

BIOGRAPHY & IDENTITY, CELEBRITY & FANHOOD

Researching intersections of
avant-garde and popular culture.

Commentary

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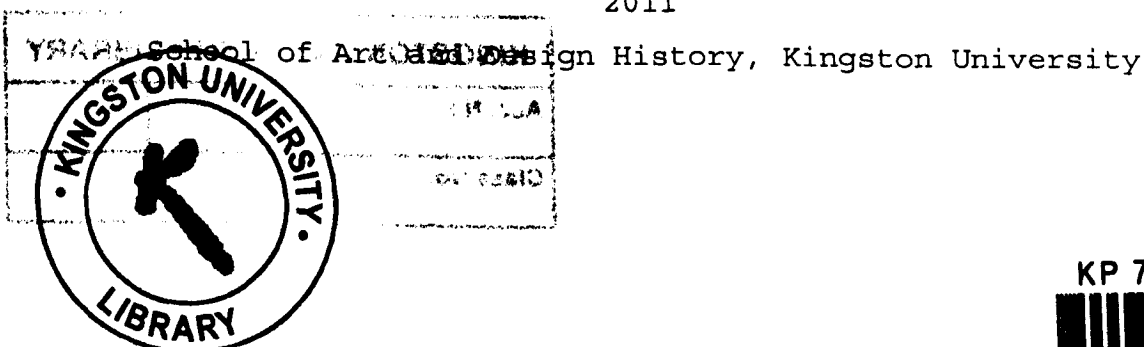
Abstract

This PhD by publication critically reviews the background, context, and reception of work published from 1978-2008. The work surveyed, comprises popular music biography, texts on art school influenced bohemia and counterculture, and on celebrity and fan culture. The social and cultural context of the work is mapped and methodological and stylistic issues addressed. The origins of the punk aesthetic though the Sex Pistols is charted. The turn in celebrity studies towards a "fan culture" based approach is demonstrated by the publication of *Starlust* in 1985. Subsequent work on "fan culture" is discussed. Issues relating to researching and theorising popular culture and cultural and design history are debated. Extracts from the publications cited are provided.

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"It is a curious fact... that the things which most of us would like to publish, are not the things which most of us would like to read."

- Helen MacGill Hughes, *News and the Human Interest Story*, 1940

Introduction

My publications have mostly been around two themes: 1) the phenomenon of celebrity and fan culture, and 2) avant-garde and bohemian intersections with popular culture. Both themes have overlapped. The work produced has run through various media, and that is reflected in this submission with reference to the guideline criteria for PhD by publication, that the work display a "contribution to knowledge/artistic expression." I have cited engagements with countercultural activism where appropriate and explanatory of published work. I have discussed legal matters and publication histories where these have significantly impacted on published material, or where they raise general relevant questions.

The commentary below is mostly arranged chronologically. This is to link common themes logically and illustrate their development in context. Discussion of my first publications is fuller than that of later ones, since issues recur, albeit in different contexts. I have tried to avoid repetition. As much of my work has been deliberately written to appeal to a non-specialist readership, I have spent some time on spelling out the academic background and sources of my methodology and preoccupations. I begin with an account of my educational background, insofar as it was formative for my published output.

Art school to Media Studies

I enrolled at Harrow art school in 1963 for a foundation (in those days called pre-diploma) course, where I was tutored in avant-garde theory by the painter, Theodore Ramos. At Harrow, I also met and befriended Malcolm McLaren (as a fellow 16-year-old student), whose career had a decisive influence on mine. After pre-dip I decided I wanted to focus on writing, but have always maintained an interest in, and association with, fine art and design. From the mid sixties I engaged with the London avant-garde,¹ and in Paris, where I was attracted to the writings of the Situationist Internationale. During this period I collaborated in London with McLaren in art and theatre design projects at the Kingly Street Gallery and New Arts Theatre (nowadays the Arts Theatre) in Great Newport Street. I mostly earned a living as a "runner" in the second hand and antiquarian book trade.

In 1967 I enrolled at the Sorbonne for a diploma course, *Civilisation française*, preparatory to a degree in French literature and philosophy. I also attended lectures which accelerated my interest in phenomenology, particularly in the multidisciplinary work of Jean Paul Sartre and the theorists focused around *Les Temps Modernes*. During the May '68 "evenements" I participated in the occupations - liaising with Anglophone media from the Sorbonne.

The experience of '68 generally, made me aware of the centrality of mass media in culture. I returned to the UK and enrolled in 1969 a course in mass communication at the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL, now Westminster University) - the first of its kind in Europe. I graduated in 1972.

The course had equally weighted pathways: communication theory, a standard academic discipline (I chose history), and radio and TV

¹ Focused around Better Books and Collets, both in the Charing Cross Road, and the London Film Co-op which later evolved into the London Arts Lab, and the Indica Gallery and Bookshop.

studio practice. The academic course team was experimental, finding ways to break from a behaviourist inflected American notion of "mass communication" and importing Sassurian linguistics and elements of psychoanalysis into the course. The History pathway gave me a secure grounding in historical methodology.

Charles Parker and interviewing technique

I was fortunate to be taught interviewing technique at PCL by the broadcaster, Charles Parker. Parker had developed the radio ballad, a series of documentaries with music, in collaboration with Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger. He was politically and aesthetically committed to capturing the common voice of ordinary people and the timbre of ordinary lives.

Parker pioneered the craft of interviews with people who didn't have an agenda to tell or a product to sell, and might need coaxing and reassuring to elicit details of experiences they might be reticent about revealing - or may have never previously articulated.

Parker taught a precise and rigorous technique which I later adapted in research for many published projects. Parker's work was also important in developing oral history, and this burgeoning discipline, intersecting with ethnographic observation methods, was also influential.

I subsequently adapted Parker's technique.

Firstly, I felt his emphasis on sympathetic "objectivity" was inconsistent and flawed. The interviewer was a part of the situation of an interview, and that had to be accommodated in the methodology - both in relation to the conduct of the interview and its subsequent processing. This move towards reflexivity was influenced by readings of what was called "faction," or "new journalism," particularly Truman Capote, *In*

Cold Blood, 1966, and Norman Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself*, 1959, *Armies of the Night*, 1968, and *Marilyn: a biography*, 1973.

I also thought Parker was unduly shy of "academic" literature. Throughout my career I have ensured that as an interviewer (and someone who sometimes instructs research assistants and students): the more background the better.

In-depth research from a variety of sources and disciplines should therefore precede any interview-based project. An effective interviewer anticipates responses from interviewees from this background research. It is often in the context - or through the focus, of such anticipation, that new or surprising elements emerge.

While much of this background may never surface in a resulting publication, its quality and depth will have framed and informed the interview. Likewise, while theoretical issues that may have guided the questioning, (for example categories and suggestions from psychoanalysis or anthropology), may remain unspoken in the interview-encounter, they might be crucial to the drift or point of an interview.

Notions that interviews are a sort of neutral encounter, or a groping towards the unknown, are flawed. The interviewer always has expectations of the interviewee and these partly shape the interview. The issue is: how subtle and well founded (and non-judgemental) are those expectations? ² ³

Another early influence on my methodology was the work of Erving Goffman, and his emphasis on dramatic interaction and role

² Later on, Michael Billig's discourse analysis style of interviewing - or "rhetorical psychology," was a reminder that what is not said in an interview can be as important as what is spoken. Michael Billig, *Talking of the Royal Family*, London : Routledge, 1991

³ Over my career I have developed and systematised interviewing technique. A basic guide is in Fred Vermorel, "Hints on Interviewing," *Researching & Writing*, 1993. I have also developed seminars which unpack issues in detail for particular outcomes. Interviewing however, is not my only research tool, I have also used questionnaires, content analyses, focus groups and participant observation.

playing - particularly in, *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*, Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1968. Variations of Goffman's "participant observation" have been a consistent feature of my work.⁴

Experimentalist film documentary was also formative. Particularly the work of Frederick Wiseman, and the directors of the Rive Gauche movement: Agnes Varda, Alain Resnais, and Chris Marker (particularly, *Le jolies Mai*, 1963). Equally influential were Luis Buñuel, *Los Olvidados*, 1950, Gillo Pontecorvo *The Battle of Algiers*, 1966, Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, *The Hour of the Furnaces* 1968, and Louis Malle's extended documentary on India, *Calcutta*, 1969. These works all subverted - at the same time as they deployed, the notion of documentation.⁵ I also followed developments in the early "film as history movement," attending the "Archive Film in the Study and Teaching of Twentieth Century History" conference at the Imperial War Museum (June 1972).

