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Stephen Hill

## **Q and *The Face*:**

### **Narratives of consumption in the UK music press in the 1980s**

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**Stephen Hill** is Head of Media at The Burgate School and Sixth Form Centre in Fordingbridge and also teaches Media Theory at Bournemouth Media School.

University of Winchester  
West Hill, Winchester  
Hampshire  
SO22 4NR  
sah78uk@yahoo.co.uk

#### **Abstract**

This article challenges the view that the use of consumer-based vocabulary in the music press is at odds with valuing popular music qualitatively. This is placed in the context of those who have written specifically on the music press including Forde (2001), Strachan and Leonard (2003) and John Stratton (1982) as well as some of the key figures in *Popular Music Studies*: from Adorno (1942) and Reisman (1950) to Goodwin (1988), Grossberg (1993) and Negus (1996). The piece focuses in detail on *The Face* and *Q* during the 1980s and includes a resume of the personnel and institutions involved. However, the main focus of the article is the textual analysis of both titles and, in particular, the interpretation of this in light of Pierre Bourdieu's work in *Distinction* (1979). It is argued that while education and cultural taste are integral parts in the function of the music press, it is the reflexive construction of the self that is primary in the judgements made about popular music.

#### **Introduction**

This article looks at the role of consumerism in the British music press during the 1980s and its function in the production of meaning. It focuses specifically on the way in which consumer discourse was incorporated into vocabularies for talking about popular music during this period and the implications this might have for the understanding of the music press in a wider sense. It is argued that while the tightening and corporatization of the publishing business has become synonymous with the constriction of debate in the music press (Forde 2001; Gorman 2001), the appropriation of consumer discourse into the lexicon of popular music criticism has offered new opportunities for the objectification of heritage and the articulation of cultural taste. For the purposes of this discussion I offer textual analysis of *The Face*

(UK style magazine which ran from 1980 to 2004) and *Q* magazine, both of which were launched during the period and deploy very different strategies for the deconstruction of popular music as product. The article also makes reference to *NME* and *Smash Hits*: titles whose personnel were intimately involved in the shaping of both *Q* and *The Face*.

## **Contemporary debates on the popular music press**

Strachan and Leonard define music journalism as 'the practice of reporting or writing about music for publication in specialist or non-specialist print media including the music press, life-style magazines, newspapers, biographies and histories', stressing the importance of the music press in the 'ascription of popular music meaning' and the importance of 'certain stylistic conventions' to the way in which popular music has been 'valued and judged' (Strachan and Leonard 2003a: 253). It is the aim of this article to explore the relationship between such forms and conventions and the construction of pop ideology. In this direction the work of John Stratton remains definitive in that he identifies the music press as 'active in the development of ideological rationalisations of popular music' (Stratton 1982: 274) and the tension he perceives between art and commerce in the production of 'popular music discourse', both of which are central to what follows. As Stratton notes, 'Art and commercialism are articulated as two separate domains by music journalists. Consequently one domain may be discussed without the intrusion of the other. The result is an ideological resolution of a real economic conflict' (Stratton 1982: 283). While the resolution of that discursive conflict remains a central tenet of the popular music press, I will argue that the transformation in popular music journalism during the 1980s manifested itself in the synthesis of those 'two separate domains' in the appropriation of consumer discourse.

## **Language and ideology**

Frith (1996) focuses on the discursive language that is available to us when making judgements of taste about popular music by identifying three contemporary arenas in which judgement about popular music is articulated. Firstly, amongst musicians themselves: focusing specifically on the discursive strategies and narrative devices used to evaluate peer performance. Secondly, amongst music producers—spotlighting the industry's internal decision-making process as well as the rhetoric of marketing campaigns. And, thirdly, amongst the music press—emphasizing the mediation of cultural taste by those writing about popular music.

What is significant about Frith's account of the music press is that he decouples the depthless landscape of value within postmodernity from the specialist audience of popular music consumers reading the music press.<sup>1</sup> Instead he argues the music press is resolutely modernist in their longing for a sensitive minority readership. This echoes Goodwin's (1990: 271) suggestion that very traditional narratives of authorship preside over even the most digitally advanced or 'postmodern' musical productions. Frith focuses on the use of adjectives and the way in which the music press turn description into interpretation: relating music to its possible uses and placing it generically. However, it is the function of both these as 'consumer guidance' that is pivotal, in particular the knowingness of the exchange between critic and reader; 'Such reviews are incomprehensible to anyone who is not already informed in the right way. Criticism, in other words, is not just producing a version of the music for the reader but also a version of the listener for the music' (Frith 1996: 68). This provides a useful framework in which the relationship between language, consumerism and qualitative judgements of taste can be explored. By making the process reciprocal and reflexive (i.e. the reader is complicit in the proclamation of cultural nobility because the act of consuming both the magazine and music is extricable from the construction of self), Frith shifts the emphasis of distinction from the music to the medium of criticism (i.e. language).

## Polyglottism

Forde (2001) shares a view held by Gorman (2001) that the 'quality' of writing in the music press has declined as the industrial context has become more streamlined. Forde presents the New Journalism<sup>2</sup> style of 'immersion writing', the cult of the 'personality writer' and the use of 'literary techniques' as belonging to a hey-day of

1. By positioning pop as postmodern I am locating it within the relativist nature of taste and value within postmodern culture. For discussions of the ways in which popular music might be seen to embody postmodern cultural practice see Goodwin 1990; Grossberg 1992; 1993; Blake 1999.

2. 'From the mid-1960s onward music journalism increasingly revealed the profound influence of the emerging New Journalism movement. Spearheaded by colour-supplement and magazine writers such as Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson and novelists such as Norman Mailer and Truman Capote the New Journalism undertook to take journalism out of the real of mere "dry" reporting of facts by utilizing many of the stylistic components of fiction. Its conventions had an important influence on style and content as well as on the construction of the image of the journalist within music especially rock journalism. Stylistic traits pioneered by the new journalists such as scene by scene construction, third person point of view, recording of everyday detail and the inclusion of the persona of the journalist within the text were appropriated by US and UK music critics from the end of the 1960s. The fact that many new journalists explicitly created a new cultural agenda that treated popular culture as worthy of serious analysis has also been attributed to the influence of the New Journalism' (Strachan and Leonard 2003b: 254).

magazine journalism. In particular, the ascendancy of what he terms 'polyglottism' (to speak in many tongues) of titles like *NME* and *Melody Maker* in the 1970s and writers like Danny Baker, Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill is offered up as the zenith of popular music journalism. He attributes the editorial freedom of that era to a greater stability in a magazine publishing market that was less competitive and publishing groups that were not so streamlined or target focused.

