and accompanied by a half-hour BBC1 documentary screened on the eve of release. This time the album sold 696,000 copies in its first week, making it the fastest selling album of all time. Three weeks prior to this triumph Noel Gallagher and his partner Meg Matthews had attended Tony Blair's infamous show-biz

reception at 10 Downing St. With Britpop in its come-down phase the band continued to be phenomenally successful, touring globally and releasing an album of B-sides at the end of 1998.

Since 1998

Oasis are the only one of the four case-study bands still having hits. They have released four albums since 2000 (*Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants* (2000), *Heathen Chemistry* (2002), *Don't Believe The Truth* (2005) and a live album *Familiar To Millions* (2000)). Noel and Liam are the only remaining members of the original line up, while *Morning Glory* is still their biggest selling album.

Discography

Singles:

Title	Release date	Highest UK chart position
Supersonic	11 April 1994	31
Shakermaker	13 June 1994	11
Live Forever	8 August 1994	10
Cigarettes and Alcohol	10 October 1994	7
Whatever	18 December 1994	3
Some Might Say	24 April 1995	1
Roll With It	14 August 1995	2
Wonderwall	30 October 1995	2
Don't Look Back in Anger	19 February 1996	1
D'You Know What I Mean?	7 July 1997	1
Stand By Me	22 September 1997	2
All Around The World	21 January 1998	1

Albums:

Definitely Maybe	30 August 1994	1
(What's The Story) Morning Glory	2 October 1995	1
Be Here Now	21 August 1997	1
The Masterplan	8 November 1998	2

Sample articles

The articles on Oasis analysed in Chapters 5-8 are listed below in chronological order.

- E. Morgan (1994) 'Pool's Gold' (new band article), *NME*, April 2.
- T. Kessler (1994) 'Respect is Dune' (live review), *NME*, April 9.
- K. Cameron (1994a) Untitled (live review), *NME*, April 23.
- J. Harris (1994b) 'The Bruise Brothers' (interview), *NME*, April 23.
- S. Price (1994) 'Northern Slights?' (live review), *Melody Maker*, August 20.
- K. Cameron (1994a) 'Family Duels' (album review), *NME*, August 27.
- S. Sutherland (1994b) 'Insolence is Golden' (live review), *NME*, August 27.
- P. Lester (1994) 'Certainly Probably' (album review), *Melody Maker*, August 27.
- A. Perry (1994) Untitled (album review), *Select*, September.
- A. Perry (1994) 'No Pictures, Pal' (feature), *Select*, October.
- A. Scanlon (1994) 'He Ain't Heavy...' (interview), *Vox*, October.
- J. Robb (1994) 'Man City Slickers' (live review), *Vox*, November.
- A. Perry (1994) 'Chaos. Drink. Noise. Drugs. Songs...' (interview), *Select*, December.
- E. True (1994) 'White Band in Hammersmith Palais' (live review), *Melody Maker*, December 24-31.
- T. Parkes (1995) 'Life's A Beach' (live review), *Melody Maker*, July 22.
- S. Maconie (1995) 'The Black Sheep Boy' (interview), *Select*, August.
- K. Cameron (1995a) 'I'm A Lad, and that's f—ing that' (interview), *NME*, September 30.
- J. Robinson (1995b) 'Tales of the Expected' (album review), *NME*, September 30.
- D. Stubbs (1995) 'Tale Ending?' (album review), *Melody Maker*, September 30.
- P. Hewitt (1995) 'Who's Charted?' (interview), *Loaded*, October.
- A. Harrison (1995) 'Star Trip II: The Search for Rock' (album review), *Select*, November.
- A. Heath (1995) Untitled (interview), *The Face*, November.
- P. Moody (1995) 'The Stardust Brothers' (live review), *NME*, November 18.
- K. Micaliff (1996) 'The Kings of Rock 'n' Roll' (interview), *Sky Magazine*, March.
- B. Stud (1996) 'Oasis in America' (interview), *Melody Maker*, March 30.
- P. Moody & M. Beaumont (1996) 'The Oasis Story Pt 1: From Burnage to Britpop' (feature), *Vox*, May.
- P. Moody & M. Beaumont (1996a) 'The Oasis Story Pt 2: From the Brats to America's Most Wanted' (feature), *Vox*, June.