Early cultural politics

From late '68 I collaborated (along with Jamie Reid and Malcolm McLaren) with the London based King Mob group, founded by the ex-situationist Chris Gray.⁶ I wrote and co-wrote, anonymously (as was the style in that group), material for *King Mob Echo*, [London : King Mob, 1968-1969] and for pamphlets (now lost)

⁴ In 1971, as an undergraduate, I initiated a series of interviews carried out by myself and fellow students at the Bexley Heath Mental Hospital. We were allowed into locked wards to interview diagnosed "paranoid schizophrenics." This was to make a comparative analysis of schizophrenic and normal speech patterns. The result was unpublished but I still use extracts from this project in seminars on research technique.

⁵ In 1971 I travelled to Northern Ireland and spent summer interviewing people about the effect of the "troubles" on children. This material contributed to the final studio project for my undergraduate degree. (During this project I was detained and interrogated by the IRA in the Bogside in Derry, which gave me a sinister new slant on "interviewing").

⁶ Gray published the first English translation of situationist writings, [Christopher Gray, *Leaving The Twentieth Century: the incomplete work of the Situationist International*, London : Free Fall Publications, 1974. The book was designed by Jamie Reid.]

issued in the course of occupations and other events. in 1969, I assisted Malcolm McLaren and other Goldsmith's students in organising a Free Festival, designed as much as a media scandal as a cultural event. (See description in Sex Pistols biography, second revised English edition). This had moderate resonance but was a useful rehearsal for the Sex Pistols.

Early work related to photographic representations of celebrity

My academic interest in celebrity developed from the late sixties. It seemed that celebrity was decisive in maintaining social cohesion and channelling expectations. The hierarchies and choices it imposed also skewed and policed the cultural and political market place.⁷

My first attempt to analyze celebrity was through a dissertation for the MA History at the University of Sussex, 1974-5. This was focused around the cultural uses of photography with an emphasis on its social history. This work suggested how photography might enhance the palpability of celebrities to create a parasocial realm of fantasy and fetish.

This dissertation developed into research on the phenomenology of the "presence" of photographic representation, a presence underpinning celebrity's photogenic pseudo-intimacy.

In 1976 I wrote an essay on these lines, "Through the Camera," on the epistemology of the photographic image. This essay was accepted for publication by the art historian, Ian Jeffrey (Jeffrey wrote an introduction to the essay), but withdrawn by me as incomplete. Jeffrey later commissioned two articles for *Creative Camera*, for details see below) which drew on this unpublished material.

⁷ This political dimension was later expressed in my opposition to Live Aid. See the interview piece by Frank Owen, "Charity is Sadism, *Melody Maker*, July 19, 1986, (Appendix Two), and my formulation "Consensus Terrorism" in Frank Owen and Carolyn Brown, "An A-Z of Post-Modernism," *i-D*, Pop Issue April 1987, (see below).

1978, Sex Pistols: the inside story

This research was then deflected though my immersion in a biography of the Sex Pistols, *Sex Pistols, the inside story*, London, Universal Book, 1978.

I had become interested in the developing plot around punk from around 1975. The biography came about from my connections with the Pistols' manager McLaren and other key figures, principally Bernard Rhodes (who later became manager of The Clash), Vivienne Westwood, and Jamie Reid.

I was privy to the art college background and countercultural - and specifically, the neo-situationist - agenda behind the band. I witnessed - and occasionally participated in - debates and stratagems that led to the band's formation and signings to EMI, A&M and Virgin, as well as design developments at the McLaren/Westwood boutique at 430 Kings Road, Chelsea, (by that time called SEX) which first hosted and styled the band.⁸

Collaboration

The Pistols' biography was co-authored by my then wife, Judy Vermorel, who contributed interview material. These interviews comprised around 1/3 of the text. Background research was by me. The interviews were prepared by both of us, mostly conducted by Judy Vermorel, and edited by me. All non-interview material was sourced and edited by me. The conception and style of the book and all commentary was by me. My overall contribution to the first edition was around two thirds. In

⁸ For example, I assisted Westwood and McLaren in promoting and selling their fashion goods at the Wembley Stadium Rock & Roll jamboree in 1974, researched catalogues of fetish wear which were used in early "bondage" designs, and, with McLaren, erected the lurid SEX sign over the shop. At the same time, I was dubious about the boutique's commercial agenda and sent postcards to the shop with critical comments. These comments later surfaced on SEX T-shirts. For example, "Does passion end in fashion?" Westwood also sent me an angry letter written on the cardboard stiffening for a shirt - along the lines of was I living in the real world?

subsequent editions, as extra material and more commentary was added, it approached three quarters. (This ratio continued in subsequent co-authored work. Where design elements featured, these were generated by me.)

Sources for the Sex Pistols' biography

Sex Pistols: the inside story was organised as a collage (or collision) of texts and narratives drawn from primary as well as secondary sources.

The intention was to evoke the feeling of the punk "moment" (essentially 1975-1978) through the narrative style. I also wished to provide material for future research and interpretation.

One perspective coming from my previous historical research was to imagine what a future historian of punk would value most: what standard archives and accounts might miss out. Thus, informal conversations as well as interviews with the relatives and friends of the band, hangers-on, fans, roadies, photographers and journalists, antagonists and opponents of punk, and particularly, the inner workings of the management team, the umbrella company for which was Glitterbest Ltd.

Glitterbest drew together Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood, Bernard Rhodes (until he quarrelled with McLaren and left to manage The Clash), Jamie Reid and his then partner, Sophie Richmond (whose personal diary offered valuable insights and was reproduced in part in the text). There was also Stephen Fisher, the Glitterbest lawyer, a key figure often neglected.

During the research for this book I kept away from directly participating in the band's management. McLaren and Bernard Rhodes had tried to recruit me at an early stage, (See account in *GQ*, January 2011), and while I was researching the book McLaren asked me to co-manage The Slits with him. I thought however, that this might compromise the text.

I was however, privy to many internal management discussions, and other meetings, such as confidential legal briefings from Stephen Fisher, and telephone conferences with EMI and Virgin Records.

Problems of emphasis and perspective

Given this access and my shared background with McLaren, Westwood, and Reid, I may, in retrospect have had my perspective skewed in favour of the management team and its agenda. The book emphasises the role of the management and plays down the role of the band members.⁹

This emphasis was later continued by Greil Marcus in *Lipstick Traces: a secret history of the twentieth century*, 1989, and, to a lesser extent, by Jon Savage in *England's Dreaming* 1991. A corrective was John Lydon's autobiography, *Rotten*, 1994.

(Lydon and the other band members' perspective was also put by Julian Temple in the rockumentary, *The Filth and the Fury*, 2000.)

The Pistols' biography also underplayed connections between the performances of some of the minor (as well as provincial) punk bands, like The Slits and Eater, with the Viennese Actionists

⁹ The book likewise neglected the wider cultural context in favour of the cultural milieu surrounding Glitterbest. For example, the COUM exhibition at the ICA in 1976 was an anticipation of punk the book failed to emphasise. See in this respect, John Walker's account: "Nicholas Fairbairn, a Tory MP, was one of those who attended the crowded, evening opening at the ICA on 18 October and heard "doom and gloom rap" from Genesis, "masochistic" music by Throbbing Gristle, all wearing "black lurex," and witnessed striptease by Shelley who had been specially hired for the occasion (she was rather disconcerted by the art world venue). LSD [which later became "Chelsea"], a Punk band, was the supporting act. Fairbairn was dismayed by the presence of "Hell's Angels [Punks more like] and men with multi-coloured hair" in the audience. As far as Fairbairn was concerned the COUM performers were the "wreckers of Western civilisation." He remarked: "Now we are getting the lid off the maggot factory." -- Cosey Fanni Tutti & Genesis P-Orridge in 1976: Media frenzy, Prostitution-style <http://www.artdesigncafe.com/Cosey-Fanni-Tutti-Genesis-P-Orridge-John-A-Walker-Art-and-Outrage-ADP-1-3-2009>

and in the UK the work of Stuart Brisley.¹⁰ Nor was the wider punk scene covered. The book thus gave perhaps too much emphasis to a commercially successful and metropolitan punk "elite."

Likewise, the connections with Warhol and the Velvet Underground were neglected - the route of punk from its origins in early 1970s New York avant-garde was implied, but effectively downplayed in favour of its importation by McLaren and Westwood to London.