Forde argues that the 1980s were an era of decline in popular music journalism. This, he suggests, was characterized by a shift away from 'journalist as a star' features, towards a more PR-centred culture that manifested itself in a 'corporate and occupational conservatism' in the British music press, typified in the 'monoglottic' house style of the Emap titles *Smash Hits* and *Q*. He argues that these magazines became 'subjected to increasing bureaucratisation, policy orientation and goal attainment, resulting in a new type of brand-centric music journalism which marked a significant break from (and overturning of) the polyglottic personality approach' (Forde 2001: 29). Like Frith, Forde identifies the role of music journalism as a 'consumer guide'; the distinction he makes though between this and the 'polyglots' is that from the 1980s onwards the music press was 'branded'. While he borrows from Bourdieu (1979) in suggesting that music critics acquire a 'capital of consecration over cultural artefacts' (ibid.) it is the homogenizing of this into a singular corporate style that he views as problematic.

In response to this a number of points can be made. Firstly, it may be said that with its 'journalist as star interviewers' the *NME* and *Melody Maker* were in their own way branded 'polyglots' themselves. Secondly, as Negus (1996) makes clear, the informal relationship between the record company's press office is often a clandestine one. Thirdly, the temptation to romanticize the 'discordant' 'iconoclasm' of the personality writers needs to be kept at bay. As Charles Shaar Murray's introduction to Gorman (2001) confirms, some of those writers who shaped the music press during the 1970s have a tendency to view that era through decidedly rose-tinted spectacles: 'You could never have created the *NME* of the 70s in a marketing meeting, and even if you had, you could never have found the people capable of producing such a monstrosity through any conventional publishing channels' (Gorman 2001: 10).

It is not, however, the aim of this piece to ascertain whether the journalistic style of the music press in the 1970s was qualitatively better than that in the 1980s. The very premise of this article is that it is difficult to make such qualitative distinctions about cultural artefacts; although obviously I accept the consensus view that the 1970s was a time of great freedom for journalists writing about popular music (and that that in itself might be considered a good thing). However, to view this freedom from the economic considerations of the 1980s as the definition of good music

journalism is to fall foul of the very same Frankfurt School anxiety about mass culture expressed by Adorno (1992) that has so beleaguered Popular Music Studies. Hence, the aim of this paper is to explore the possibility that, for the purposes of valuing music qualitatively, the appropriation of consumer discourse and the shift to a more 'anodyne' register does not necessarily impact upon the worth of what is written. Indeed, if we accept Stratton's view that the role of the music press is the ideological reconciliation of art and commerce, then the explicit articulation of that consumer-based discourse has real potential for illuminating that process.

## The music press and consumer discourse

The role of consumer discourse in the music press is an under-explored area within Popular Music Studies. Within Cultural Studies the popular music press has been used to enable and illuminate discussions in which ideas about consumption and identity are indexed to relative notions of cultural value. For example, Davies (2001) and Railton (2001) have indexed these debates to very specific gender narratives in articles that explore the 'homosociality' of rock magazines and the 'carnavalesque' of the pop press. What is missing is a textual exploration of the relationship between the producers and consumers of the popular music press and the cultural narratives attached to particular artefacts. Of those magazines that have placed popular music within the broader contours of consumer culture, Gudmundsson *et al.* (2002), Forde (2001) and Gorman (2001) all make mention of the corporate style of *Q* magazine and its emphasis on the consumption of popular music. Much more, however, has been written about the role of consumerism and *The Face*. For example, the magazine recurs in the work of Hebdidge (1988), Mort (1996) and Nixon (1996) as the definitive music and lifestyle title. On the one hand, therefore, the work of these theorists offers an excellent way of beginning to think about how we might begin to approach the use of consumer discourse in *Q*: not least in terms of its close point of relation to the representations of masculinity within the magazine. On the other hand, some account needs first to be made of the very different audiences to which each title appealed, as well as the clandestine relationships between the personnel involved.

*The Face* was launched in 1980 by Nick Logan. Logan had previously been editor of *NME* and *Smash Hits*. At *NME* he had worked alongside Alan Smith to revamp the magazine in ways that ushered in the era Forde defines as the polyglot years. Upon leaving the IPC title in 1978 he launched *Smash Hits* for Emap. This was an immediate success and in the first half of 1979 *Smash Hits* had ABC<sup>3</sup> figures of around 166,000 (only 40,000 less than *NME*). Two years later Logan left *Smash Hits* and set

3. The Audit Bureau of Circulations give figures for magazine sales in the UK.

up *The Face* using his own money. Operating initially out of *Smash Hits* offices, the first issue of *The Face* appeared in May 1980. Logan describes how he was inspired by the 'luscious colour' of *Paris Match* and that his impetus for *The Face* was that 'common people' should have 'glossy paper too' (Gorman 2001: 287). Nominally a music title, the magazine stood out from the 'inkies', not just because of its production values, but because it positioned popular music within what Nixon refers to as the wider context of the pop process: 'the dress codes of pop consumers, together with the design of record sleeves, glamour, the stars and pop video' (Nixon 1996: 146). Utopian as this vision might have been, the reality was that *The Face* addressed a more rarefied constituent of readers than either *NME* or *Smash Hits*. Its audience was cohered around a sub-cultural elite of metropolitan fashion police and style cognoscenti (and those who aspired to such status); a group whose identity was articulated in explicit material acts of consumption.