- K. Cameron (1996b) 'Mama, it's all supernova now' (feature), *Vox*, June.
- S. Sutherland (1996) 'Nevermind the Ballochs' (live review), *NME*, August 10.
- J. Cigarettes (1996) 'Five Go Mad For It' (live review), *NME*, August 17.
- J. Harris (1997) 'Good, Aren't They?' (interview), *Select*, August.
- T. Parkes (1997) 'Now That's What I Call Music!' (album review), *Melody Maker*, August 16.
- S. Williams (1997) 'Some Almighty' (album review), *NME*, August 16.
- R. Wilkinson (1997) 'And on the third album, Noel created...' (album review), *Select*, September.
- A. Male (1997) 'Vandal In The Wind' (live review), *Select*, November.
- G. Morris (1998) 'Rock 'n' Roll Stars and Stripes' (interview), *Melody Maker*, March 7.
- J. Harris (1998) 'I'm A Dirty Dog, Me' (interview), *Select*, May.
- P. Robinson (1998) 'B-Sides Here Now' (album review), *Melody Maker*, October 31.
- A. Collins (1998) 'Besides Themselves' (album review), *Q*, December.
- A. Perry (1998) 'Some Might Pay' (album review), *Select*, December.

Echobelly

Biography

Sonya Aurora-Madan (vocals) and Glenn Johansson (guitar) met in London at a gig in the early 1990s and by the summer of 1992 had formed Echobelly along with Alex Keyser (bass) and Andy Henderson (drums). They released their first record, the 'Bellyache' EP, in November 1993 to considerable media attention, much of it directed towards the 'novelty' of an Asian woman fronting an indie band. Echobelly could soon count Morrissey among their fans and released two more singles before their debut album *Everyone's Got One* (aka EGO) in August 1994. Around this time the band's line-up was amended to include guitarist Debbie Smith, who had formerly played with Curve and any number of early-90s lesbian bands. Initially drafted in as a replacement for Glenn when he broke his arm, she became a permanent fixture. The band toured in America and Japan where, by 1995, they were considered superstars.

In August 1995, at the height of Britpop, they released their most successful single 'Great Things' which charted at number 13 and got Echobelly on *Top of the Pops*. The album *On* which followed in September was also widely successful and the band released two further singles from it. After that the band entered something of a low patch. Original bass-player Keyser left the band on bad terms (he was replaced by James Harris). On top of that the band's label Rhythm King became embroiled in legal problems with Sony, and Echobelly were forced to go to court because a former member sued them for royalties. Due to this, and Sonya's ill health, Echobelly were unable to record for some time. However, they made a comeback in 1997 with the release of their third album *Lustra*. It was neither a critical nor commercial success, and despite the fanfare that had once heralded them, they were all but dismissed. John Harris (2003), for example, describes them as 'one of the explicitly British groups who had appeared in the slipstream of [Blur's album] *Modern Life Is Rubbish*' (p167).

Post 1998

Echobelly disappeared from the public eye for several years after *Lustra* and parted company with their record label, only to establish their own label, Fry Up, through which they released an album, *People Are Expensive*, in 2001. The band played a number of dates to coincide with the release but have never regained the popularity they enjoyed in the Britpop era. However, they also released a 'best of' album in 2003 entitled *I Can't Imagine The World Without Me*, and in 2004 put out a new album *Gravity Pulls* on their own label.

Discography

Singles:

Title	Release date	Highest UK chart position
Bellyache EP	November 1993	-
Insomniac	24 April 1994	47
I Can't Imagine The World Without Me	21 July 1994	39
Close...But	21 October 1994	59
Great Things	18 August 1995	13
King of the Kerb	20 October 1995	25
Dark Therapy	16 February 1996	20
The World Is Flat	8 August 1997	31
Here Comes the Big Rush	27 October 1997	56

Albums:

Everyone's Got One	22 August 1994	8
On	15 September 1995	4
Lustra	10 November 1997	47

Sample articles

The articles on Echobelly analysed in Chapters 5-8 are listed below in chronological order.