I was however, to return to this last theme in later editions, and have frequently used it as a problem in my teaching practice: what factors made punk in London successful as opposed to its debacle in New York?¹¹

¹⁰ E.g. the political amplification of "happenings," the ritualised "abuse" of the artist's body through performance, the preoccupation with versions of "transgression" and neo-Dadaist theatre. See for example several of the acts in Don Letts, Punk Rock Movie, 1976. Thus: Eater, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pabf_oQUk4M, <retrieved 18 Jan, 2011>

¹¹ The suggestions made are principally: 1) the grounding of punk's originating and crucial art student constituency in a legacy of avant-garde "troublemaking" and a canon of deviant anti-heroes; 2) the existence of a funded management coterie who kept UK punk going despite the initial indifference (indeed, hostility) of the music industry and the media to a point when it could no longer be ignored; 3) the familiarity of this management coterie with avant-garde precedents: the tactical use of anti-establishment polemics, the cultivation of manifestos, and the sophisticated manipulation of media publicity, (as evident in Futurism and Surrealism as punk); 4) in a more banal but also important way, the fact that while the New York punk scene was awash with heroin, which tends to diminish energy and focus, the drugs of choice for UK punks were alcohol and amphetamines - conducive to speed, anger and angst. On this point, Tony Wilson, the founder of Factory Records, asserted to me (in a private conversation) that a tactic used by record company A&R people planning ahead for which genres of band to sign, was to scout the clubs for which drugs were selling. This would indicate the kinds of bands that might prosper commercially in the coming months. Trends in substances apparently preceded, or presaged, moods in musical taste. Wilson, of course, was also the founder of the Hacienda club, as famous for its mass consumption of E as for its invention of Rave.]

The collage style of this book (and later work)

A significant element of the book was an attempt to dramatically juxtapose and to counterpose apparently "raw" data: interviews, quotations, fragments of media text, documents, images.

Since this became a more or less consistent feature of my writing I will expand a little more on the origins and rationale of this method.

This collage method of fragments or quotations was partly inspired by the subversive and critical uses of quotation, as irony and dislocation, by the Viennese satirist, Karl Kraus. As is well known, Walter Benjamin appropriated this technique, and in his essay on Kraus remarked that:

"Krauss's achievement exhausts itself at its highest level by making even the newspaper quotable. He transports it to his own sphere, and the empty phrase is suddenly forced to recognize that even in the deepest dregs of the journal it is not safe from the voice that swoops on the winds of the word to drag it from its darkness." ¹²

Drawing on Benjamin's essay on Kraus in her introduction to *Illuminations*, Hanna Arendt comments on Benjamin's own use of quotation,

"In this form of 'thought fragments,' quotations have the double task of interrupting the flow of presentation with 'transcendent force' and at the same time of concentrating within themselves that which is presented" ¹³

My own deployment of this method was equally linked to surrealism's destabilisation of realism through "uncanny"

¹² *Selected Writings of Walter Benjamin*, 1996-2003, 3: p453

¹³ Hannah Arendt, Introduction to Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 1969, p39

juxtapositions and approximations, and more especially by the situationist practice (pace Lautréamont) of "détournement":

"Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can be used to make new combinations. The discoveries of modern poetry regarding the analogical structure of images demonstrate that when two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed. Restricting oneself to a personal arrangement of words is mere convention. The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the juxtaposition of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy. Anything can be used." ¹⁴ ¹⁵

The artist Robert Rauchenberg had also been influential. I visited the 1964 (February-March) Whitechapel exhibition with Malcolm McLaren who was also enthusiastic about Rauchenberg's neo-dadaist collages: their exotic materiality, textual aggression, and the creative energy they displayed. Two years later, we were equally taken with Robert Motherwell's 1966 (February-March) show at the Whitechapel.¹⁶

Neil Nehring's analysis of the method in "Graham Greene Meets the Sex Pistols"

One use I made of this technique was to intersperse selections from Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*, 1938, at strategic points in the narrative.

¹⁴ Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, 1956: A User's Guide to Détournement. <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/detourn.htm> <retrieved 19/11/2011>

¹⁵ The idea of mapping fanhood through fragmentary and elliptical passages that evoked or "ventriloquised" or implied analysis was also stimulated by Jean Pierre Faye's, *Theorie du récit : introduction aux langages totalitaires*, 1972. Faye's methodology was an early deconstructivist approach which prioritised detailed empirical observation.

¹⁶ Theodore Ramos, our foundation studies tutor at Harrow, had previously introduced us to Motherwell's anthology, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 1951

John Lydon had told me that this was one of the few books he had read - it being a set text for his "O" level (nowadays GCSE) in English. I found this both amusing and suggestive. In a formal interview for the book, Lydon responded dismissively to a question about what he read for English "O" level:

"JR: {Melodramatically} Macbeth. (Bored) Keats' poetry. And, er, what was the other one - (drawls) *Brighton Rock*, Graham Greene. Complete rubbish."¹⁷

In a 1999 article, Neil Nehring made my use of détourned fragments from *Brighton Rock* the focal point for an article, "Revolt into Style: Graham Greene Meets the Sex Pistols."¹⁸

Nehring wrote:

"*Brighton Rock* was 'détourned' (with appropriate credit to Greene) in a 1978 biography of the Sex Pistols... Although the Vermorels' book appears in some bibliographies on rock music, its Situationist practice, including the suggestive use of Greene, has gone unremarked. The book liberally quotes Greene to create a parallel between his sociopathic hero, Pinkie Brown, and Johnny Rotten, the Sex Pistols' singer. Most horrific is the linkage of accounts of razor attacks on both; more pointedly, Pinkie's "face of starved intensity, a kind of hideous and unnatural pride," is paired with a music periodical's description of Rotten: "his eyes look so glazed... that you seriously wonder if there isn't some pathological monster straining inside him to get out"¹⁹ [p225]

¹⁷ Fred and Judy Vermorel, *Sex Pistols*, 1978, p132

¹⁸ *PMLA*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (Mar., 1991), pp. 222-237. This account was later also used in Neil Nehring *Flowers in the Dustbin: culture, anarchy, and postwar England*. Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, c1993.

¹⁹ Nehring, *ibid*, p225

Nehring comments that my use of *Brighton Rock*:

"...affords a glimpse of how the resources of "high art" can complete the linkage of mass-produced commodities and entertainment forms that is typical of youth subcultures..."

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Arguing that the way *Brighton Rock* "...exemplifies the original dialectic between the avant-garde and mass culture," has been "methodologically severed" by "academic interpretation..."²¹

Nehring suggests that the détournement of the novel in the Pistols biography reinstates the "palpable contumacy" of Greene's text, together with its relevance to "another important, lost dialectic... between the avant-garde and anarchism." ²²

Nehring elaborates:

"Détournement [in the Pistols' biography], as Debord would have it, embraces Greene's phrases and, by juxtaposing them with accounts of the Pistols, corrects past critical conclusions about Greene - that his concerns are essentially theological, for instance - by providing an opening, at least, onto Greene's anarchist leanings. The passages from *Brighton Rock*, moreover, illuminate the Pistols' stance, especially as defined by catchwords like anarchy and vacant. Full of similar themes - the Vermorels cite the lines 'a dim desire for annihilation stretched in him: the vast superiority of vacancy' (144) Greene's text hardly, in its entirety, eschews political and theological commitment... Viewing the punk ethos in the light of the novel amplifies the theme of vacancy and should prompt reconsideration of punk's presumed nihilism. On closer examination, the Sex Pistols' song 'Pretty Vacant,' while generally evoking a

²⁰ Nehring, *ibid*, p223

²¹ Nehring, *ibid*, p223

²² Nehring, *ibid*, p223

predictable moronism ('Don't ask us to retain 'cause we're not all there'), contains at its heart a denial of stereotypes of insensate youth: 'I don't believe illusions / When too much isn't real / So stop your cheap comment / 'Cause we know what we feel.'" ²³

Another element of this *détournement* strategy, not mentioned by Nehring, was - in a sense - to turn the trick on punk itself. Thus deconstructing the ideological provenance of certain punk lyrics and attitudes.

In an interview, John Lydon (Johnny Rotten) had denied that reading had had any effect on him:

"No it hasn't affected me at all. I just don't like reading anyway." ²⁴

However, it seemed that Lydon's rhetoric of spontaneity: his self-avowed anarchism and the way it was expressed, even down to gestures and comportment, arose from texts available to him, rather than instinctual resentment. Fragments of *Brighton Rock* for example, had penetrated Lydon's conversation and lyrics without him apparently being aware of the fact. The wasted and haggard venom of his stage act was more like a rock and roll version of *Pinkie* than, as McLaren would have it, a new angle on *Oliver Twist*.

This also hinted that other aspects of the Pistols' output might have originated from texts made available to the band by the Glitterbest group.²⁵ That was not surprising, given the hothouse familiarity between band and management, especially at the inception of the Pistols. It did however, undermine the anti-intellectualist street urchin image portrayed by the media

²³ Nehring, *ibid*, pp225-226

²⁴ Fred and Judy Vermorel, *Sex Pistols*, 1978, p132

²⁵ In a wider sense too, this approach in the book was inspired by a determination to track influences and ideological and avant-garde communications in a specific detail rather than through generalised assertions.

as well as by band members. (This point was also made in the "Checklist" of characters at the end of the book which listed details relevant to the sociology - e.g. parental occupation - and education of people involved. Likewise, the book also featured interviews with the mothers of band members.)²⁶

Another intention of this collage technique was to dramatise the violence of the punk moment as a collision of ideologies and agendas in a mediated sphere. *Brighton Rock* was not the only text détourned. PR handouts from EMI, newspaper reports, and extracts from Keats' poetry were insinuated into the narrative.