The notion that *The Face* epitomized something very specific and not entirely pleasant about Britain under Margaret Thatcher has become a recurrent theme in received thinking about the title. Gudmundsson *et al.* (2002: 56), for example, define *The Face* as the embodiment of 'postmodern consumer ideology'. Likewise Mark Kohn argues that *The Face* was a useful passbook to young ideas for 40-year old advertising executives (Gorman 2001: 289). Elsewhere, 'style', in particular, is something that is viewed as problematic. For example, Mort suggests 'style has been defined as the product of Thatcherism in as much as it involved capitulation to the marketplace' (Mort 1996: 28). Consequently, when Emap launched *Q* in November 1986, the people working on it saw it quite differently to *The Face*. '*The Face* had gone mad' commented Cowles (Art Director on early editions of *Q* magazine) in 1996 'and was a really high faulting style title, very 80s' and on *Q* he was 'designing in a way to counterpoint that'. Likewise, Gudmundsson *et al.* make clear in *Q*'s earliest incarnation that there was a stark contrast between advertising and editorial, which juxtaposed the synergy of the two pioneered at *The Face*.

Certainly *Q* was less avant-garde in its cultural choices; it sought out the established stars—Paul McCartney, Elton John, Mick Jagger etc. It is also widely recognized as having appealed to a new older demographic of popular music enthusiasts who were simultaneously being targeted as potential consumers of the CD. Nevertheless, on a surface level *Q* bore more than a passing resemblance to *The Face*. Just as *Q* positioned itself as a counterpoint to *The Face*, it was also defined in opposition to the 'inkies' such as *NME*, *Sounds* and *Melody Maker*. In an obvious sense this was apparent because it was printed on glossy A4 paper, and large sections were in colour. However, more importantly is the fact that it also shunned the polyglottism of *NME* and much has been made of the anonymous professional style of *Q* journalism.

In one sense the similarities between *Q* and *The Face* were attributable to the personnel involved; both Mark Ellen (editor) and David Hepworth (editorial director) had been editors of *Smash Hits* after Logan's departure. *Smash Hits'* departure from the old-style music press in its use of glossy colour paper would go on to characterize both *The Face* and *Q*. Its success was also predicted on the rise of a new sensibility in popular music brought about by groups who were less keen on preserving the distinction between art and commerce. Unlike the music press before it, *Smash Hits* did not have to work particularly hard to maintain that illusion, but rather it presented itself as complicit in the process of commoditization.

The era of *Smash Hits'* ascendancy was 1979 to 1984. These years saw the emergence of what became known as New Pop: 'Blondie, Police, Jam, Adam, Spandau, Human League, Duran Duran, Culture Club' (Gorman 2001: 286). As Ellen observed in the 2003 Channel Four documentary broadcast to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *Smash Hits*, these groups demanded a new medium because 'they did not work on horrible old inky smudgie broadsheet paper... It only really works pin sharp printed in colour' (Ellen, *25 Years of Smash Hits*, Channel 4, 2003). However, they also embodied an ideological position that was quite counter to the *NME* of the 1970s. Rimmer, for instance, clearly positioned New Pop in a dialectic with old rockist ideas:

[T]o those who cling on to the spirit of punk, everything about the New Pop is utterly abhorrent and devoid of their precious 'credibility'. The New Pop isn't rebellious. It embraces the star system. It conflates art, business and entertainment. It cares more about sales and royalties and the strength of the dollar than anything else and to make matters worse, it isn't the least bit guilty about it (Rimmer 1985: 13).

It was this anti-*NME* spirit that really galvanized the editorial after Logan's departure. Hepworth, for example, suggests that '*Smash Hits* was put together by a bunch of people who couldn't get anywhere in that *NME* world' (Gorman 2001: 291). Consequently, the rationale underpinning *Smash Hits* was not only to make the journalistic style 'shorter, tighter and more disciplined' (ibid. 285), but also less serious. As Hepworth's comments to Channel Four suggest, under his tenure as editor between 1981 and 1983, *Smash Hits* purposely celebrated the synthetic and inconsequential: 'We at *Smash Hits* are planning to reverse the tide of music coverage entirely in the direction of trivia. Henceforth we are really genuinely interested in the colour of people's socks' (Hepworth, *25 Years of Smash Hits*, Channel 4, 2003).

So, if *The Face* was the ultimate manifestation of *Smash Hits'* celebration of the surface culture of popular music under Logan, then *Q* can be viewed as taking the impartial and irreverent tone championed by Hepworth and Ellen to the next level. However, it is the articulation of consumer discourse that has drawn the most

attention within the academy. As Mort has argued, *Q* was first and foremost a consumer lifestyle magazine (Mort 1996: 75). Likewise, Forde suggests that *Q*'s monoglotic house-style built on that of *Smash Hits* and was a function of its role 'as a branded consumer guide' (2001: 29). And, equally, Gudmundsson *et al.* argue that *Q* has become the 'ultimate consumer guide for rock and related products' (*ibid.* 58). There is a temptation then to lump together *Smash Hits*, *The Face* and *Q* as a single pivotal moment in music journalism; one which ushered in an era of what Forde describes as 'brand-centric music journalism' and its corollary: 'bureaucratisation, policy orientation and goal attainment' (Forde 2001: 29). And, as Mat Snow has observed, '*Q* with *Smash Hits* and *The Face* before it, broke the stranglehold of the three-party music press' (in Gorman 2001: 319). While this in itself might be a good thing, the subtext underpinning the work of Gorman, Forde and Gudmundsson is that this was somehow the beginning of the end for music journalism.

Although in retrospect we can see that the music press of the 1970s might tacitly have been about the reflexive construction of self through the consumption of popular music, consensus, it would seem, is that during the 1980s *Smash Hits*, *The Face* and *Q* all embodied postmodern culture in a way that was new. For example, Forde suggests that both *Smash Hits* and *Q* were typical of Emap's shift towards 'glossy, high production, niche titles' (Forde 2001: 26). Likewise, Gudmundsson *et al.* argue that *The Face* 'embraced postmodern consumer ideology' (Gudmundsson *et al.* 2002: 56), while Gorman ventures that *Smash Hits* and *The Face* 'introduced pop, street fashion and lifestyle as viable commercial prospects' (Gorman 2001: 15). Clearly, the concept of a society pre-occupied with surface culture and consumer ideology is not new and can be traced through the work of Barthes (1993) and Baudrillard (1998). However, *Smash Hits*, *The Face* and to a certain extent *Q* were perhaps the first to articulate these ideas for a more mainstream audience.

