'Loaded': indie guitar rock, canonism, white masculinities[1]

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Abstract

Indie alternative rock in the 1980s is often presented as authentically autonomous, produced in local scenes, uncaptured by ideology, free of commercial pressures, but also of high culture elitism. In claiming that the music is avant-garde, postmodern and subversive, such accounts simplify indie's historical, social and cultural context. Indie did not simply arise organically out of developing postpunk music networks, but was shaped by media, and was not just collective, but also stratified, hierarchical and traditional. Canon (articulated through practices of archivalism and connoisseurship) is a key means of stratification within indie scenes, produced by and serving particular social and cultural needs for dominant social groups (journalists, scenemakers, tastemakers, etc.). These groups and individuals were mainly masculine, and thus gender in indie scenes is an important means for deconstructing the discourse of indie independence. I suggest re-envisioning indie as a history of record collectors, emphasising the importance of rock 'tradition', of male rock 'intellectuals', second-hand record shops, and of an alternative canon as a form of pedagogy. I also consider such activities as models of rational organisation and points of symbolic identification.

The problem with many studies of independent or alternative music (indie) is that they treat it as if it really was independent. It is often represented as a relatively autonomous space, the product of isolated, marginal, local scenes, uncaptured by ideology, free of the commercial and other pressures that mark the mainstream, but also free of high culture elitism (Kruse 2003, p. 1). Many critiques and/or accounts of indie (and canonical groups like the Velvet Underground) are written by fans or advocates of the scene, and thus tend to make absolute claims for the value of the music – that it is avant-garde, postmodern, subversive or radical (Reynolds 1990, pp. 11–13; Felder 1993; Arnold 1995, pp. 4–11; Gilbert 1999; Azerrad 2002, pp. 3–11; Harrington 2002, pp. 373–93). In their concern to position (some) indie music as valuable and innovative, they tend to overlook or simplify indie's historical, social and cultural context, and risk essentialising it as resistant to the dominant culture, or as a postmodern, ahistoric form of 'play' (Zuberi 2001, p. 4). David Hesmondhalgh has gone some way to redressing the balance by showing the complex interactions in relations of production between indie labels and the industry, and addressing the question of how indies balance financial viability with street credibility, making a living without 'selling out'. However, he only discusses UK indie, and I intend to take a more international perspective, expanding on his remarks about indie 'aestheticism' and 'classicism' (Hesmondhalgh 1999, pp. 46–7).

 Indie guitar rock is a postpunk subgenre of independent or alternative rock, featuring mainly white, male groups playing electric guitars, bass and drums 'that sound a bit like the Byrds, The Velvet Underground . . .' to primarily white, male

audiences, recording mainly for independent labels, being disseminated at least initially through alternative media networks such as college radio stations and fanzines, and displaying a countercultural ethos of resistance to the market (Larkin 1995, p. 196). In the 1980s, indie guitar rock 'scenes' occurred all over the First World, from the US to the UK to Australia and New Zealand, marked by a comparative stylistic homogeneity, which is at least partly attributable to the recurrence of similar influences, mainly punk and 1960s white pop/rock (Shuker 1998, p. 104). Indeed, the name checking of indie precursors is a feature of many publications on indie such as discographies (Mitchell 1996, p. 102; Straw 1997B, p. 499; Gilbert 1999, p. 36; Strong 1999, pp. 1–11; Cavanagh 2000, p. 187; Thompson 2000, p. 2). Such practices need to be reconciled with the punk/indie ideology of independence.

Adding 'guitar' to 'indie' is my attempt to be more specific. This move excludes genres like industrial and electronic music (also associated with indie) – although hardcore, Goth and some metal (which I do not discuss in detail) may have some affiliations to the definition offered above. However, most studies of indie seem to be predominantly studies of guitar bands – if this has not been spelt out before, then perhaps it needs to be. The prevalence of guitars is a preliminary indication of indie's canonical nature – it immediately suggests affiliation to rock tradition (and perhaps this is one reason why other studies have tended to pass over it).[2] In the interests of brevity, I have henceforth referred to the genre as 'indie', but as indicated, I use this term in a selective manner.

Indie did not simply arise organically out of developing postpunk music networks, but was shaped by media (particularly print), and was not just collective, but also stratified, hierarchical, parochial and traditional. Canon (articulated through practices of archivalism and connoisseurship) is a key means of stratification within indie scenes, produced by and serving particular social and cultural needs for dominant social groups (within indie scenes, for example, journalists, scenemakers, tastemakers, record company owners, some musicians). These groups and individuals were mainly masculine, and the extent to which social power and gender intertwine in indie scenes is a theme I will be returning to (especially because some commentators have suggested that indie masculinities are more 'enlightened' than is the norm in rock) (Reynolds and Press 1995, pp. 205–7; DeRogatis 1996, p. 13; Gilbert 1999, p. 44; Grajeda 2002, pp. 242–4). But canon is also a way of historicising indie, not just because it is historic (literally) but also because it can be read historically as an archaeology of knowledge – it shows how the discourse of independence was shaped. Canon-related practices such as archivalism are not simply cataloguing of the past – they are political and selective. Foucault views them as discursive practices which shape the way we 'know' (Foucault 1972, p. 131). There is an assumption here (borne out by Hesmondhalgh) that independence is always a form of negotiation with the dominant culture, a much more complex and ambiguous notion than simple 'resistance'.

Moreover, there are reasons why canonism might be particularly relevant to indie: David Buckley, in his excellent biography of R.E.M., suggests that 'By 1979 . . . pop history was not so much progressing in linear time but folding in on itself' (Buckley 2002, p. 4). That is, post-punk revivals of older musical styles (ska, for example) highlighted the increasingly reflexive nature of music making: '. . . there was such a variety of genres and styles . . . that making new music was, for some, an act of musical archaeology as opposed to innovation . . . A great rock group . . . needed not just a sexy singer, a great virtuoso, or a sussed marketing scam . . . It needed a pop

historian' (*ibid*., p. 5). In R.E.M.'s case, for example, they had just such a rock aficionado, reader, listener and archivist with 'presumably . . . one of the largest record collections in Georgia' – guitarist Peter Buck (*ibid.,* pp. 5, 7). In the UK, books such as Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (1996) and Giles Smith's *Lost in Music* (1995) focus on the increasing centrality of record collecting and second-hand record shops to popular music culture in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Methodology and subjectivity