This was also meant to suggest the complex - sometime contradictory and frequently ambiguous - social and cultural factors at play. Especially however, it was intended to foreground the sophisticated agenda of cultural politics that I believed lay beyond media clichés like "dole queue rock" or out-of-control-hooligans.

Questions of interpretation and the management's misgivings

How far to draw this subtext out, how much to venture beyond suggestion into description and analysis was a source of discussion and contention with the management.

The management team - particularly Jamie Reid and Bernard Rhodes, were opposed to spelling out the intentions and politics of the Glitterbest group. They felt this might undermine their project, which at the time the book was being researched was

²⁶ Another significant factor was that the management were a) all half a generation older than the band, and b) all university or art college educated - only Glen Matlock (St Martins school of art) had been educated past secondary school or sixth form college level. The management therefore had a greater repertoire of images and experiences to draw on. It also tended to act as ad hoc tutors - Westwood being particularly "didactic" in her tone and relationship with young punks. Moreover the band's lyrics and manifestos tended to be written collectively and in some confusion (and inebriation). Jamie Reid claimed to me that he had supplied crucial lyrics, including the couplet, "They made you a moron/Potential H-bomb," in God Save The Queen.

still a work-in-progress. From their point of view, the Sex Pistols (and The Clash) were vehicles for a wider cultural sedition. They were therefore content to support - and enhance - the "moral panic" aspect of punk.

In particular, Jamie Reid objected to my avowed intention to "demystify" the Sex Pistols. He thought that to be effective the band should remain mysterious - even mystifying. He thought the then current media clichés served the purposes of the Glitterbest agenda rather than clarification of the band's ideological roots. It was more "threatening" to the *status quo* to present punk as the work of inebriated and unemployable louts than a cabal of theorists and stylists.

There was also opposition to revealing the internal workings of the organisation from the Glitterbest lawyer, Stephen Fisher. Fisher was nervous about the implications for professional legal etiquette. While I make no claim whatsoever here that he behaved with impropriety, it is a fact that certain contractual arrangements between the band and the management later became one basis of the band members' successful court case against McLaren for "mismanagement" and unpaid revenues. (Sex Pistols vs McLaren, 1987.)²⁷

The result was that the first edition (1978), was oblique. Little was spelled out. Specialists and reviewers who suspected or understood the context therefore read the book in a different way to the general public.²⁸

²⁷ In the event, all of these key participants spoke extensively and most were formally interviewed. Some of this background and interview material was however, withheld and only used as background.

²⁸ This was most starkly illustrated by a three-day serialisation in the *Sun* (week of Monday January, 16, 1978) which gutted the information in the book and rewrote it in journalese, negating the texture and intentions of the original. I thought this misrepresented the book and protested, but was contractually unable to intervene.

The French edition

For the French edition in May 1978 I partly stepped out of the editorial shadows with an "Epilogue - par Anon." This offered a three page afterword commenting on the creation and (by that date) creative destruction of The Sex Pistols.²⁹

This French edition was in any case received differently to the first English edition. In France, The Sex Pistols had immediately been understood as an episode in the history of post '68 modern art, as neo-situationist agitprop.

The French had a different emphasis on a high/low culture fracture: the Pistols were seen on a par with any other contemporary art movement, and analysis of the phenomenon, rather than being seen as pretentious or inappropriate was eagerly sought and entered into. While reviews of the English edition had been positive³⁰, these mostly emanated from the music press, or subcultural or academically marginal sources.

In France, however, the book was reviewed by mainstream publications like *Le Monde* and *Les Nouvelles Litteraires*.³¹

²⁹ *Les Sex Pistols* [textes réunis et présentés par] Fred et Judy Vermorel ; (traduit par Francis Dordor), 1978

³⁰ For example, Simon Frith, *New Statesman*: "Easily the best book about punk. The only one to articulate the mania of that moment." Nick Kent, *NME*: "Here at last is a truly solid and perceptive study of a group whose sensation reeking activities have so often resulted in perverted and overly biased viewpoints... Superb editing work... a constant fluidity which like any "good read" draws one instinctively into the action... Sheer revelatory potency... stands in a category rare in the rock In' roll stakes: the in-depth biography.

³¹ Alain Wais, *Le Monde*: "Everything is revealed, scrupulously and with precision." Maurice Achard, *Les Nouvelles Litteraires*: "Absolutely astonishing... a real work of history... This book shows how much we live in a present continually overtaken by events. A shattered present... The Sex Pistols as expressed in this book illuminate the last quarter of our century." *L'est eclair, France*: "An entire epoch is distilled in this book."

The second UK edition and added commentary

When the first UK re-edition appeared (1981) after the Pistols' break-up I decided to go further. In an "Interregnum" I highlighted the Pistol's entering into the mythical realm of media "factoids" (pace Norman Mailer's use of the term). The book was updated with references to the deaths of Nancy Spungeon and Sid Vicious, material from the Virgin signing and the making of The Great Rock and Roll Swindle, and the Pistols belated entry into the design establishment - viz the interview with Danny Friedman of the V&A about the museum's purchase of Jamie Reid's Sex Pistols art work. Then, in an 30-page end piece titled, "When Malcolm Laughs," I attempted to clarify issues around the Sex Pistols' radical and countercultural roots.

This addition was welcomed in the journal, *Popular Music*:

"Revised version of the definitive book on punk... Contains much additional material on McClaren and his ideas and provides an important account of pop music as art, leisure and politics." ³²

In *The New Statesman* (11 December 1981), Frith expanded. He acknowledged that the perspective of the first edition had been "to place the Pistols where they belong - in the history of modern art," and argued that the new material demonstrated how through the Pistols, "Marxism and Situationism and Warhol were fused in an argument that political and commercial interests were the same thing - what mattered was to make a *public show*." [His emphasis].

The additional commentary was referenced and quoted extensively in Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*, 1987, (pp130-131), to illuminate the radical and situationist politics behind the Sex Pistols' management, and place the Sex Pistols in an

³² Simon Frith, Stephen M. Fry, David Horn
Popular Music, Vol. 2, *Theory and Method* (1982), pp. 324-341

avant-garde tradition of dissenting art. (Frith and Horne also pointed out that the reason punk electrified the cultural studies tradition, which rapidly colonised the phenomenon for Theory, was that punk and cultural studies had essentially the same intellectual roots.)

The commentary was also picked on and elaborated by other writers, most notably by Greil Marcus in *Lipstick Traces*, 1989.

From this period I also contributed articles to the Music Press and gave media interviews along the same lines.

All this helped shift the tone and weight of commentary on punk to its consideration as an influential movement creatively engaged across various strands of culture.

Then, in the third edition, which was to become the standard English language edition, (1987), and also the most translated one,³³ and still (2011) in print, I updated the book more extensively. I now provided explicit links, sources and references, and elaborated on the art school and avant-garde background and the situationist politics of the management team. Most of this material had never been made public before.

By that time in any case, the band had long broken up and the punk moment had passed. (The announcement that the band had broken up in the USA came on the same day as the official publication of the book's first edition).

I also felt that the ideology and management strategy behind the band needed to be spelt out. In that respect I disputed McLaren and Julian Temple's narrative in the *Great Rock and Roll Swindle*, 1980, which fetishised the role of McLaren (as opposed to the Glitterbest team generally) and created a Great Man of History narrative. While McLaren was undoubtedly the key

³³ Japanese (1986), [published a few months ahead in Japan], Italian (1992), German (1994), Russian (2006).

catalyst in Glitterbest, he was essentially heading a team of motivated and articulate individuals who in turn operated as a catalyst for a wider movement.

The constraints of "legality" and libel etc

The Pistols biography was the first time I encountered the problem of lawyers vetting a text. This is not an issue that concerns much academic writing but it shapes and conditions populist and biographical texts to an increasing degree, especially in the UK.

The 16-page libel report by Oswald Hickson, Collier & Co, (11 November 1977) on the Pistols' biography began with general cautionary remarks:

"There is a good deal of bad language in the book. If, for example, Sid Vicious is reported to have said of Malcolm McClaren "I hate the bastard; I think he's a fucking toss-bag," this would not be defamatory of McClaren (it is mere vulgar abuse), but it could be defamatory of Vicious, e.g. if he was renowned for his temperate language or if he and McClaren were the best of friends and Vicious had often said so (he would seem hypocritical). The possibilities of libel difficulty if the book is not what it purports to be ... are unlimited and we must therefore advise on the basis that the compilers have been completely honest in their compilation."