The notion that 'style' is a phenomenon exclusive to the material culture of the 1980s, however, is disingenuous. From Teddy Boys to Punk, youth culture since the 1950s has consistently expressed itself in particular stylistic codes.<sup>4</sup> However, what the monoglots and *Q* in particular have been criticized for is the moderation and balance of their written style. Forde, for example, portrays *Q*'s style as non-partisan and conservative while Barney Hoskyn describes it as 'smarmy' (cited by Gorman 2001: 319). Now of course, the tendency to view the music press of the 1980s as somehow less resistive to the establishment is in part built upon a romantic fantasy that the youth cultures of earlier generations were somehow more radical. How-

4. For a discussion of the relationship between style and politics the work of Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1984) and Stuart Ewan in 'All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture' (1988) are both definitive.

ever, it is also contingent upon a view of the music press prior to the 1980s that can be dislocated from consumer discourse. To what extent this is possible needs careful consideration. On the one hand, it could be argued that by embracing consumer discourse (as opposed to implicitly embodying it) the monoglots actually exposed the real ideological function of the music press identified by Stratton: to fabricate the distinction between art and commerce. On the other hand, Mort (1996: 28) has argued that 'the style press of the 1980s' continued the alliance between style and resistance 'albeit in a different form'. However, what is required is a framework for looking at the ways in which consumer cultural practice can be seen as resistive. It is to this end perhaps that the work of Gudmundsson *et al.* is most transforming in the slippage they identify between consumption that is *conspicuous* in a title like *The Face* and consumption that is *inconspicuous* in *Q*. This distinction is specific not only to the location of popular music within that consumer discourse but also the representation of the male subject:

*Q* in the 1980s was anti-Face and anti-Morley. Its readers were grown men for whom rock was a hobby (e.g. record collecting, factual knowledge suited to pub-quizzes) and reading a magazine was entertainment. Rather than placing rock in the middle of the metropolitan lifestyle, *Q* pictured it as a leisure activity, part of a life that also included work, football, television and the local pub (Gudmundsson *et al.* 2002: 58).

This is interesting to me not only because it positions *Q* in relation to *The Face* as well as what was going on at the *NME* during this period but it also foretells of the way in which the formula was modified to produce Emap's *FHM* and IPC's *Loaded*. However, for the purpose of this article it is the licence it gives to investigate the relationship between popular music, consumer discourse, and the construction of masculinity in *The Face* and *Q* that is primary.

### **Consumer discourse, popular music and the construction of masculinity**

Pitting one text against another in a bid to uncover the ideological difference is not a new strategy for dealing with the music press. Hebdige (1988) uses the analogy of a war between first and second worlds to describe the relationship between *Ten8* magazine and *The Face*. Broadly speaking, the world of *Ten8* is modernist: the relations of power are ordered so that priority and precedence are given to written and spoken language over mere 'idolatrous imagery' (Hebdige 1988: 158). By contrast, the world of *The Face* could be said to embody a more postmodern rationale: 'Truth—insofar as it exists at all—is first and foremost pictured: embodied in images which have their own power and effects' (*ibid.*). Hebdige argues that the relative

success of *The Face* over *Ten8* is reflective of the times, which are characterized by the collapse of the relationship between the signifier and signified, the predomination of surface culture and the simulacrum. In one sense it would be very easy to read the relationship between *Q* and *The Face* against the same binary. Certainly, *Q* adheres to a much more modernist rationale than *The Face*. And in this sense the success of *Q* can be seen as a yearning for the much more familiar terrain of *NME* and *Melody Maker*. As David Cavanagh points out, *Q* was for a generation of music fans who had 'grown up reading Nick Kent and Charles Shaar Murray and, hey, here was this magazine where they could read Charles Shaar Murray again' (Gorman 2001: 323). However, not only does such a tactic ignore the fact that the effect achieved by the bricolage of writers of the polygottic era was no less postmodern than the more homogenized style of *Q*, but it is also antithetical to the view of the 1980s outlined by Frith. Rather, the success of *Q* can be attributed to the successful manufacture of a veneer of modernity over a base structure very similar to that of *The Face*. This can be said to have worked on two levels. Firstly, while *The Face* embodied consumer discourse, *Q* magazine worked hard to fetishize its use of that language. Secondly, while *The Face* positioned popular music in relation to the wider pop process, *Q* positioned popular music amidst the lifestyle of its male readers. Consequently, the ideological distinction between *The Face* and *Q* is inextricable from the use of consumer discourse.

One strategy for extrapolating the ideological significance of the distinction between *The Face* and *Q* is to plot them either side of the conceptual divide marked historically by the terms 'rock' and 'pop'. This is nothing new of course; Strachan and Leonard (2003a) point to the way in which the music press in the late 1960s became fragmented along similar lines. Similarly *The Face* could be said to embody what Mary Harron (1990) defines as the 'mutability and glitter' of pop, while *Q* believes in the 'geniuses and heroes' that characterize rock (Harron 1990: 209–10). This approach is also particularly useful when considering the role of sex in popular music discourse because, as Coates (1997) suggests, rock and pop are not only connotative of particular narratives of authenticity but also gender: '[R]ock is metonymic with "authenticity" while "pop" is metonymic with "artifice". Sliding even further down the metonymic slope, "authentic" becomes "masculine" while "artificial" becomes "feminine" ' (Coates 1997: 53).

And certainly, *The Face* addressed a less singular demography of readers than *Q*. It belonged to a more mixed constituent of metropolitan style aficionados, while *Q* was predominantly the cultural property of male record buyers. However, the problem with this tactic is that it reduces the multiplicity of referents to which the 'pop aesthetic' appeals and relies instead often upon readings of texts that are perhaps *too* resistive and, moreover, specific, in their emphasis. For example, while the

rise of the glossy music magazine may owe a debt to the legacy of women's magazines, the danger, it would seem, is to be drawn into the 'backlash' debate (Faludi 1992). Clearly, magazines like *Q* could be viewed as part of the subtle and insidious recoil against feminism, in which the mores of female culture were co-opted into a re-inscription of a more singular notion of patriarchy. However, the emergence of men's lifestyle titles were just as indicative of capitalism's rapacious need to find new markets and emerging definitions of masculinity that were more fluid. The gender politics, then, needs to be placed in context of the transformation in consumer culture.