I played in a band, Sneaky Feelings, from 1980–1989. Identified as part of the 'Dunedin Sound', we recorded three albums for NZ indie Flying Nun and toured NZ and Europe (Bannister 1999). We were at the '60s pop' end of the indie spectrum, and felt little allegiance to the 'punk' orthodoxy that we felt dominated Flying Nun. Our musical style and influences were probably closer to Postcard acts like Orange Juice and Aztec Camera (we listened to black music and took a good deal of flak for it) (Cavanagh 2000, pp. 23–4, 28; Nichols 2003, p. 90). That is, the indie canon was the site of a struggle over representation, which we lost. By the end of the 1980s, indie was primarily defined by a punk rock ethos that rejected any affiliation with the pop mainstream, but by the early 1990s, with the success of Nirvana, it arguably became an 'alternative mainstream'. Subsequently, I published a book, *Positively George Street*, about Sneaky Feelings because I felt we were being written out of the label's history, and indeed out of indie history, for example our non-appearance in various articles about Flying Nun, in indie discographies, and in local (New Zealand) rock polls (Robertson 1991, pp. 43–4; Strong 1999; Churton 2000, p. 228). So I have first-hand experience of indie canonism, or more precisely, of being excluded from it.

On the other hand, canonism is an aspect of my own practice, as well as a feature of indie scenes more generally, and debates such as I engaged in my book 'about the composition of the canon do not of course challenge the institution as such – rather the reverse' (Hawthorn 2000, p. 35). I suggest that gender provides one way of theorising my subjectivity in this respect. Further key sources are rock journalism and prior studies of indie and other popular music scenes. UK music weeklies such as the *NME* played an important role in the dissemination of indie in the 1980s, but even before that, 1970s rock journalism, notably the writings of Lester Bangs, provided the first, and arguably the most important theorisation of punk/indie values (Bangs 1987; Davies 1996, pp. 125–6). Moreover, rock journalism is the most important and visible site for canonism – for example, the 'pop-rock' canon, generally composed of 1960s and 1970s acts, was largely constructed through the music press, and presents a very selective reinterpretation of popular taste, which punk and indie rock might be expected to oppose (although they are now a prominent part of it) (Regev 2002, p. 254). While it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest musical scenes being influenced by writing, rather than the other way round, I argue that this is a function of indie's complex (but often ignored) relation to 'rock tradition' (including canon). In terms of period, I have concentrated on the 1980s. With the collapse of Rough Trade and a number of other indie labels, and the crossover success of Nirvana and grunge (which in turn introduces a whole new spectrum of musical and other factors), 1991 marks the end of a chapter in the indie story, as well as the end of my own involvement in indie scenes as a musician (Arnold 1995, pp. 5–6; Bannister 1999; Azerrad 2002, p. 3).

How do we theorise 'canon'?

The relevant sense of canon I will initially employ is that of an authoritative list of 'those works and authors whom the . . . establishment . . . considers ''major'' ' (Childers and Hentzi 1995, p. 37). Emblematic of the highest social aspirations and artistic achievements of a given social group, canon also provides a means of proving the superiority of one social group over another. As I've already outlined, canons are always the site of struggle, as different groups clamour for representation. Western canonism is often critiqued as representing a 'privileged, elite group of white male critics' (*ibid.,* p. 37). I accept this criticism – indeed, although referring primarily to a Leavisite literary 'great tradition', it actually describes the indie canon rather well (in the general sense of being both formulated by and representing white men). However, pointing the finger at white men would be a bit hypocritical, considering I am one myself. Rather, I want to ask: how did such a 'high cultural' concept as the canon become so firmly entrenched within indie? From where did it derive its 'authority', and through what processes? And finally, what purposes (psychological, social, cultural) does such canon formation serve?

At first glance, independent rock and canonism would seem to have little in common. Canonism would appear to connote institutionalised high culture, hierarchy, tradition, authority, dominant social groups, while independent rock suggests popular culture, collectivity, innovation and (in)subordination. A canon implies a tradition, an establishment and rules. Independent rock is not generally viewed in such a light. However, canonism (albeit more loosely defined) is not infrequent in popular music scenes. Paul Willis's 1970s study of UK bikers showed their investment in a limited repertoire of 1950s and 1960s rock and roll, in terms of the music on the club jukebox, but while Willis explores the meanings such sounds had for bikers homologically, he doesn't really explore it as a canonic practice, perhaps because this would have over-complicated what he sees as their anti-intellectual, rough, idealised proletarianism, their utter reliance 'on the unequivocal concreteness of things' (Willis 1978, p. 33). There are also what Jason Toynbee terms 'canonical cultures' – subcultures based around a retrospectively created corpus and normative style, closely related to revivalism, e.g. northern soul (Toynbee 2000, pp. 125–6). However, such scenes do not generate much new music.

Partially because of the high cultural resonances of canon, studies of popular culture have tended to eschew such hierarchical paradigms, emphasising instead audience uses and meanings. However, such studies assume an overall social hierarchy in which popular culture is subordinate or resistant. They may thus overlook issues of power within the cultures and audiences studied. In her book on UK dance music scenes, Sarah Thornton points out how 'studies of popular culture have tended to embrace anthropological notions of culture as a *way of life* but have spurned art-oriented definitions of culture which relate to *standards of excellence*' (Thornton 1996, p. 8). Thornton suggests that popular cultures produce systems of social and cultural distinctions, just like the rest of society. Adapting Bourdieu's 'cultural capital', the 'linchpin of a system of distinction in which cultural hierarchies correspond to social ones' (*ibid.,* p. 10), she proposes the term 'subcultural capital' (basically 'hipness') to describe operations of 'distinction' within popular culture (*ibid.,* p. 11).

Cultural capital is both objective (consisting in material objects) and embodied (style, knowledge). While Bourdieu maps out a hierarchical society, in which material capital and access to power and resources (for example through class) broadly

correspond to social and cultural capital, subcultural capital is specific to subordinate social groups. Class origins and material resources are less important than embodied capital (although arguably, embodied capital may improve one's prospects of long-term material and social gain – a 'hip' band has at least in theory the opportunity for career advancement). Subcultures often reproduce dominant discourses in an inverted form; what is socially acceptable in straight society becomes unacceptable in the subculture. Movement away from the subculture towards the mainstream is perceived as 'selling out', a loss of subcultural capital (as occurred with indie bands signing to major labels) or as a betrayal of 'roots' – the indie audience and canon.