There were also specific caveats. Thus, in his condemnation of music journalists, Sid Vicious had said:

"They're just so thick they wouldn't know a string quartet from a string vest. They're just totally dumb. They don't know a fucking thing. They make me sick. They make me physically ill because they're not in touch with what's

going on. They've got no idea of what is happening. And they can't, you know, they can't handle it." ³⁴

The libel report suggested that:

"This passage is defamatory of reporters in the music press. It would be very difficult to justify and there is risk in publication here. The reporters concerned are quite probably a sufficiently small group to be able to sue."

To anyone with knowledge of the trade, the notion of music journalists grouping together to sue on the basis of what a musician has said about them as a collectivity is so unlikely as to be risible. In itself, this advice appears simply comical - and was in this case successfully argued against. It does however illustrate a wider and serious problem.

Many media, or libel lawyers operating in this field of popular culture have an ignorance and suspicion of the subject. This enables their taste (and distaste) to seep into legal advice. Once enshrined in a legal advice document these extra-legal judgements of taste and propriety have considerable power.

The deference with which publishers treat such advice (which, of course, they pay considerable sums for) has increased steadily since the publication of the Pistols' biography. ³⁵ Publishers nowadays will rarely question legal advice about a text, since if they disregard this advice this will adversely affect their insurance policy against libel. Moreover, there is no way of testing whether a lack of libel suits was an effect of the legal advice, or of other factors. As one editor said to me, in this context, "a lawyer can never be wrong."

³⁴ Fred and Judy Vermorel, *Sex Pistols*, 1978, p156

³⁵ I return to this point in relation to my biography of Kate Moss, 2006/2007.

At the same time, it is in the lawyers' interest to be over-cautious, lest they let something slip through that may come back to haunt the publisher (and by association the reputation of the lawyer.) It also increases the temptation for lawyers to act as *ad hoc* literary critics - critics who are anonymous and whose contribution to a text is masked. Equally, they are free to import their prejudices - even to the point of requiring authors to change their "tone."³⁶

This process reinforces the high/low cultural divide and limits available discussion. Because these legal documents are rarely made public, their significant policing of critical discourse is masked and generally unknown. The process can be read, in a Bourdieusian sense, as cultural gatekeepers guarding the citadel of high culture against pop barbarians. Also perhaps, an elite protecting its cultural capital.

From this point it seemed that a strategy to anticipate and if necessary manipulate the legal process was needed. Particularly in the context of contentious material destined for a popular readership. While I thought that commentary about popular culture should be accessible to the people who consume that culture, this meant aiming for a market which was under the spotlight and financially sensitive.

1978, "Keith Tryard" at the Whitechapel

In 1978, I briefly floated a sculptor of "polemical objects" called "Keith Tryard." This came after a remark by the art

³⁶ Another example of such impromptu extra-legal cultural valuation occurred about a remark I published in 1980 about Kate Bush's brother, Jay Bush's, status as a poet, when I alluded in passing to the prolific writer, Edward Lucie-Smith. The lawyer commented, "Surely Edward Lucie-Smith, who by the mid-1960's was already a widely acclaimed [sic] poet and critic and rates three column inches in the 1980 edition of Who's Who, cannot be dismissed as a minor art critic, 'a middling fish in the stagnant pond of sixties' British literature.'" The lawyer was entitled to demur from my assessment of Lucie-Smith. However, the context of his demurring was culturally "loaded" against the author, as well as covert. Such vetting - or cultural grooming, of texts is not unusual. Advice in the matter of "Kate Bush, Messrs. Simons Muirhead, 19 June 1980.

critic, Ian Jeffrey, (in a letter) about the then fashionable crop of agit-prop leftist artists like Victor Burgin, that their work sometimes carried "a ton weight of irony." Tryard's speciality was encasing objects, principally books, in blocks of cement, which were then crudely varnished. I made his oeuvre - half a dozen "polemical objects," and concocted a biography. The invention of Keith was also occasioned by a projected exhibition of politically committed artists at The Whitechapel that Summer. This was "Art for Society," 10 May-18 June, curated by Nicolas Serota. Ian Jeffrey was on the selection panel and suggested that a late submission by Keith Tryard would be appropriate.

A Tryard piece was duly selected for exhibition. This was "Brains," a copy of the previous year's *Arts Council Report* encased in a rectangle of concrete which was attached like a large hammer-head to a pick-axe handle.

The piece caused controversy, reported in the *Evening Standard*, after another contributor complained that the accompanying caption invited members of the public to use "Brains" to destroy adjacent works of art. The caption was removed, but "Brains" remained.³⁷

Reviewing the exhibition as a whole, William Feaver detected the earnest complacency and déjà vu which Tryard was pastiching.

"The mood is rumbustious verging on the fervid; like a field meeting trying to get worked up to full cry. Old hands, catcallers, missionary types, converts, rub shoulders with the less committed... Rights and wrongs are chanted (in the catalogue mostly) with Sankey and Moody certitude, formalist demons are denounced and exorcised... [Feaver then describes] The cult of fellow

³⁷ The previous month an artist called Reuben Routen had been charged with criminally damaging a £30,000 exhibit by Carl Andre at the Whitechapel. *Daily Mirror*, April 1, 1978, p8. Routen had knocked over a pile of Andre's wooden blocks.

feeling and claps on the back [concluding], a new academicism is in the making."³⁸

Tryard's "Brains" went on tour with the exhibition. The piece was then bought by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Utrecht, for their permanent collection. It seems to have been last exhibited at the "Kunst als Kampfmittel" ("Art as a Weapon") exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Utrecht Gallery in 1984.

Keith meanwhile, had been quietly disposed of.³⁹

1980, The Sex Pistols: The Heyday.

In October 1980 Factory Records put out an interview cassette based on interviews for the Sex Pistols biography, FACT 30, The Sex Pistols, The Heyday.

This was edited by me and fetishistically packaged by Peter Saville in a black vinyl case.⁴⁰ I edited the tape and provided promotional material.

In 2003 A CD version of the tape was issued by LTM.⁴¹ This was a re-edited and re-mastered version to which I added extra material, including a fragment of a recording with Malcolm McLaren's grandmother, Rose Corre.

³⁸ William Feaver, "Whitechapel War Cry," *The Observer*, May 28, 1978, p28

³⁹ Tryard had been foreshadowed in 1970 when I organised the copying of several of the eight erotic lithographs by John Lennon which had been confiscated by the police after the opening in January 1970 of Lennon's exhibition of lithographs, Bag One, at the London Arts Gallery. Around one hundred Lennon fakes were made in the print studio at Goldsmiths art college and distributed as "genuine fake Lennons" for free outside the gallery. This was intended as a rebuke to Lennon's allegedly superficial radicalism, as well as the commercialisation and celebrification of art.

⁴⁰ <http://www.cerysmaticfactory.info/fac30.html> <Accessed 5.2.2011>

⁴¹ Sex Pistols: The Heyday, BOUCD 6603, with accompanying booklet, 2003

1980, *Malcolm Poynter: A Violent Genius*

I first encountered the sculptor, Malcolm Poynter, when he was an undergraduate at Goldsmiths. His polemical style and overtly political engagement interested me. I thought however, that during the late seventies, Poynter's agent was promoting him in an inappropriately genteel manner. Discussing this with Poynter, the idea emerged of a short and suitably brutal monograph/catalogue.

I also wanted to test the market for a series of popularised biographically based accounts of contemporary artists. Poynter was selected for a trial run as his work seemed to chime with a post-punk mood.

Malcolm Poynter: a violent genius was published in 1980.⁴² It was part funded by the Nicholas Treadwell Gallery.

The publication was designed to contrast with the tone of most "catalogue" publications and foreground the sometimes troubling biographical sources and impact of Poynter's imagery. The typography and layout was based on the lurid and surreal photomontages of French *Déetective* magazine, which like the former *Police* magazine had influenced the surrealists' graphic design as well as their fascination with images of urban "degeneracy."⁴³

Poynter's vivid and scatological verbal expression was showcased in the manner of *Déetective*-like headlines like "The pills and the booze" and "Hands down your trousers." The layout was equally designed to correspond with provocative aspects of Poynter's work, which at that period evoked bizarrely interrupted autopsies, or debris at horrific crime scenes.

⁴² *Malcolm Poynter: a violent genius*, interviews by Judy Vermorel; editing, artwork and introduction by Fred Vermorel, 1980.