If we accept the position put forward by Radway (1984: 19) that 'literary texts are the result of a complicated and lengthy process of production that is itself controlled by a host of material and social factors', then it seems reasonable that the same should apply to other non-literary forms of writing, where the time frame may be shorter but the economic pressure even more pressing. In this sense the historical division between subject specific titles like *Angling Times* or *Practical Motorist*, aimed at men, and more general lifestyle titles like *Woman's Own* and *Cosmopolitan*, aimed at women, is indicative of some underlying distinction in the ways that male and female spheres of culture are conceptualized. The emergence, too, over the last decade, of lifestyle titles like *FHM*, *Loaded* (and most recently *Nuts* and *Zoo*), aimed squarely at male readers, speaks of a fundamental transformation in the way gender is constructed by the media. We have moved, it would seem, from the situation Winship (1987: 6) describes of the success of women's lifestyle magazines being connotative only of women's exclusion from culture 'other than the one which is controlled and mediated by men' to an arena in which culture order is open to contestation. The music press and specifically *Q* magazine and *The Face* have played a key part in this process of transformation by offering (to varying degrees) insight beyond that which pertains to particular recordings or performances, into the wider 'style' culture of popular music. However, to suggest that the emergence of lifestyle titles aimed at men symbolizes some new world order is misleading.

It needs to be made clear that in titles ranging from *Vogue* to *Woman's Own*, *GQ* to *What Car?* the emphasis is clearly on the role of reader as consumer. In music titles this is explicit in the way buyers' guides and record reviews mediate readers' consumption. However, the sort of agency this offers women *and men*, therefore, depends largely on how far we go along with Miller's (1993) assertion that consumption and the free market are not the same thing and working out just who is responsible for the 'logic of late capitalism' is not easily resolved. Far from revivifying patriarchal order, the appropriation of these mores within magazine publishing aimed at men and the commoditization of male lifestyles in the music press is more likely a symbol of rapacious capitalism than masculinity in crisis. Indeed, for Nixon

(1996) this is synonymous with the shift from heavy industry to a service-based economy, and likewise Mort (1996) identifies the Yuppie as the objectification of consumption in a subcultural project of masculinity. What needs to be given further consideration is the role of music in the negotiation of this.

The representation of identity in the music magazines of the 1980s is significant because it captures both the moment of retrospection inaugurated by the CD and the co-option of masculinity as a project of consumption. Just as Corner and Harvey (1991) identify the commoditization of heritage as the key concept used by the Thatcher government in managing the conflict between political conservatism and radical free-market capitalism, so too does the historicization of popular music bridge an ideological gap between the cultural prerogative of the masculine and the commoditization of male lifestyle. The exclusiveness of the CD becomes both a historical archive and a potent symbol of fettered *lifestyle* consumption. Mark Cooper's piece 'The Beatles on CD', for example, is illustrative of the numerous articles on the new format in early editions of *Q*: 'Long-awaited by dealers and public alike, these Beatles' releases will set the seal on the arrival of compact disc as a mass-market phenomenon and boost the sales of both the hardware and the software. The releases mark a watershed for those who have held-off investing in CD "until the Beatles are out", a phrase dealers have grown tired of hearing' (Cooper 1987: 10).

What is fascinating about this article is the way in which Cooper uses narratives of consumption to negotiate the wider cultural capital of the recordings. He sets up a binary in which the release of the first four Beatles albums on CD simultaneously confers cultural authority on the new format and reaffirms the weight of The Beatles' legacy. The meaning of consumption is in dialogue with much broader judgements of taste. On the one hand, the subheading suggests that cultural authority is not judged in terms intrinsic to the aesthetic qualities of the recordings but in anticipation of the sales EMI will make: 'Massive sales or bloody massive sales' (ibid.). On the other hand, halfway through the piece Cooper recounts how demand for these new releases is such that bootlegged copies of a test pressing 'command as much as \$80' (Cooper 1987: 11). Such is the capricious tone of the article: if 'mass-market' sales are a good thing then the cultural cache of black-market product is even better. Consumption becomes a narrative device: a way in which *Q* mediates its own cultural values. This narrative, however, is not entirely linear. It demonstrates what you want it to: if sales are small then the object is exclusive; if sales are high then it has populist authority. This is encapsulated in the final sentence: 'Once again, The Beatles have arrived to launch another popular music revolution' (ibid.). It is the narrative account, not the status of consumption itself, that shifts and for this reason we perhaps need to look beyond consumer theory to explain the mediation of cultural artefacts in *Q*.

## Taste

The model of cultural nobility offered by Bourdieu (2000: 2) is an excellent way into beginning to think about the presentation of cultural artefacts in the music press and the ways in which the mediation of taste is suggestive of the dominant ideology. Bourdieu identifies what he calls 'cultural nobility' in the claims that are made by and on behalf of divergent cultural matter. In his logic cultural taste is the site of contestation between differing accounts of what is legitimate and 'noble' and what is not. This, he argues, is contingent not upon the objects themselves but the way in which they are objectified. For Bourdieu, education is the key to not legitimacy itself but the successful proclamation of legitimacy. The sort of claim an individual makes is closely tied to the education they have had and in this sense 'nobility' has the tendency to always foreground itself. The objectification of cultural 'nobility' for Bourdieu is negotiated in the consumption of cultural matter: 'consumption is, in this case, a stage in the process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code' (Bourdieu 2000: 3). He uses the term both literally and metaphorically to regulate what he refers to as cultural capital. On the one hand, cultural capital determines the predilection of consumers in the choices they make. On the other hand, all sorts of symbolic consumption goes on in the way knowledge is socially distilled.