However, different popular music cultures ascribe subcultural capital in different ways. For example, the dance cultures Thornton describes have much less investment in a canon than indie: 'Different cultural spaces are marked by the sorts of temporalities to be found within them – by the prominence of activities of canonisation, or by the values accruing to novelty and currency, longevity and ''timelessness'' ' (Straw 1997ʙ, p. 495). Dance culture is marked by a swift rate of change, and hipness is mainly about keeping up with new trends and innovative sounds. In indie, change is slower, and there is more continuity between scenes: 'change within the culture . . . took the form of new relationships between generic styles constitutive of the canon which had sedimented within alternative rock culture since the late seventies' (*ibid.,* p. 497). While record collecting is important to both cultures, dance cultures tend to value novelty, while indie is more backward-looking, more 'classic' (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 36).

Archivalism

Indie is usually represented in terms of musicians, bands and scenes. I suggest it could be rewritten as a history of record collectors. Indie had a huge investment in a version of the past, in its own voicing of 'rock tradition' (often deleted) (Arnold 1995, p. 7). To even find, say, a Velvet Underground or a Byrds album in New Zealand (or Minneapolis, or Manchester) in 1980 would have taken effort, commitment, and a lot of hanging round (usually second-hand) record shops. This was not casual consumption – it was a mission (Buckley 2002, pp. 3–7). Such awareness of the past was (at the time) subversive. Unlike today, when classic hits stations and CD reissues are ubiquitous, in the early 1980s, the 1960s were virtually unheard, a kind of secret. To uncover a 'lost' classic from the bin of a second-hand shop represented a small victory against the forces of modern capitalism, which were only interested in selling you the latest Dire Straits album.

Not only the music, but also the ideologies of the 1960s act as a common reference point for different discourses of alternative music. Michael Azerrad states in his survey of 1980s US indie rock that 'virtually every artist in this book acknowledges the influence of the Sixties musical counterculture' (Azerrad 2002, p. 7) because of the perceived idealism of 1960s counterculture about music as a way of life. But 'the indie community saw what had happened to the Sixties dream . . . the baby boomers' egregious sellout' (*ibid.,* p. 7). Gina Arnold states 'we were too ashamed of the fate of hippie idealism, to recognise our actual allegiance to it' (Arnold 1995, p. 175). So while the punks were typically antagonistic to 'old hippies', in indie culture there is an ambivalent acknowledgement of its importance.

The aforementioned shops were sometimes staffed by knowledgeable ex-hippies who had actually been there (the 1960s), had huge private record collections, and who sometimes took a more than proprietorial interest in the young musician types who hung around their shops. Some of them wanted to 'educate' their customers; some were even thinking of starting their own little record labels. In 1981, record shop owner Roger Shepherd of Christchurch started an indie label, Flying Nun, aided and abetted by musician Chris Knox. In London, Geoff Travis had already done the same with Rough Trade (Cavanagh 2000, pp. 37–42; Kruse 2003, pp. 51–5). In Scotland, record collections were also to the fore: Orange Juice was being given 'a crash course in [Postcard Records] Alan Horne's ''magical hipness'', absorbing the best pop, rock and soul records from the 1960s and 1970s which Horne had been collecting since his early teens' (Cavanagh 2000, p. 28). A little later, Alan McGee would be doing the same with Creation (Hesmondhalgh 1999, pp. 45–50; Cavanagh 2000). In Dunedin, there were mentors and taste-makers who shaped musical tastes, for example, Roy Colbert of second-hand shop Records Records, who encouraged young musicians to listen to the Velvet Underground, 1960s garage rock and psychedelia, much like McGee and Horne (although Horne also liked soul) (Bannister 1999, p. 21; Cavanagh 2000, p. 37). In Minneapolis, record shop owner Peter Jesperson educated young local bands, notably the Replacements, making sure 'they were aware only of the finest musical influences' (Jesperson also co-ran an independent label, Twin/Tone) (Azerrad 2002, p. 200). Wuxtry Records in Athens, Georgia, provided a focus for emergent bands such as the B-52s and R.E.M. – Peter Buck would 'spend hours in listening sessions, dissecting, analysing, categorising, and playing' with store co-owner Dan Wall (Buckley 2002, p. 11). R.E.M.'s manager Jefferson Holt was another record shop owner (*ibid.*, pp. 40–1). In Brisbane, Australia, the Go-Betweens released their first two singles on Able, a label run by Toowong Music Centre proprietor Damien Nelson (Nichols 2003, pp. 53–5). This is not to denigrate the importance of other factors to the emergence of indie – most importantly, the pre-existence of punk scenes (although at least some of these also began with kids hanging round shops, e.g. the Sex Pistols and Malcolm McLaren's Sex boutique) and punk bands starting their own labels, for example Black Flag and SST. But again, often the founders were often ex-hippies, for example, Geoff Travis, Chris Knox and Greg Ginn (Azerrad 2002, pp. 15–16).

Second-hand record shops and their owners performed a broadly educative function for indie musicians, broadening their awareness of musical history. The canon is not a list, but rather a tool of education and a means of distributing cultural capital. Of the literary canon, John Guillory writes that:

[w]here the debate speaks of the literary canon, its inclusions and exclusions, I will speak of the school, and the institutional forms of syllabus and curriculum . . . how works are preserved, reproduced, and disseminated over successive generations and centuries. Similarly, where the debate speaks about the canon as representing or failing to represent particular social groups, I will speak of the school's historical function of distributing, or regulating access to, the forms of cultural capital. (Guillory 1993, pp. vii–viii).

The problem with Sneaky Feelings was that we knew too much, and thus were not apt pupils, as Colbert wrote in his review of my book: 'Self-appointed rock critics are endemic to record stores the world over. They hold court in voices loud enough not only to silence whoever they're with, but also to let those behind the counter know they are in the presence of people who know the Right Stuff . . . Imagine my surprise . . . when . . . I found five of them up onstage in the same band. And a sixth was mixing

their sound. Sneaky Feelings. Can you have six self-appointed rock critics in one band?' (Colbert 1999, p. 43). Colbert's rhetorical question suggests a distinction between 'critics' and real musicians who 'just do it', with the implication that we were too intellectual to play rock and roll (or perhaps more precisely that we challenged his version of the rock canon). This illustrates a thesis that I will develop further on – that rock's perceived anti-intellectualism naturalises certain forms of influence through discourses of spontaneity and originality.