⁴³ See for example, "French crime papers of the 1930s: *Police Magazine* and *Detective*" <http://strawresearch.mcgill.ca/printculture/gallery6/front.html> <Accessed 5.1.2011>

The book's publication coincided with an exhibition at the Nicholas Treadwell Gallery, 30 Chiltern Street, W1. Reviewing this exhibition, William Feaver commented in *The Observer* that Poynter's approach "is as subtle as a kick in the crotch." Emmanuel Cooper in *Gay News* detected a gay subtext in Poynter's work: " "We can easily read gayness into [this exhibition], just as we can read friendship and male bonding; all is implied, little is stated." ⁴⁴ About the book, Cooper commented that "Poynter is very much concerned with the rawness of urban realities. Much of his work is about protest, about the need to look again at the way we live our lives." In *Time Out*, Sarah Kent found the book "disturbing." Michael Shepherd's (more or less duplicated) reviews for the *Sunday Telegraph* and *What's On in London* wrote of a "vivid interview book about Poynter's desolate, aggressive adolescence which makes a chilling and no doubt all too typical contemporary human document." ⁴⁵

3000 of these books were printed. It was circulated through art house outlets, but some distributors were guarded. The Irish distributor, Butler Sims commented, "I regret that we feel that the content of the book would be completely unsuitable for the Irish market, owing to censorship controls." ⁴⁶ About half of these books were apparently later pulped by Nicholas Treadwell who was reported to believe their circulation might have an adverse effect on his protégé's reputation. (There are copies lodged in the British Library, Tate Library (Tate Britain), and V&A Libraries.)

The *Detective* design failed to strike a chord. Equally, it proved impossible to obtain funding or support to extend this approach to other young artists.

⁴⁴ *Gay News*, (England) December, 1980. p3

⁴⁵ "Skinheads and Bald Truths," *Art, What's On in London*, Dec 5 1980

⁴⁶ Letter from Brian Blennerhasset, 25 May 1981.

1980-1, Gary Numan and Adam Ant

In 1980-1 Omnibus Press/Music Sales commissioned two pop biographies, delivered as book packages, designed by me.

Fred and Judy Vermorel, *Gary Numan by Computer*, London: Omnibus Press, 1980, was an essentially visual exercise which played on Numan's association with computer-related imagery. Using a random number table supplied by University College, London, the text randomised quotations from Numan into "word salads." This was partly intended as a comment on the way pop star interviews served as presence fetishes.

Fred and Judy Vermorel, *Adam and The Ants*, London: Omnibus Press, 1980, revealed Adam Ant's (Stuart Goddard's) art college background and the sources of his performance in the Futurist movement, the painter Allen Jones, and especially the art historian, Peter Webb. (Webb taught Adam at Hornsey College of Art). The book went on to sketch Adam's collaboration with McLaren and the genesis of Bow Wow Wow. Adam is a light-weight figure on the music scene, but an interesting case study in the transcription of high culture (from the Webb seminars) to punk, and then mainstream pop.

Origins of my interest in celebrity and fan culture: early research

Up to the 1970s, available literature on celebrity was scant and the notion of fan culture hardly existed. Typical, was Edgar Morin's, *The Stars*, 1960, a discursive and elliptical approach which did little to reveal the sociological dimension of celebrity, and rested on an analogy with religion.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Eleven years later, Morin's *Rumour in Orléans*, 1971, used a research team for a large scale and experientially based discourse analysis about the rumours of white slave trafficking in the city of Orléans - a methodology that would have been useful to investigating popular discourses around movie stars. Edgar Morin in collaboration with Bernard Paillard (and others), *Rumour in Orléans*; translated from the French by Peter Green, New York: Pantheon Books, 1971

Information could be gleaned from studies of Hollywood or the music industry in general, but these were not always substantiated and it was sometimes difficult to assess whether the accounts were hearsay or hyperbolic. Thus, the description of Hollywood fan mail in Margaret Farrand Thorp, *America at the Movies*, 1939, was fascinating, but how much was from first hand research? ⁴⁸

Ruth Suckow, "Hollywood Gods and Goddesses," *Harpers Magazine*, July 1936, was vivid for her account of how the tone of early Hollywood movie magazines overlapped with the fanzines which preceded them, but some of her examples seemed have been run together or glossed to make a journalistic impact. ⁴⁹

From asides and details provided, sometimes inadvertently, in professional studies, the timeline was pushed back intriguingly. For example, this declaration by a patient in a 1903 case study by the psychologist, Pierre Janet:

"The concerts given by X have been for me a revelation; they have awakened such an enthusiasm in me that I have never recovered from it. I cannot explain its effect.

⁴⁸ "Fan mail comes into Hollywood's studios daily by the truckload. Special clerks are needed to sort it on each lot. A conservative estimate puts the letters addressed to players at a quarter of a million a month. A top star expects about three thousand a week. Many are crank letters, many fantastic requests for financial aid, most of these motivated by the generous warm-hearted personality the star has displayed on the screen. There are many proposals. Seventeen-year-old Deanna Durbin has already had fifty. Some letters, on the other hand, contain gifts. One of her fans in China sent Norma Shearer a hundred-dollar embroidered handkerchief because it was Marie Antoinette who introduced the use of handkerchiefs. Robert Taylor swelters under sweaters knitted for him by admiring ladies. The bulk of the mail, at least 75 percent, is made up of requests for photographs or for some personal souvenir - buttons from Clark Gable's tuxedo, an old lace from Sonja Henie's skating shoes, the wishbone of Fred Astaire's Christmas turkey." Margaret Farrand Thorp, *America at the Movies*, 1939, p96

⁴⁹ "The personal note... runs riot... intimate and flattering, addressed 'to you and you and you,' with a chummy air which says, this is your magazine, run only for you, to bring you news of your idols - for we, the writers, and you, the readers, are all common folk together basking in the light of these shining beings." p.198

When I left the hall after the first concert, my legs and whole body shook so that I could not walk, and I spent the night in tears... But it was not painful, far otherwise; it was as if I was coming out of a dream which filled my past life. I understood things more as they really are. I was in a veritable heaven of happiness. My only hope during many years has been to hear him again and to experience the same feelings. I believe that, as people said, I had a passion for him, but it was not an ordinary passion; of that I am sure. He seemed to possess a supernatural influence over me."⁵⁰

Also useful, was this passage quoting an anonymous movie fan in Margaret Philips, *The Education of the Emotions*, 1937:

"From the age of 12 onwards I entered a new phase, living my life completely under the aegis of a film star. The first was Sessue Hayakawa a Japanese of great attraction and very great quiet power; cruel, silent, mysterious in his appeal, ruthless in his domination, famous in dramatic roles where he branded women and brought them to his feet. I built up a complete phantasy world with him as its centre; he was my guardian; he had decided on this dullness and quietness for me. Everything I did at his behest; practicing [the piano] became endurable; he ordered it; he himself sometimes stayed behind my chair, watching and overlooking me; he punished me if the performance did not reach his standard - or rather, his minions punished me at his orders. It would have been too great a favour for my lord himself to have dealt with me. None would believe how much of the ability I was said to have shown in later years... was entirely due to the rigid fear I was under of this man.

"No real person mattered to me at all; it was at night, when I escaped to my bedroom, that the reckoning for the

⁵⁰ Pierre Janet, *Les Obsessions et la Psychasthénie*, 1903 vol 1, p387

day would come and the phantasy world, which was my only real world, would open out before me once more. Punishment was always flagellation." ⁵¹

But there was no extra or contextual material to be found in Janet's or Phillips' texts. Moreover, such insights were sometimes censored. ⁵²

During the 1970s, the American sociologist, Orrin Klapp led the field. Klapp's *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, 1962, and *Symbolic Leaders*, 1964, are standard references even today. His strengths were in his empirical research, his descriptive analyses, and his insistence that celebrity should be understood sociologically. ⁵³

Adding to Klapp's insights were suggestions and asides in a number of other studies. These were not always obviously linked to the study of modern celebrity. From the mid 70's to mid '80's I made a multidisciplinary trawl of sources. What follows below is an impressionistic citing of some the more provocative and helpful texts. These were often the starting point for more extensive reading and thought.

I should also add that from around 1977, this research into secondary and background sources was progressing in tandem with the first interviews and other primary research for *Starlust*, as well as the Kate Bush project, (see below). My

⁵¹ Margaret Phillips, *The Education of the Emotions through Sentiment Development*, 1937

⁵² Attempts to locate Janet's case notes on this (and similar?) patients revealed that Janet ordered his notes destroyed after his death, (correspondence with the Institut Pierre Janet). Margaret Phillips mentioned in her text that the account of the Sessue Hayakawa fan was censored out of delicacy, but mentioned she had preserved the "protocol" of all her research (presumably interview transcripts) for posterity. A trail leading through archives, relatives and friends eventually led to the confession of a bonfire of her effects by an apparently disgruntled associate.

⁵³ Richard Dyer, *The Stars*, 1979, later became another standard reference that catalogued previous work and attempted to situate it within a largely cinematic framework.

reading of these multidisciplinary texts was therefore informed by - and directed by, empirical research on celebrity culture - work which gradually resolved itself into a focus on fan culture.

John L. Caughey, "Artificial Social Relations in Modern America," *American Quarterly*, 1978, ⁵⁴ was instructive in helping normalise the use by fans of celebrities in fantasy and role playing. Caughey emphasised the sociological reality and impact of fantasy, daydreaming and even hallucination in everyday life.