The music press embodies Bourdieu's model of distinction: it both educates its readers and renders them complicit in judgements of taste. Moreover, the inextricable relationship between education and judgement foregrounds the success of each publication: the reader is implicated and flattered in the successful proclamation of nobility. Between *The Face* and *Q*, however, there is a subtle difference in the weighting of education and judgement. On the one hand, *The Face* invites readers to make their own judgements of taste, while simultaneously educating its readership with subject matter that is on the brink of the mainstream. On the other hand, *Q* offers artefacts that are more familiar, but makes an explicit attempt to educate its readers in the process of naming. This is implicit in the narrative tone. *The Face* is purposely irreverent; nominally serious topics like art, for example, are subordinate to frivolous things like cosmetics in the 'intro' section. The magazine brings together a disparate collection of cultural material. Characteristic of this is page 32 of *Face* 70 in which the Japanese avant-garde is considered alongside the design of beer bottles. It assumes a dexterity on the part of the reader in distinguishing between cultural matter which can be 'bombarded with designer pork scratchings' and 'iconoclastic neo-dada objects' (*The Face*, November 1987: 32). By contrast, there is a discomfort about such mutability in *Q* magazine: a need to re-inscribe the seriousness of the subject and contain the plurality of its existence. The introduction to Chris Salewicz's

lead article with Paul McCartney in Q 1 is characteristic of the solemnity with which it handles cultural artifacts: 'Paul McCartney is 44. He was 20 when his first composition appeared on record. Today he's just returned from remixing a second single from his new LP *Press to Play*, his 27th solo or group studio album in 24 years' (Salewicz 1986: 29). Of course, this interview was very important to the success of the magazine: Paul McCartney is one of contemporary popular music's most respected performers and it was something of a coup to have him in the first issue. However, the use of incessant arithmetic data to corroborate this seems unnecessary.

Mort (1996: 25) highlights the way in which the magazine uses consumption to mediate symbolic order. The agent of this relationship for Mort is style: the exchange value of which is commodity. In *The Face* this is framed not in acts of 'everyday' consumption, but in 'an exotic celebration of goods' (ibid.). The selection and arrangement of goods is highly specialized: 'it was the binary opposition between taste and the mass market' (ibid.). What is significant about this account is the way it emphasizes the consumer discourse as a language in which the magazine is fluid. However, it is also a language that is silent. *The Face* purposefully eschews, it would seem, explanations of why things have style. The assumption is that if the reader does not already know, then there really is no point in telling them. Its codification, therefore, pertains to be indecipherable. Consequently, it does not comment on consumption, but rather embodies it.

*****	<b>Indispensable:</b> A record likely to be enthused-over by 99% of sane humans.
****	<b>Excellent:</b> A record that achieves what it set out to do.
***	<b>Good:</b> A record that may be average but is nonetheless enjoyable.
**	<b>Undistinguished:</b> A records that's unlikely to appeal to anyone beyond hardcore fans and the person that made it.
*	<b>Tragic:</b> A record so utterly devoid of merit that even the artist would demand a fee to sit through it.

Figure 1. *The star rating system for valuing music qualitatively used in Q*

Q quite clearly operates within a similar framework of consumption to *The Face*. Each issue explicitly locates contemporary popular music in the context of wider cultural consumption. For example, early editions feature articles with a wide variety of titles: 'Cocaine' (Q 1); 'Books of Blood' (Q 1); snooker player 'Gordon Burn' (Q 3); 'George Lucas' (Q 3); 'Ken Russell' (Q 5); 'Multiplex Cinemas' (Q 7); 'TV Comedy' (Q 9); and, 'ITV: The Chart Show' (Q 9). However, the magazine is far more elaborate in the construction of criteria for the judgement of taste. For example, although Q is making judgements of taste on behalf of the reader, the definitions of the star-rating system explicitly educates the reader on how to make their own

claims (see Figure 1). The use of the word 'sane', for example, and the phrase 'achieves what it set out to do' appeal to categories of rationality that are difficult to substantiate. The magazine not only codifies a specific language of nobility but also institutes a framework of value-based consumer choice. This is exemplified in the introduction to the guide in which *Q* explicitly addresses the reader as a consumer: 'record company schedules means that in a small minority of cases a record may not be in the shops at the exact time of publication'. Likewise, reviews are ordered by the commodity status of the recording: 'either a new compilation or a mid-price edition'. *Q* catalogues cultural artefacts in such a way that judgement is inextricable from consumption. Certainly the arrangement of those artefacts is highly symbolic. However, consideration also needs to be given as to how *Q* is consumed.

The inextricable relationship between the cultural order of popular music and the commoditization of its heritage confers upon the mediation of both literal and symbolic consumption in the music press, a nobility that is highly saleable. Indeed, the slippage between symbolic and literal consumption is clearly the ideological niche market the music press fills. The literal consumption of heritage is one way in which the music press confers nobility upon the symbolic mediation of cultural taste through consumption. This process is most explicit in the re-release section of the magazine, which often matches and sometimes exceeds the volume of new material reviewed: the history of popular music, it would seem, is a rich ideological reserve to be mined ad infinitum. Though consumption may be a narrative device rather than a material exchange, it is the way in which the mediation of cultural taste articulates itself in a meta-narrative of symbolic consumption that is most interesting. By affecting the value-neutral standpoint of objective consumer guidance the music press conceals the partisan ideological framework underpinning the arrangement of popular history into a linear canon of culturally noble artefacts. The appearance of only ten women on the cover of *Q*, for example, between 1986 and 1990 is connotative not only of a ritualized predisposition towards older male stars but a strategic exclusion of female performers and their histories. Gaar (1992) and O'Brien (1996) have both written excellent books which challenge the masculine order of popular music history, and in this sense the power of cultural heritage is perhaps metonymic with the heritage of masculine power. However, what is needed is a closer consideration of the ideological foundations underpinning the documentation of popular music history in the popular music press.

## **Parody/pastiche**

Andrew Higson's work (1993) on the heritage film in the 1980s is a useful way into thinking about the presentation of history in the music press. Like Corner and Harvey (1991), Higson identifies heritage as a manifestation of cultural instability

about national identity. However, it is his appropriation of the terms 'parody' and 'pastiche' defined by Jameson (1991) that proves most instructive in overcoming the semiotic paralysis of postmodernism:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs (Jameson 1991: 17).