Perhaps the prototypical and most influential record collector/punk mentor was US journalist Lester Bangs. Bangs was not only a passionate advocate for punk rock (some claim he coined the term); he was also perhaps the biggest single ideological influence on indie musical culture (Bangs 1987, p. 337; Jones and Featherley 2002, p. 34). In the early 1970s, Bangs published a series of influential 'punk rock' manifestoes in *Creem*, a US rock magazine. His messianic, hectoring style and absolute faith in his own subjectivity (also characteristic of fellow 'gonzo' New Journalist Hunter S. Thompson) were attractive to aspiring rock journalists, musicians and wannabe indie scenemakers seeking to impose themselves upon a largely indifferent world. Bangs thought 1970s music (and musicians) elitist and pretentious. He proposed replacing them with amateurs who would re-infuse rock with passion (Bangs 1987, pp. 373–4). Bangs defined the punk ethos in terms of three basic tropes: assault, minimalism and ineptitude (Heylin 1993, p. 3; Gendron 2002, p. 233). This 'back-to-basics' approach only seemed anti-traditional: it drew on established avant-garde discourses of minimalism and primitivism, and a quasi-Beat identification with free jazz as a musical template (Bangs 1987, pp. 41–6). Finally, it was based on an alternative canon of 1960s US garage rock (e.g. *Nuggets*), The Stooges, and the Velvet Underground (all of whom partly owe their present pre-eminence to his pioneering advocacy) which contrasted strongly with the 'progressive' musical choices of emergent US rock institutions such as FM radio and *Rolling Stone*.

The central paradox of Bangs' theory is that it is based on listening to recordings, but was translated into live musical practice, and this is a tension that informs indie culture's ambivalent relations with canonicity. Bangs' repeated emphasis on the physical and visceral: 'Rock and roll is not an artform – it's a raw wail from the bottom of the guts' (Bangs 1992, p. 104) suggest natural creativity and the immediacy of the 'live', physical experience. As Sarah Thornton has pointed out, rock culture emphasises the superiority of live to recorded performance (Thornton 1996, p. 26). 'Liveness' implies the physical presence of performers, and minimises mediation: 'the fewer steps between performer and audience the better' (Knox 1991). However, in indie this has to be balanced against the importance of recordings (archivalism) in defining musical practice. Liveness as such was replaced by an insistence that the recording sound 'live' or 'real' through an aesthetic of minimalism – 'less is more'; a punk 'back to basics' purity. This recreates a feeling of liveness by supposedly minimising technological interventions between the author and the audience: 'Music should be unadorned so as to communicate directly . . . I use only one mike and my only effect is an antique plate reverb . . . used very sparingly' (*ibid*.). Low production values, lack of overdubbing, cheapness and DIY amateurism become the marks of authenticity, because they mark the recording as being uncommercial and therefore uncompromised. Flying Nun band the Gordons (now recording for Matador Records as Bailter Space) recorded their self-titled first album with instruments they'd made themselves (McKessar 1988, p. 27). US indie act Hüsker Dü's early albums seem to have been recorded in little more than the time it took to play them (Azerrad 2002,

pp. 166, 169, 171). When drummer Grant Hart notes that '[i]n our whole oeuvre . . . there's probably not five second takes', it's tempting to reads this as a boast (*ibid.,* p. 169).

However, bands who want 'liveness' are faced with the paradox that rawness and spontaneity do not simply happen – they are effects created (or at the least enhanced) in the studio (Toynbee 2000, pp. 104–5). The Jesus and Mary Chain are an excellent example, legendarily shambolic live, but in the studio their 'raw' fuzzy sounds were created by painstaking overdubbing of layers of distorted guitar. Citing the precedent of Phil Spector, the band wanted to create 'masterpieces', replicating Spector's Wall of Sound (Robertson 1988, p. 45). This suggests again that authenticity has nothing to do with 'liveness' – in this case it's very much the self- conscious invocation of 1960s precedents. Kevin Shields' (My Bloody Valentine) painstaking approach to recording is similar, and similarly Spector-, or even Wagner-esque, in its sound and ambition (Cavanagh 2000, pp. 340–3, 413–16, 423–8).

Indie culture's repeated emphasis on 'liveness', and the consequent centrality of the 'local' (i.e. live) scenes to indie ideology hide the multifarious ways in which the 'new' is constructed from a revoicing of traditional and generic elements. It also seeks to naturalise ideological and intellectual elements such as canon within alternative culture in a way that preserves the myth of its spontaneity and originality. Indie is hardly the first popular music to be founded on archivalism – the British Invasion and 1960s UK blues boom were based on a similar reappropriation of recorded sounds from remote places and scenes (US blues and R&B) and an aesthetic of purism (the UK blues revival). In a sense, they faced similar problems – how can an authentic live music be based on recordings? There is always a sense that the real, authentic moment is elsewhere, and certainly with the case of blues, this fed 1960s white male musicians' sense of inadequacy (Frith 1988, p. 61; Waksman 1999, pp. 199–203). Bangs offered a way out of the dilemma by suggesting new sources of authenticity in forms of primitivism that were not ethnically coded, but drew implicitly on the high cultural traditions of the avant-garde (minimalism), a Romantic conception of innocence, and a canon that marginalised black influence (Bangs 1987, p. 278).

Gender, canonism and indie

Canonism in popular music has historically been identified with men, and indie was also overwhelmingly masculine. Although, interestingly, many studies/ accounts of indie have been by women, they still reiterate the homosociality of indie scenes, whether in the UK, US or other places (Arnold 1995, pp. 10, 55, 163–6; Davies 1996, pp. 126–7; Cohen 1997; Sutton 1997; Kruse 2003, pp. 138–44; Gilbert 1999; Hesmondhalgh 1999. p. 46). It is tempting to suggest an ongoing association between indie, record collecting and some masculinities. For example, in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, the male protagonist's power (such as it is) is very much based on taste rather than social accomplishment: the importance of 'what you like' as opposed to 'what you're like' (Hornby 1996, p. 222). Canon is tied up with male subjectivities and identities (as we also see in Paul Willis, Lester Bangs). This was by no means a 'dominant' masculinity, except within its limited domain (Arnold memorably de- scribes male indie musicians as 'cultured and autistic' (*ibid.,* p. 163). It would tend to identify with subordinate groups: 'young White men . . . uncomfortable with the conventional gendered identities offered by the dominant strands of popular culture, but unable . . . to fully embrace gay culture' (Gilbert 1999, p. 44). But if the pop/rock

canon, as Regev suggests, represents the claims of a 'knowledge'-based post-industrial middle class to a distinctive cultural capital, then indie rock, to some extent, was perhaps a means for some of its lower, more bohemian strata to convert some of their intellectual capital into social status (Regev 2002, p. 261). (At the end of the film version of *High Fidelity*, the protagonist sets up his own indie record label.)