"While an American does not have real face-to-face interactions with media figures, he does have artificial interactions with them. Every time he enters a theatre, turns on a media machine, or opens a book or magazine, he slips mentally out of the real social world and he enters the world of vicarious artificial experience. The intensity of such media relations can be very high."⁵⁵

And,

"Media beings... figure in internal experience, as when the individual... uses media beings as *dramatis personae* in daydreams."⁵⁶

Caughey also pointed out how knowledge of and discussion about celebrities acts a common sense discourse of "community," and how we defensively pathologise people who internalise the claims of celebrity with what we judge to be an uncomfortable intensity. He also suggested how apparently eccentric or

⁵⁴ John L. Caughey, "Artificial Social Relations in Modern America," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Spring, 1978), pp. 70-89

⁵⁵ Caughey, *ibid*, p71

⁵⁶ Caughey, *ibid*, p73

aberrant scenarios of celebrity possession or stalking, segue into mainstream and culturally sanctioned practices.⁵⁷ The literature of pre-modern hero cults, saints and hagiographical literature also threw up interesting comparisons and theoretical insights. Thus, Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 1971, stressed the theatricality involved in the reciprocity between saintly figures and their audience, and the playfulness inhering in spectacles of holiness and associated themes of possession and exorcism. He also drew on modern anthropological studies to enhance understanding of his discipline, studies which:

"...stressed the relation between the possessed and the community, represented, - in this case, by the exorcist. In this relationship the anthropologists have tended to single out as significant the aspect *theatral* that links both parties. Highly individual though the experience of possession may be, its handling tends to be acted out as a duet between the possessed and non-possessed. In such a duet, each side has a role; each unconsciously follows a score." ⁵⁸

Brown's cross disciplinary insights and his emphasis on the role-playing aspect of possession/exorcism helped me focus on the role-playing of fans and an account of fans' agency. His formulation of "a duet between the possessed and the non possessed," suggested a more plausible model for the behaviour of the fans I was researching at that time, than standard models of seduction, entrapment and control. This article, and the literature it led me to, also helped disentangle the log jam represented in celebrity studies by the "charisma" hypothesis. (see below).

⁵⁷ The article was expanded into, John L. Caughey, *Imaginary social worlds : a cultural approach* , Lincoln, [Neb.] ; London : University of Nebraska Press, c1984

⁵⁸ Peter Brown, "The Rise and the Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 1971, p88

Jacob Goldstein and Hans Toch, "An Analysis of a Sample of Eccentric Mail To The United Nations,"⁵⁹ opened a fascinating and unexpected vein of research, which I later pursued in various projects, notably *Starlust* (below).

The article contained a detailed content analysis of "'crackpot' communications" "received by individuals and agencies who have in one way or another attracted public notice."⁶⁰ The authors provided many quotations and the analysis was thorough, noting such stylistic characteristics as "Spatial Peculiarities" the use of repetition, the recurrence of ambivalent tropes, as well as fusions of orthography and drawing. (See "The Soul of a Fan" for my analysis of fan mail in similar terms.) It also, usefully, provided illustrations. The article, being from a psychoanalytical perspective was phenomenologically rich, and not shy of providing those "dirty" and ambiguous aspects which might have been discounted as "noise" rather than "signal" by some other scholars.

Insightful first hand reports were scattered in different literatures. Daniel Jones, a friend of Dylan Thomas, gave an account of the apotheosis of the poet, by way of encounters with Dylan Thomas fans.

"Then the unannounced visits to my house began. It was assumed that I would be delighted to discuss Dylan Thomas, the man and his work, but particularly the man, for hours on end with perfect strangers at any time of the day or night, casting my own work or leisure on one side."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Jacob Goldstein and Hans Toch, "An Analysis of a Sample of Eccentric Mail To The United Nations," *American Imago*, 13, 1956, pp149-187

⁶⁰ Goldstein and Toch, *ibid*, p149

⁶¹ Daniel Jones, "Overmilk'd Wood. The Myth of Dylan Thomas," *Encounter*, May 1977, p24

Experiences like this resonated with my observations of fanhood. Jones also mentioned the compulsion of some fans to steal trophies, and the unsettling - almost uncannily still - stare of the fan, "they all stared at me, fixedly, meaninglessly" evoking the way that fans mount vigils - for tickets, glimpses, trophies. This kind of detail was unusual and evocative - a "thicker" description than many offered by Klapp - which were usually culled from secondary sources.⁶²

Robert F Lucid, "Norman Mailer: the Artist as Fantasy Figure," *Massachusetts Review*, 1974, opened up the area of ambivalence towards celebrities as a key dimension of our imaginary relationships with them: "...there is a measurable element of hostile feeling involved in our relationship with our public figures... [and] some part of us even welcomes the prospect of the death of the hero so that our feelings for him may be consummated." ⁶³

Lucid's focus was primarily on projections towards Norman Mailer. He cited many instances of hostility and aggressive feeling towards Mailer, deriving from Mailer's celebrity rather than his writings or opinions or persona. He also pointed out the media's complicity in such hostility. ⁶⁴

Lucid also cited Alan Lelchuk's novel, *American Mischief*, 1973. In this, one of the characters is called "Norman Mailer," described as a famous novelist who comes to Harvard to give a

⁶² Jones also described the gradual transformation of portraits of the poet: "...the receding hair is brought forward, the forehead by way of compensation heightened, lips and nostrils narrowed, arms rounded, body unsexed..." This chimed with my study of celebrity portraiture.

⁶³ Robert F Lucid, "Norman Mailer: the Artist as Fantasy Figure," *Massachusetts Review*, 1974, p581

⁶⁴ For example, a letter about Mailer's controversial biography of Marilyn Monroe, *Marilyn, a Biography*, 1973, which was published in *Village Voice*, August 23, 1973: "[The] letter, signed by a woman, was featured as the first item in the 'Letters to the Editor' section, and consists of two sentences. The first, though incoherent, furiously denounces Mailer for daring to address himself to the life of Marilyn Monroe at all. The second, and last sentence reads: 'A thousand angels will giggle when Norman-the-cruel Nudnick croaks.'" Lucid, *ibid*, p593

lecture. The Mailer character is assassinated and Lucid remarks that "...what is most remarkable is the savage rationale for Mailer's assassination which the book proffers and the loving care with which the execution of the deed is detailed.

"...the details of the assassination are paced with all the slow, dreamy completeness of a pornographic fantasy being stretched out as long as possible... Then the assassin... his deed done, executes the definitive gesture: 'Yet as he lay there,' he says of his victim, 'his silver-gray hair and agitated face now seemed to me patriarchal in repose, and I had a curious and powerful urge to touch him.'" ⁶⁵

Lucid diagnosed this as a "diseased" vision, but a widespread phenomenon, concluding, "The way we treat our fantasy figures is an important index to our inner state."⁶⁶ [And that] ...something in our cultural circumstances is permitting the madness to manifest itself, the same something which has permitted the terrifying sweep of bloodthirstiness overwhelming so many other of our public figures." ⁶⁷

There were also suggestions in this vein in the psychoanalytical literature. Hostility towards celebrity figures seemed to be rooted in the structure of the imagined (star-fan) relationship and the kind of "object" that a star then became. That kind of object most resembled a fetish - a concatenation of contradictory compulsions, and a source of ambivalence. S M Payne, in "Some Observations on the Ego Development of a Fetishist," considered that,

"...the necessity to make a defence against an archaic sexual aim is one of the determinants of fetishism - the aim being to kill the love object [and] ...the fetish saves the individual from a perverse form of sexuality. The

⁶⁵ Lucid, *ibid*, pp588-589

⁶⁶ Lucid, *ibid*, p582

⁶⁷ Lucid, *ibid*, p594

component impulse which would prevail if not placed under special control is the sadistic impulse." ⁶⁸

Phyllis Greenacre, made a similar point: "The fetish... contains congealed anger." ⁶⁹

Another intimation of the ambivalence of fan worship came from two scholarly articles examining the spate of rumours in late 1969 that Paul McCartney had died and that the Beatles were concealing his death, or even using a double, and that McCartney's death could be deciphered in coded messages as well as Beatles' lyrics and imagery. ⁷⁰ These rumours reached such a pitch they penetrated mainstream US media and the Beatles were obliged to issue denials.

Both these articles described fan ambivalence about the Beatles and their celebrity as one basis for these rumours. The Suszec article concluded that, "An embarrassed but eerie longing for the story to be true - for Paul to be really dead - was repeatedly expressed, such expression being invariably accompanied by protestations of admiration or love for the singer." ^{71 72}

⁶⁸ S M Payne, "Some Observations on the Ego Development of a Fetishist," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1939, p161

⁶⁹ Phyllis Greenacre, "The Fetish and the Transitional Object," *Psychoanalytical Study of the Child*, 24 (1969) p162. This is a striking formulation, even if (or, perhaps, especially if), we bracket Greenacres's underlying extrapolation from Freud's castration complex hypothesis and consider this symbolic content of the fetish as a cultural rather than psychological phenomenon.