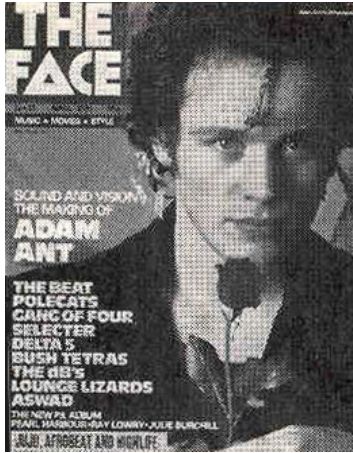


Figure 2. Adam Ant on the cover of *The Face* (1981)

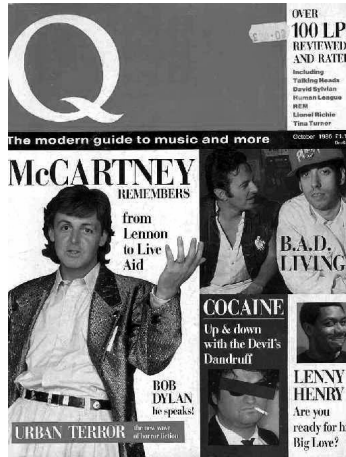


Figure 3. Paul McCartney on the cover of *Q* (1986)



Figure 4. Mick Jagger on the cover of Q (1987)



Figure 5. Mick Jones on the cover of The Face (1981)

For Jameson to pastiche is to mimic without any satiric or other impulse that communicates difference, but to parody is far more carnivalesque and knowing and this has all sorts of benefits in sorting out the signification of culturally ambiguous

matter. Higson, for example, uses it to distinguish between specific narratives of historical representation: 'The heritage films...work as pastiches, each period of the national past reduced through a process of reiteration to an effortlessly reproducible, and attractively consumable, connotative style' (Higson 1993: 112).

The antithesis of this would perhaps be the inter-textual hybridism of films like *Scary Movie* (2000), *Austin Powers* (1997) or *Starsky and Hutch* (2004), which consciously spoof generic forms and conventions, as well as the historical time frame in which they exist. Certainly, in the presentational devices used within the music press, the differences between parody and pastiche are likewise articulated in dialogue with representations of cultural history that are less singular. In the shot of Paul McCartney, for example, on the cover of *Q* 1 (see Figure 2) the performance of heritage is entirely neutral; the musician does not have to don a Beatles suit and mop-top wig to assert historical prerogative. Likewise, for the shot of Mick Jagger on the cover of *Q* 5 (see Figure 3) it is unnecessary for Mick to put on a leopard skin cat suit and flounce around with a silk scarf, even though his cultural authority is contingent upon the evocation of such past glories. By contrast, an image of Adam Ant from an early issue of *The Face* (see Figure 4) undermines a fixed historical position with a pantomime of historically ambiguous romantic iconography. Similarly, a shot of Mick Jones from *The Clash* in a Stetson (see Figure 5), toying with emblems of Spaghetti Western films, is at odds with their urban British identity. What this means, however, is ambiguous. Perhaps the key point to extract is that the presentation of cultural history presents the possibility of an underlying ideological framework resistive to the levelling of postmodern debate.

Now for Higson, the slippage between parody and pastiche is synonymous with a number of other cultural tensions. For example, in the pictorial camera style of the heritage film, Higson argues that the creation of a 'narrative space' (Higson 1993: 126) comes second to 'the creation of a heritage space'. And, for him, this is commensurate with the tacit invitation to consume: heritage is used to implicate the audience in the subordination of cultural order to capitalism. Clearly there is an equivalence here with the way heritage and male authority converge in *Q* magazine and *The Face* to confer nobility upon consumption as a narrative strategy for determining cultural taste. Likewise, Higson offers a resistive reading of the heritage film in which parody become synonymous with alternative codes of masculinity: 'The discourse of authenticity is treated so seriously', he argues, that 'the films scale the heights of camp' (Higson 1993: 126). And certainly as Susan Sontag (1966) has argued, there is a lot of theoretical mileage in camp as a Foucaultian semiotic event. However, this needs to be placed in the wider context of the representations of gender within the magazine.

The representations of gender on the front cover of *Q* magazine and *The Face* help define boundaries of masculine identity in the 1980s. For example, Paul McCartney and Mick Jagger embody very different codes of masculinity. Paul McCartney stands for stability and the real; he is working class in origin, a family man and an honest guy. By contrast, Mick Jagger symbolizes something more capricious and extreme: bravado, insouciance and bourgeois ennui. However, these are rendered entirely neutral on the cover of *Q*. The magazine presents the two men in a way that foregrounds their historical status and makes any need to negotiate their position as masculine subjects superfluous because, inevitably, it is one and the same thing. By contrast, on the cover of *The Face*, the gendered identity of Mick Jones and Adam Ant is negotiated in specifically historic terms. Like Paul McCartney, Mick Jones stands for stability and the real. However, this is a far more rebellious and violent mode of working-class masculinity. Accordingly, Adam Ant is connotative of mutability: the kind of middle-class foppishness and theatricality to which Mick Jagger also appeals. Unlike *Q*, this difference is performed in temporally coded visual language. Thus, when Jones sports a Stetson, he is appealing to a historic breed of frontiersmen, loners and outlaws. Likewise, Ant's debaucherous curled locks evoke eighteenth-century romantic ideals about the chivalrous rogue. However, the cultural authenticity this confers upon the male subject is always effaced. We know that Jones is not a real cowboy and we know that Ant is not a real highwayman. *The Face* may be camp, but the real significance is that in both magazines this ideological disposition is historically coded.

The difference between parody and pastiche is suggestive of the same ideological divide that exists between 'rock' and 'pop': it can be conceptualized in terms of what is synthetic and that which is for real. However, its theoretical advantage is that it is less genre-specific and separates performativity from notions of gender per se. For example, while a band like Bon Jovi are nominally 'rock', there is a strong element of self-parody in their performance, while a 'pop' act like Dido is almost certainly devoid of any satiric impulse. It also privileges the dependence of cultural capital on heritage. And, although this may be articulated in terms of symbolic and literal consumption, judgements of taste perhaps need to be decoupled from the baggage of capitalism. The parody/pastiche is useful then because it foregrounds cultural order in the narrative certainty of history. As the live music scene is testimony, this issue is pressing: new groups compete against tribute acts and ageing original stars have more often than not become their own tribute band. Certainly in contemporary music magazines from *Smash Hits* to *Wire* there is a divide between those that embody a more self-conscious parodic sensibility and those that are more linear in their presentation of history. What is certain, however, is that it is not necessarily the music that codes itself in this way. From Steps to Throbbing Gristle,

popular music may well be the embodiment of postmodern cultural practice; however, what shifts are the narratives of authorship, which the music press imposes on these phenomena. While a magazine like *Q* may pertain to present value-neutral accounts of pop history, of which their own legacy may be an integral part, in reality those narratives are highly specialized and value loaded. However, there is a tension here between that which we might tentatively refer to as 'pop ideology' and the need of the story that is being told to be engagingly sequenced and structurally coherent.