In his account of gender and connoisseurship, 'Sizing up record collections', Will Straw suggests that: 'Record collections, like sports statistics, provide the raw materials around which the rituals of homosocial interaction take shape . . . each man finds, in the similarity of his points of reference to those of his peers, confirmation of a shared universe of critical judgement' (Straw 1997A, p. 5). However (and this is crucial) 'there is an ongoing anxiety over whether the most valorised forms of masculine mastery are social or asocial' (*ibid.,* p. 7). Peter Buck of R.E.M.: 'I'm not one of those anal types of collector . . . that wants every different matrix number. I play records at parties when I'm drunk' (Buckley 2002, p. 6). In other words, record collecting can be seen as a feminine activity (as consumerism often is) private, 'nerdy', 'geeky' and 'subservient to the terms of a symbolic order' (i.e. the collector 'depends' for his identity on things outside himself) – incompatible with public ideals of masculinity as self-sufficient, instinctual power (Hornby 1996, pp. 73, 137). To resist the passive consumer/fan tag, male record collectors often adopt a bohemian, anti-commercial stance, typically by 'valorising the obscure' and transgressive. They contest hegemony then, by setting up their own canon of 'great work' (Straw 1997A, p. 10).

Because many indie labels were initially more ideologically than commercially driven, the aesthetic preferences of the owner(s) were central to the style of music produced: 'the whole thing is just my taste' (McGee in DeRogatis 1996, p. 221; Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 46). In NZ, Chris Knox notes that: 'I did get reasonably well known for sort of drunkenly and stonedly going up to bands and saying ''aw for chrissakes you gotta stop playing that song, that song and that song, and you gotta get rid of that bloody bass player''. I'd like to think I was the Jiminy Cricket, sort of conscience on the back of the Pinocchio that was Flying Nun. I tried to keep things pure' (quoted in *Heavenly Pop Hits*, 2002). In the US, Homestead Records (now Matador) head Gerard Cosloy (also editor of influential 1980s indie fanzine *Conflict*) was notorious for the vehemency of his views about what constituted correct musical practice (Arnold 1995, p. 37; Azerrad 2002, pp. 326–7). Such figures not only enabled indie production – they also played an important role in 'policing' the purity of the genre. Drawing on Sedgwick's notion of homosociality, Will Straw suggests that the social nature of masculinity is policed by one's susceptibility to accusations of homosexuality (Sedgwick 1991, p. 1; Straw 1997A, p. 7). In indie this perceived effeminacy ('wimpiness') is generally attributed to bands that are too 'mainstream'. This is particularly notable in US indie, where hardcore provided an especially masculinised paradigm of authenticity (Arnold 1995, p. 10; Azerrad 2002, pp. 52, 150, 314–15). This equation of mass culture and femininity (and consequently 'high' culture and masculinity) has a long history in Western discourse (Huyssen 1986; Sedgwick 1991, p. 185).

Clearly, many indie musicians were record collectors too: 'collecting and studying old rock bands is a rite of passage for young men entering the ''scene'' ' (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 47). But in public performance, young male musicians would want to avoid such 'nerdy' and potentially feminising identifications. So when indie culture begins to emerge in the early 1980s, the archival aspects of the culture

were submerged, or at least de-emphasised. Musicians wouldn't necessarily want to talk about their influences because it would compromise their cool, their originality. In Straw's words – 'hipness' is a 'controlled economy of revelation, a sense of how and when things are to be spoken of' (Straw 1997A, p. 9). The notion of control connects to power – a man who talks too much about what he 'knows' becomes feminised, a nerd – selective silence is 'cool' and hides the effort of acquiring knowledge under a veil of 'instinctuality'. So musicians instead talked about 'just doing it' (i.e. music) like it was something they just invented (the DIY influence of punk was also important here) (Robertson 1991, pp. 9, 55). Alternatively, they play for those 'in the know' (DeRogatis 1996, p. 156). Canon works here through not being represented explicitly, but rather implied. Within the NZ scene, there was a canon of acceptable influences that were taken as self-evident and thus were not much discussed. In the case of the Dunedin Sound, the influence of punk, the Velvet Underground, 1960s garage rock, and early Pink Floyd (the Chills) was 'self-evident'. More mainstream influences were likely to be commented on however: 'Sneaky Feelings have always admitted and even coveted the 60s tag and the big studio has allowed them to fulfil ringing guitar fantasies. At times you could swear you were listening to the Byrds. The effectiveness is undeniable but . . . I hope for their sakes the next album doesn't sound the same. Get the picture?' (Brown 1984). 'One of the Dunedin Band's influences are more than just on their sleeves [sic] with this song . . . Wind this one up and WALLOW in it' (Colbert 1985). Denial of influence was a way of reproducing the autonomy of the scene through rejection of a 'feminised' nostalgia. This discourse recurred more radically in US hardcore, so influential on indie there: the 'straight edge' ethos of abstinence – dependence is weakness. So my suggestion is that while canonism is essential to understanding indie, at the same time it is also problematic because it compromises scenes and musicians' perceived independence, originality, subversiveness, etc. Hence it is often downplayed. Of course, now that indie is over twenty years old, relatively institutionalised, and extensively written about, the indie canon is frequently cited, but my point is that this was not (indeed could not) always be the case.

How is (was) canonism articulated in practice?

Canonism was initially an implicit rather than explicit indie discourse. Making it too explicit would have institutionalised the scene, and made it appear parochial and derivative – not a good look for a rock culture, especially a postpunk one, since punk was supposedly so anti-traditional. But paradoxically this very radicalism necessitated regulation, to maintain a sense of the scene's uniqueness and difference. As Dave Hesmondhalgh puts it, indie's 'counterhegemonic aims could only be maintained . . . by erecting exclusionary barriers around the culture' (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 38). So canon was rearticulated as 'purity': '[t]his myth of purity . . . is today as defining a pop myth as any other. In England it defined punk from the beginning' (Arnold 1995, p. 38; Felder 1993, p. 4; Marcus 1999, p. 25). Purity links to authenticity, in the sense that music which is 'uncommodified' and uncompromised by the market, tends to be 'true' to a particular social group, exhibiting a quasi-folk discourse, with a dual (paradoxical) insistence on populism ('music of the people') and anti-populism (an Adorno-esque disdain for mass popular taste). In both folk and punk/indie, this tendency has an elitist aspect, reproducing a central tenet of canonism – the distinction between authentic and apocryphal texts (the religious connotations seem apt).