- L. Evans (1993) Untitled (live review), *NME* February 20.
- P. Moody (1993) Untitled (live review), *NME*, October 30.
- J. Cigarettes (1993) 'Dynamic Duodenum' (new band article), *NME*, November 6.
- P. Mathur (1993) 'The Future Sounds of London?' (interview), *Melody Maker* November 6.
- A. Perry (1993) 'Echobelly – new Smiths/Suede alert!' (new band article), *Select*, December.
- S. Williams (1993) 'Waving We're Waving' (live review), *NME*, December 25 – January 1.
- J. Robb (1994) 'Not Droning But Waving' (live review), *Melody Maker*, January 8.
- S. Pattenden (1994) 'Perfect Outsider' (interview), *Select*, February.
- A. Mueller (1994) Untitled (live review), *NME*, April 2.
- D. Stubbs (1994) 'Pop 'Belly' (interview), *Melody Maker*, June 18.
- V. Segal (1994) 'Ultra Sound!' (live review), *Melody Maker*, July 9.
- A. Mueller (1994) 'Credit To The Resonation' (album review), *Melody Maker*, August 13.
- D. Fadele (1994a) 'Repeat Defender', (interview), *NME*, August 20.
- S. Williams (1994b) 'Meet The Resonance' (album review), *NME*, August 20.
- E. True (1994) 'Everyone's A Winner' (interview), *Melody Maker*, August 27.

S. Dalton (1994a) 'Everything Starts With a 'T'' (interview), *Vox*, September.

S. Dalton (1994b) 'Class of '94' (album review), *Vox*, September.

S. Maconie (1994a) 'Don't Get Me Wrong' (interview), *Select*, September.

A. Harrison (1994b) 'Swing Out Sista' (album review), *Select*, September.

S. Dalton (1994) 'Echoes and the Money Men' (live review), *NME*, September 24.

C. McLean (1994) 'In the 'Belly of the Beast' (interview), *Vox*, October.

A. Mueller (1994) 'Get Yer Sonyayas Out!' (interview), *Melody Maker*, October 15.

D. Jennings (1994) 'Gut Reactions' (live review), *Melody Maker*, November 5.

E. Sirrs (1995) 'Land of the Rising Sonyas' (feature), *Vox*, March.

S. Wells (1995) 'A Right Little Madan' (interview), *NME*, August 19.

J. Nine (1995) "'Great' Expectations' (interview), *Melody Maker*, August 26.

A. Richardson (1995) "'Belly Flop' (album review), *NME*, September 19.

E. True (1995) 'Let's Get It On' (interview), *Melody Maker*, September 30.

A. Male (1995) Untitled (album review), *Select*, October.

J. Robinson (1995) 'Off!' (live review), *NME*, October 28.

M. Aston (1995) Untitled (album review), *Q*, November.

M. Luffman (1996) 'Far From the Madan Crowd' (live review), *Melody Maker*, February 10.

L. Verrico (1997) 'Allure Unto Herself' (interview), *Vox*, August.

E. True (1997) 'Echo and the Money Men' (interview), *Melody Maker*, August 2.

J. Wirth (1997) 'Cred Sonya!' (album review), *NME*, November 8.

B. Myers (1997) 'Going Belly Up' (album review), *Melody Maker*, November 15.

D. Booth (1997a) 'Madan For It!' (live review), *Melody Maker*, November 22.

M. Roland (1997b) 'All Fright On The Night' (interview), *Melody Maker*, November 22.

R. Wilkinson (1997) Untitled (album review), *Select*, December.

R. Morton (1997) Untitled (live review), *NME*, December 20-27.

Appendix 3

Chapter title sources

The titles of the following chapters were taken from the following songs' lyrics.

Chapter 4: "Introducing the band" taken from 'Introducing the Band' by Suede (*Dog Man Star*, Nude Records, 1994).

Chapter 5: "You need to be yourself" taken from 'Supersonic' by Oasis (*Definitely Maybe*, Creation Records, 1994).

Chapter 6: "If I can't be a star I won't get out of bed" taken from 'Waking Up' by Elastica (*Elastica*, Deceptive Records, 1995).

Chapter 7: "Will I belong dear?" taken from 'Insomniac' by Echobelly (*Everyone's Got One*, Fauve, 1994).

Chapter 8: "Here they come, the beautiful ones" taken from 'Beautiful Ones' by Suede (*Coming Up*, Nude Records, 1996).

Chapter 9: "Make a cup of tea and put a record on" taken from 'Waking Up' by Elastica (*Elastica*, Deceptive Records, 1995).

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