## Conclusion

If we accept that from a classic Cultural Studies perspective the music press exists to en-code and de-code the meaning of popular music, it would seem that underpinning this process is a tension between art and commerce, which exists within cultures of popular music more generally. This is significant because debate within the academy has been shaped by a similar anxiety about mass-culture and whether or not it is possible to value postmodern cultural matter like popular music qualitatively. One solution to this is to shift the focus of analysis away from the judgements of a pre-discursive self to the medium of judgement. As Simon Frith argues, the music press 'is not just producing a version of music for the reader, but also a version of the listener for the music' (Frith 1996: 68).

Of those theorists that have focused on the music press in detail there is consensus that the written style of the music press shifted in the 1980s. *Q* magazine, *The Face* and *Smash Hits* are seen as having replaced the New Journalism style of *NME* and *Melody Maker* (defined by Forde as 'polygottism') with a more corporate 'monoglottic' form. The role of consumer-based discourse, in particular the affectation of a non-partisan homogenized style is something that is problematized by Gudmundsson *et al.*, Forde, and Gorman. Their view of the music press in the 1980s regards the judgement of taste in *Q*, *The Face* and *Smash Hits* as complicit with consumer culture and less than radical. While I have not attempted to challenge this view *per se*, it needs to be augmented with awareness that, far from being antithetical to the function of the music press, the appropriation of consumer discourse possibly makes its role more transparent.

The changes in the music press during the 1980s did not, however, happen in a vacuum—although seemingly there was a very tight nucleus of personnel involved. They were in part a response to a new sensibility brought about by groups who were less keen on preserving the distinction between art and commerce than the generation before them. They were also a response to the fragmentation of the pop market, as the first generation of pop fans moved into middle age. Teenage single buyers, thirty-something connoisseurs and aspirant metropolitans were just some

of the distinct demographics the music press now aimed to cater for. However, perhaps the most formative influence upon the transformation of the music press in the 1980s was the objectification of masculinity as a project of cultural consumption.

It is well documented in the work of Nixon and Mort that by the mid-1980s masculinity had become a commoditized entity. This was manifest in both the redefinition of retail space on the high street and the emergence of style titles like *GQ* and *Arena*. And, while *The Face* was clearly aimed at this more elite demographic, *Q* perhaps addressed a more middle-brow audience. In retrospect, therefore, it would be easy to view the transformation of the music press in the 1980s as a clear step towards the very mainstream commoditization of male culture in the 1990s with magazines like *Loaded* and *FHM*.

The relationship between popular music and consumer discourse can be seen in a number of sets of binaries: rock versus pop, the masculine versus the feminine, the authentic versus the inauthentic, and modernism versus postmodernism. On the one hand, it could be argued that commoditized forms are synonymous with pop, the feminine, the inauthentic and postmodernism. On the other hand, art could be seen as metonymic with rock, the masculine, the authentic and the modernist. The problem with this approach, however, is that it is too prescriptive. What happens when we encounter an 'inauthentic' performance of masculinity in the rock genre with a postmodern sensibility? Not only is the meaning of consumer discourse fluid but the terms of its definition are changeable. Moreover, the notion that there is a hierarchy in the cultural order of contemporary popular music seems like an anathema: popular music is after all characterized by its pseudo-individualized nature. Nevertheless, there is a certain democracy in capitalism; in so far that it is a commodity, popular music is cultural matter with capital value that is continually in flux. In a literal sense this is evidenced in the worthlessness of the releases found in the bargain bin. Figuratively it is verified in the temporal value of some popular music compared to the longevity of 'classic' material. In both cases these relative values are also indexed to a range of variables (age, race, sex and class) connected to what is being appraised and who is doing the appraisal. And, in this sense, the music press is about masculinity because historically it was predominantly men who were writing the reviews: a masculine subject position was prerequisite to the capital of consecration. Indeed, emanating from that standpoint it is possible to see emerging an elaborate framework for aesthetic judgement, defined by and sometimes in opposition to patriarchal order. While race, age and class interpolate in this ruling, it is my contention that sex predominates. Taste in this sense has the tendency to foreground itself: the music press both educates its readers and renders them complicit in judgements of taste (see Toynbee 1993). Part and parcel of this initiation is the rehearsal of some very specific narratives of gender, which are manifest not

least in some extremely partisan editorial strategies for dealing with female recording artists.

While historically the music press has tended to shroud taste in mystery, the appropriation of consumer discourse in the 1980s endeavoured to make the process of judgement more apparent. This is evidenced most clearly by the star rating system in *Q* (see Figure 1), which instituted a deceptively anodyne register for what was clearly value loaded in its emphasis on logic and consistency. A properly polished veneer of cogency, however, required a more tangible barometer of taste than assumed rationality. What emerges as a key concept, therefore, is the role of heritage in the negotiation of taste. If nobility is contingent upon the inheritance of a musical gift or the continuation of a musical legacy then the successful proclamation of that in the music press is dependent on defining the laws of succession. And both *Q* and *The Face* were very good at defining those laws. While *The Face* was a benefactor of the new and avant-garde, *Q* was reluctant to bequeath distinction to anyone but the most established popular music performers. It is in these strategies for encoding the performance of heritage that the music press reveals most about its aesthetic rationale and in this direction Higson's use of Jameson is definitive. *The Face* can be seen to embody a parodic sensibility: carnivalesque and ironic in its representation of the past. It turns historical depiction into a witty commentary that says as much about the present as it does about the past. By contrast *Q* is far more earnest in its depictions: solemnly trying to relive the past but forever missing the point that that past is forever gone.

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