Punk puritanism

Purity implies its opposite – impurity or taboo. For any musical genre or subculture that defines itself as oppositional, some notion of the impure is an important operating principle for musical practice: 'Struggles over musical propriety are themselves political struggles over whose music . . . whose rules of order shall prevail' (Susan McClary, quoted in Keil and Feld 1994, p. 257). Anthropologist Mary Douglas has written: 'ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created' (Douglas 1970, p. 15). Purity and taboo are a way of creating unity in experience, although this unity may in turn be based on the suppression of 'otherness'. In popular music (sub)cultures, 'otherness' usually translates as 'mainstream' – some construction of dominant musical and social practice, which the subculture is defined by its rejection of. Exactly what indie tended to reify as mainstream is a point we'll get to presently.

Purity confers upon a particular taste regime the status of a transcendental, ahistorical ideal, generally located in the past, linking to archivalism, and indie's tendency to idealise (a construction of) the 1960s. It also links to discourses of youth, innocence, primitivism and amateurism. Keir Keightley writes that 'rock' culture's 'oppositional conception of youth drew . . . on a longstanding association of youth with purity and innocence' derived from the folk/Romantic critique of mass society, and articulated most strongly by the 'flower children' (hippies): 'this privileging of a symbolic childhood . . . became an ongoing feature of rock culture, seen subsequently in the alternative rock community's celebration of the deliberately ''amateur'', ''naïve'' or ''twee'' ' (Keightley 2001, p. 124).[3] I think this is true, but perhaps a bit more complex than Keightley makes it: for a start, punk and indie reviled hippies (somewhat disingenuously) for their 'naivety' while continuing to espouse their own notions of childhood purity, which linked not with nature as in hippy culture, but with an idea of the natural as amateur, childlike, artistic and social practice (again, Bangs is perhaps the key influence here). For the hippies, 'naturalness' in musical practice equated to 'doing your own thing', that is, originality (Willis 1978, p. 155), but this had tended to reify over time into the high cultural idea of the autonomous creative artist/virtuoso musician (as in 1970s progressive rock, etc). Hence indie, again, tended to identify purity with the 1960s, while editing hippies out of the picture (along with blacks and women).

Purity became a central criterion in identifying and describing a distinctively indie musical practice. For example, Reynolds defines (UK) indie music as: 'whiter than white ''pure pop'' ' influenced by the *pure* voices of Syd Barrett, Roger McGuinn, Arthur Lee . . .' (Reynolds 1988, p. 247; 1990, p. 23).[4] This implied a canon: 'strictly albino roots like the Velvet Underground, Television, The Byrds, psychedelia, folk, country' (Reynolds 1988, p. 246) but also a corresponding set of musical and social practices: 'jangly pop', 'the Luddite insistence on guitars . . . the flustered undanceability' (Reynolds 1990, p. 23). An idealised naivety and amateurism was projected retrospectively: 'The Sixties are like pop's childhood, when the idea of youth was still young' (Reynolds 1988, p. 248). We can understand 'pure' here as a synthesis of Keightley's 'innocence' and a rearticulated 1960s 'pop/rock' canon, with the black artists left out.

Canonism, ethnicity, sexuality

Reynolds explains this 'whitening' of indie in terms of a rejection of the 1980s New Right agenda of commodification, instrumentalisation and sexualisation of the body, associated with black or black styled dance music, which seemed to be becoming instrumental to neo-liberal agendas like 'no gain without pain', 'work hard play hard' and 'working out' (Reynolds 1988, p. 247). Perhaps the most notorious example was the controversy surrounding the Smiths' 'Panic' with its line 'Hang the DJ', which some condemned as racist. (Although the song is ambiguous, some of Morrissey's other statements about black music are less defensible, for example 'Reggae to me is the most racist music in the world. It's an absolute glorification of black supremacy' [Wrenn 1988, p. 25; Cavanagh 2000, p. 225].) Reynolds' thesis is good as far as it goes, but there are other considerations, for example, 'rockism'.

The rise of identity politics in the 1970s – feminism (and anti-racism) – meant that for many, the (male) sexuality of rock was reinterpreted as sexism. While few commentators would be brave enough to assay a direct critique of black music as sexist (and thereby risk being labelled racist), in the aftermath of punk, white blues-based rock, heavy metal especially, was targeted as 'cock rock' and the British music weeklies coined the term 'rockism' to describe its excesses (Frith and McRobbie 1990, p. 374). Perhaps this partially explains some (especially UK) critics' preference for the word 'pop' over 'rock' – the latter has too many negative, macho connotations, as does 'rock and roll': 'The Velvet Underground were the most influential band to come out of white rocking America – ever . . . the Byrds – do they even count as rock and roll? Probably not, but neither did the Velvets, and that's what so important about them' (Thompson 2000, p. 2). Effectively, the canon was being redefined by the exclusion of black music – not just contemporary genres like disco, dance and rap, but also through the rejection of the rock and roll tradition, with its now ideologically unacceptable traditions of misogyny and masculine sexuality.

This 'whitening' of indie music was not limited to the UK. In the US, the same broad identification was made: black dance music equals commodification and mass deception: 'the radio blared out cheesy disco songs unendingly' (Arnold 1995, p. 8). Gerard Cosloy writes in *Conflict*: 'The only thing in this world that's worse than listening to some spliffed-out moron who ain't washed his hair in three years singing 'I love Jah' is watching white college students throw frisbees around to the strains of the above Rasta fool' (Cosloy, quoted in Arnold 1995, p. 120). In New Zealand, Flying Nun 'founding father' Chris Knox discussed an indie canon or 'lineage . . . the Velvets, John Cale, The Saints, Wire, the Stooges, the Birthday Party and authors like William Burroughs . . . who have tried to describe the White Man's Condition . . . it is soul music in the sense of the white man's soul'. Knox describes Flying Nun band the Stones as 'plugged into the white man's heartbeat' (Brown 1983).[5] And in Dunedin, second-hand record shop owner Roy Colbert kept black music in a separate bin, away from the main rock shelves. Examples of white canonism also abound in UK indie, although it was more inclined to 'play' with ethnicity (Reynolds 1988, p. 247; Cavanagh 2000, p. 254). I don't think it's entirely true to suggest, as Reynolds does, that rejection of black music was only due to the New Right. It seems to have been fairly entrenched in independent music circles from the mid-1970s on. In this light, indie music appears somewhat less than anti-hegemonic. Again, Bangs is relevant here – his 1979 article

'The White Noise Supremacists' shows how deeply conflicted he is over punk rock's proximity to racism, because he feels partially responsible for it (Bangs 1987, pp. 272–82).

Will Straw suggests that 'African-American musical forms . . . [stand] implicitly for a relationship to technological innovation and stylistic change against which [US indie] has come to define itself' (Straw 1997ʙ, p. 497). Indie culture was suspicious of the perceived rate of change (technological and other) in black music, which served as damning evidence of its technologisation and commodification, very much like the folk music critique of mass culture. This discourse of indie technological dystopianism can, again, be read in terms of purity ('the old [i.e. 1960s] ways are the best') and archivalism, for example the use of 'old' technology – classic 1960s guitars (Fender, Gibson, Burns, Hofner), amps (Fender, Vox), keyboards (mellotrons, Jansen organs), four-track tape recorders, tape echo, plate reverb, analogue over digital (effects, recording, synthesizers) valve technology over transistors (Knox 1989). This can be glossed as both necessity (old gear may be cheaper and more accessible) and as more authentic – the sounds produced are non-commercial, and therefore better.

The characteristic indie guitar sound was a 'wall of noise' – jangling or droning guitars, buried vocals and reverberation. The allusion to Spector's Wall of Sound is deliberate – clearly an influence on many indie bands, and his characteristic sound, based on studio reverberation, is an archival technological intervention that many indie bands used, both in recordings and live. Of course, reverberation has always been a feature of recorded music, but usually used selectively, on vocals especially.[6] Spector used it on everything, creating that muddy, apocalyptic, slightly anachronistic grandeur that characterises much of his work. Reverb literally denotes distance in space, but it can also connote distance in time – 'the past' (for example, it is often used on film soundtracks for flashback episodes) thus linking to archivalism – not only were reverb-y 1960s sounds influential on indie, but arguably these same sounds were already marked by nostalgic references that simultaneously also invoked canons and past authorities – hence Spector's references to his works as 'little symphonies for the kids' (Pareles and Romanowski 1983, p. 516). Reverberation can be read as a mediation that encourages the listener to hear the past in the present, imparting authority – it adds a 'patina of authenticity', while at the same time distancing the listener from precise articulations and expressions which might carry specific meanings. It 'muddies' the sound and de-emphasises individual elements and voices, tending towards a total, enveloping, homogeneous noise, as on early Flying Nun and R.E.M., an approach taken to an extreme by groups like Jesus and Mary Chain, My Bloody Valentine (and more recently Spiritualised, who sprung from Spacemen 3). The effect tends towards disembodiment: 'the sound literally isn't all there. It's actually the opposite of rock'n'roll. It's taking all the guts out of it . . . just the remnants, the outline' (Kevin Shields, quoted in Reynolds 1990, p. 121).[7] For indie musicians, it not only had that 'authentic' 1960s ring, but also other advantages as I have suggested elsewhere.

Reverberation achieves a sense of distance and vastness, at the expense of personality. It creates majesty, at the expense of intimacy. It is cool, rather than warm. It is cerebral, rather than visceral. It's like the big picture, but at the expense of detail . . . its attraction for young men is not hard to understand. It sounds impressive, and you can hide the messy details (Bannister 1999, p. 72).

Purity as desexualisation/regression

Reynolds suggests a mind/body splitting in indie (echoing Christian concepts of purity as associated with rejection of bodily desire). The perceived hypersexuality of black music and (I would argue) white blues-based rock ('rockism') made it taboo for indie musicians in performance. Accordingly, the masculine personae associated with indie performance tended not to be overtly sexual, aggressive and demonstrative. A related discourse is that of withdrawal, defining 'a space which neither impinges upon nor is impinged upon by the hegemony: ''we want our world'' ' (Arnold 1995, p. 11; Grossberg 1997, p. 241). An example is J. Mascis of US indie band Dinosaur Jr., whose whiny but lazy drawling vocals exude the enthusiasm of a man addressing the world from his sleeping bag, and whose attitude and subject matter on records like *You're Living All Over Me* (1987) and songs like 'Yeah We Know' (1988) and 'Puke and Cry' (1991) epitomise indie as withdrawal. There was a movement in indie away from punk activism and towards a more passive, mediated approach, an argument Reynolds advances with reference to UK indie band the Smiths: 'the rebellion of the Stones, Who, Pistols, Jam was based in some kind of activism . . . but the Smiths' rebellion was always more like resistance through withdrawal' (Reynolds 1990, p. 19). But withdrawal into what, we might ask. A 'private universe' of music seems to be the most appropriate answer (Smith 1995).

In Nick Hornby's books *High Fidelity* (1996) and *Fever Pitch* (1994), popular culture is identified with mediated, impersonal, 'abstract systems' which supply men with a sense of belonging while at the same time distancing them from more direct forms of social engagement, a disengagement characteristic of Anthony Giddens' 'late modernity' (Giddens 1990, pp. 140–1). Both works play out a similar gendered conflict in which a male protagonist has to negotiate between the culture he loves (soccer in *Fever Pitch* and popular music in *High Fidelity*) and the people (family, women) in his life. In both books popular culture is figured as a homosocial world of male bonding, to which women are opposed (literally and figuratively). Popular culture supplies a depersonalised routine or structure which supplies security for men. In *Fever Pitch* it is the recurrent structure of the football seasons; in *High Fidelity* the fact that the narrator is not only a music fan but also a record shop proprietor. Both main characters find comfort in the world of statistics: in *Fever Pitch* the endless calculation of goal differences, the recitation of scoring statistics, home and away records, etc. – the whole body of knowledge of soccer, and in *High Fidelity* the obsessive listing – ten greatest guitar solos, ten greatest first tracks, ten greatest break-ups. The male characters find safety within this numerical, mathematical world. It is a place of symbolic authority, a world from which subjectivities are exiled. They can also participate vicariously in 'goal-oriented behaviour', for example Arsenal winning the championship, the comparison of 'greatest recorded perform- ances'. Both music and football, conceptualised as abstract systems of statistics, are areas where the male characters can imaginatively participate in a world of 'pure' achievement (Faludi 1999, p. 113): 'Hornby suggests that . . . boys define themselves by relation to their interests . . . while girls define themselves by their relation to other people' (Thurschwell 1999, p. 298).

The 'garage' bands of the 1960s and 1970s became the 'bedroom' bands of the 1980s. Such a retreat from the public sphere represents a break from traditional rock masculinities' association with 'the street' but can perhaps be viewed in terms of a re-articulation of male authority through indirect, mediated forms, such as the canon.

The recurring emphasis on male passivity can, again, be traced back to Bangs. As he puts it, '[o]ne of the things that makes the punk stance unique is how it seems to assume substance or at least style by the *abdication* of power: *Look at me! I'm a cretinous little wretch! And proud of it!*' (Bangs 1987, p. 273). Bangs ironically reverses the equation of rock masculinity with power and sexuality, but the 'dumbness' of punk becomes an ironic dissemblance or 'detachment' that conceals a superior awareness. Tom Carson sums this up very well.

The peculiar astringency of the Ramones' style – Joey's insistence on keeping the 'I' in his vocals separate from himself . . . the Stones depended on a similar relativism . . . which is why a track like 'Out of Time' sounds up to date as ever, while the Beach Boys and a lot of the early Beatles, for all the undeniable greatness of the music now sounds . . . incomplete: you have to forget a little of what you know to enter into that world completely. (Carson 1996, p. 115)

Punk critics challenged the traditional view of rock 'authenticity' (Jon Landau, Dave Marsh, Robert Christgau) by implying the superiority of an ironic, relative sensibility, which has become part of the alternative rock world view (Shuker 1998, p. 20; DeCurtis 1999, p. 32). It has the implication that by denying emotional engagement or direct involvement in the world, one becomes free of illusion and can see things as they 'really' are. As Ellen Willis implies in her discussion of Lou Reed, this disavowal of sensuality and emotion can also be interpreted, when used by men, as a mode of control.

While the original primal impulse of rock'n'roll was to celebrate the body . . . (Lou) Reed's temperament was not only cerebral but ascetic . . . the self-conscious formalism of his music . . . was an attempt to purify rock'n'roll, to purge it of all association with material goodies and erotic good times. (Willis 1996, p. 75)

With all these restrictions and taboos, indie was a tightly bounded space/genre. On the one hand, one couldn't be too 'pop' or 'dance', on the other hand, 'rock' was also loaded with negative connotations. The result was a music that was gesturally restricted: not obviously black or danceable or too macho and 'rock and roll', few blues scales or phrases, little syncopation, relatively uniform in tone and texture, performed loud but understatedly and without much individual expression. Guitars are strummed continuously to create an effect of drone or jangle, with a consequent masking of the vocal, which (along with the harmonies) derive from punk or 1960s pop. Lyrics (often inaudible) tend to be introspective, pessimistic, passive, sometimes ironic, or apologetic. The image of the musician is often as anti-star – 'ordinary', modest. Recordings often sound cheap, with amateurish, childlike or obscure cover art. There is a tendency towards an aesthetic of minimalism – 'less is more'. Some of the limits were in some cases pregiven: cheap guitars, primitive recordings, and relatively amateur musicianship (especially singing), but equally there was a tendency to regard such 'limitations' as intrinsic to the genre, as marking 'difference', making a virtue of what was not always a necessity. Equally perhaps this sense of limitation can be attributed to what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as a central feature of canonisation: the tendency for 'temporary norms and conventions' to become 'hardened into universal ones so that evaluations are considered to reflect universal rather than culture or time-bound values' (Bakhtin, quoted in Hawthorn 2000, p. 35). Indie guitar rock was a genre that was defined in terms of what it was not – the specificity of its cultural and social positioning entailed a tricky manoeuvring between different versions of rock history, hence its emphasis on a normative musical style, and the importance of canon as a way of policing the purity of that style.

Of course, in the long term we could argue that that positioning paid off, to the extent that indie anticipated and laid the groundwork for today's alternative mainstream, especially the recent garage rock revival (The White Stripes, the Strokes). Its creation of 'difference' has clearly reaped dividends in the marketplace, but it also shows how its investment in canon, its ironic formalism, tends to problematise any notion of indie as independent.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that 1980s indie was not simply a space of freedom from hegemony. Rather it was defined in relation to hegemonic practices, and canonism in particular. Indie archivalism challenged the existing pop/rock canon, but subscribed to the basic idea of stratification and hierarchisation of culture. The subsequent incorporation of indie acts into the 'pop/rock' canon proves this (Regev 2002). Archivalism was closely related to practices of authority, for example the influence of male mentors, whose concepts of 'rock tradition' were profoundly influential upon indie discourses, but these concepts were implicit rather than explicit, because too obvious a canonism would have threatened the perceived autonomy and originality of indie scenes. There was a set of issues around the translation of discourses of archivalism into live practice – I argue that indie rearticulated the traditional rock insistence on the superiority of live performance to recordings by insisting on qualities of 'liveness' in recordings by the minimisation of technological mediation. But it seems to me that this mainly amounted to a codification of certain kinds of interventions and influences as being more acceptable than others. I suggest that this continuum of 'liveness' and canonicity as different but simultaneous modes of authenticity was perhaps the central paradox of indie, and was closely related to the perceived need to characterise rock cultures as youthful, organic and spontaneous as opposed to traditional, constructed and canonical. Musical mentors also regulated and policed the scene by ideas of purity that were again canonical, working to present an alternative reading of rock history that marginalised (especially) the contributions of African-American music, emphasising instead 1960s psychedelia and punk primitivism. The traditional rock emphasis on sexuality was replaced by an emphasis on pre-sexual or asexual purity, legitimated through references to 1960s psychedelia, with its idealisation of childlike innocence. This asexuality, I argue, was not only a reaction to the hypersexuality of 1980s mainstream, but also an attempt to accommodate feminist critiques of rock as sexist.

Finally I suggest that canonicity be viewed in terms of subcultural capital that to some extent translates into cultural capital – operations of distinction and stratification within popular music work to some extent to enforce masculine, white, middle-class values, operations that helped create an alternative mainstream in the 1990s – Britpop, grunge and garage rock. Purity produces an 'alternative' that is relatively homogenous and unified, thus creating a sense of difference that is ultimately exploitable in the marketplace.

Endnotes

1. *Loaded* here refers primarily to the Velvet Underground's last 'real' album and to the idea of a 'loaded' canon, not to the UK magazine 'for men who should know better'.

2. Alternatively it could be argued that guitars are being used in a new and innovative way in indie – as Steve Waksman points out, the guitar's centrality to discourses of rock makes it

a key site for investigating the ever-shifting articulations of power in relation to technology in popular music – with punk and postpunk especially important (Waksman 1999, pp. 3–13).

3. He also points out that it is an ideology associated primarily with the white middle class (emphasising that 'rock' here basically refers to white culture, an emphasis that continues into indie).

4. Lee, of LA band Love, was not white, however.

5. Cf. Sebadoh's 'Gimme Indie Rock!': 'It's a new generation of electric white boy blues'. Knox's listing of influences seems to contradict my argument about the implicitness of canon – however, I would argue that his authoritative position within Flying Nun allowed him the freedom to bend the rules.

6. In the 1960s, most reverb effects were generated mechanically, by the use of resonating plates or springs. Indie bands often favoured this over digital reverb.

7. 'As a producer, McGee knew only one trick: reverb' (Cavanagh 2000, p. 275).

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