⁷⁰ Barbara Suszec, "The Curious Case of the 'Death' of Paul McCartney," *Urban Life and Culture*, 1972, pp 61-76, and Donald Allport Bird, Stephen C. Holder, and Diane Sears, "Walrus is Greek for Corpse: Rumor and the Death of Paul McCartney," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Summer 1976, 110-121

⁷¹ Suszec, *ibid*, p72

⁷² John Lennon's assassination by Mark Chapman in 1980, or rather the public discourse around it, suggested a similar scenario. The initial shock, often expressed as disbelief that a "fan" could have committed such an act was coded through conspiracy theories. The message of fanhood's ambivalence was unwelcome. The British *New Musical Express* for example, ran a series of stories over three weeks that claimed to have unearthed FBI/CIA files that showed Chapman had been an American secret agent, programmed with drugs to carry out the killing. [27 June, 4 July, 11 July, 1981] Such rumours persist, even though no sensible evidence has ever been adduced.

As well as academic literature, I searched fictional sources,⁷³ movies,⁷⁴ popular music⁷⁵ and visual art.⁷⁶ However, the most useful account of celebrity for my purposes was Daniel Boorstin's, *The Image*, 1962.

Boorstin pinpointed the advent of a specifically modern form of celebrity: "The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness... He is neither good nor bad, great nor petty. He is the human pseudo event."⁷⁷ This kind of celebrity was congruent with electronic mass media, especially post-war and especially television. Boorstin equally linked celebrity (as the creation and circulation of "pseudo-people") to the

⁷³ Novelists tended to rely on journalistic clichés rather than research and observation. An exception was Nik Cohn's *I am Still the Greatest says Johnny Angelo*, 1967. Describing a fan in a concert, Cohn wrote: "Her face lost all its shape and her mascara ran in black streaks down her cheeks and her powder got clogged into tiny ugly pink rolls below her eyes and around her mouth. Her mouth fell away and her cheeks came away from the bone, her face lost all shape, and she cried in her lover's arms like a child who saw a witch in the dark and screamed and screamed until the light went on." [Cohn, p158]. David Helton's *King Jude*, 1971, featured groupies who ritualistically drank the blood and semen of their idols. It too, was well (and comically) observed: "Francine... showed him the crowd of girls outside the hotel, standing patiently, shifting massively from one mob leg to the other." [Helton, p105].

⁷⁴ Scorsese's *King of Comedy*, 1982, was a scrupulously researched movie which grasped the inflections and affectations of fanhood, including the fan's ambivalence. The context of this movie was also illuminating. It was made as a response to John Hinckley's obsession with Jodie Foster in *Taxi Driver*, 1976, which led to Hinckley's attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan. Unpicking these connections exposed a rich seam of celebrity/fan semiotics, linking the Lennon assassination and the development of a stalking dramaturgy that ran through several real and fictionalised cases in the 1980s.

⁷⁵ The music industry generally shied away from the topic, or obfuscated it with cute fables. Bowie's playing with stardom in his Ziggy Stardust persona (1972-1973) was not as perceptive (or brave) as the contemporaneous role playing of Bowie fans, as later revealed in *Starlust*. Peter Gabriel relied on cod psychology in his song about a star's assassin, *Family Snapshot*, 1980, "I need some attention I shoot into the light." However, the performances of rock stars were sometimes more insightful. Like Bowie's trick of walking on fans' hands laid on the stage in front of him, or Gabriel's ritualised act of throwing himself backwards into the crowd of fans at concerts, to be transported all round the auditorium on a sea of hands.

⁷⁶ Visual artists, especially Warhol and several pop artists in the UK and the US had early communicated the intensification of post war celebrity culture. But this was mostly descriptive and it was not until the 1980s that a critical perspective emerged. (For example, Guy Peellaert, Dexter Dalwood, Kathy Temin's work on Kylie Minogue, and - notably - Alison Jackson.)

⁷⁷ Daniel Boorstin, *The Image*, 1962, p57

proliferation of "pseudo-events" - events that existed only because of their transmission as surrogate events by the mass media.

Boorstin's work suggested that a study of celebrity should be rooted in contemporary media, and that speculative connections to pre electronic media models of hero worship be treated with caution. It also stressed the image-based - or as we would say now, "virtual," nature of a celebrity-saturated culture. Finally, it intimated that celebrities should be bracketed from their existence as "real" people: that they existed qua celebrities as overlapping media texts, and could be understood as such only through deciphering or deconstructing those texts.

Boorstin's ideas were appropriated by the situationists, who gave them a more overarching (and ambitious) context. Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, 1967 was typically apocalyptic: "The celebrity, the spectacular representation of a living human being, embodies... banality by embodying the image of a possible role. Being a star means specializing in the seemingly lived; the star is the object of identification with the shallow seeming life that has to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations which are actually lived. Celebrities exist to act out various styles of living and viewing society unfettered, free to express themselves globally. They embody the inaccessible result of social labour by dramatizing its by-products magically projected above it as its goal: power and vacations, decision and consumption..."⁷⁸

But the more I thought about such formulations in relation to celebrity and fanhood - that is, celebrity in relation to fanhood - the more insufficient they seemed.

Debord especially, seemed to subscribe to the injection theory of media as much as banal theorists of advertising dynamics. For example, Ernest Dichter's "motivational research," or Vance Packard's critique of Dichter in *The Hidden Persuaders*, 1962.

⁷⁸ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1967, Thesis 60

Debord, like Dichter and Packard, and to a lesser extent, Boorstin, were using a "paranoid" model of mass communication which failed to take account of the spectator's negotiation of meanings, or the spectator's agency and volition.

I also began to wonder whether celebrities-as-texts could be said to have an application or reality beyond the audience that perceived or construed them.

The problem of "charisma"

In the literature (specialist and non-specialist) generally, there was a particular and persistent theory of how celebrity worked. This was essentially taken from Weber's influential theory of charismatic leadership. Charismatic attraction was a nearly universal model used to explain, or to frame, celebrity and responses to celebrity. This model lay at the core of almost every text and assertion of how celebrity was perceived and how it operated.

The use of the term by sociologists is complex and multifaceted. But whatever its usefulness in relation to other social phenomena, when "charisma" is used to account for celebrity and fanhood it seems problematic. For one thing, it foregrounds the role of the leader (star) as a potency activating audiences through qualities such as leadership or star quality.

In a careful unpicking of the term, Martin E Spencer in "What Is Charisma?"⁷⁹ offers three key formulations:

"...charisma is neither psychological or sociological. Charisma is an affectual relationship between the leader and his followers: the one pole of this affect is awe, the other is enthusiasm..."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Martin E Spencer, "What Is Charisma?" *British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 24 No 3 September 1973

⁸⁰ Spencer, *ibid*, p351

"... the essence of charisma is an attitude of awe [Spencer's emphasis]. Underlying the three usages of the term [previously described] is a common reverential posture towards persons or objects. The charismatic leader has a '... shining face...' and his presence inspires awe. [Adding also that] The charisma of office endows its incumbent with the reverence due to the role." ⁸¹

"Charisma is... not the property of the person or a situation: the person may possess gifts, the situation may generate tensions - the charisma itself is the *historical product* [Spencer's emphasis] of the interaction between the two." ⁸²

"Attitude of awe," "inspires awe," that slippage between the charisma of individuals and the charisma of office: this seemed to elide rather than elucidate the slippery intransigence of "charisma." Charisma seemed thus to work through a crude dichotomy (leader and follower) resolved for complexity by the fudge of "affectual relationship." In any case, "affectual relationship," or "interaction" in this context, displayed the same profundity as Edward Thompson's dictum: "class is a relationship, and not a thing" - one of those formulations that leaps off the page and evaporates on inspection.

In another survey of the concept, Thomas E Dow drew attention to another quality attaching to "charisma."

"By linking charisma and ecstasy, Weber implies the elemental and daemonic character of the concept; it represents a state of being beyond reason and self control." ⁸³

This Nietzschean implication, "elemental and daemonic,"

⁸¹ Spencer, *ibid*, p342

⁸² Spencer, *ibid*, p352

⁸³ Thomas E Dow, "An Analysis of Weber's work on charisma," *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol 29, 1, March 1978, p84

appeared to link charisma with a Dionysian mythos: a phenomenology as vivid and anecdotal as Gustave Le Bon:

"I had observed, under various circumstances, the peculiar sort of intoxication produced in the most reasonable Englishmen by the contact or sight of an English peer... They may seem to redden at his approach, and if he speaks to them their suppressed joy increases their redness and causes their eyes to gleam with unusual brilliance." ⁸⁴

Spencer's allusion to charisma as an "historical product" also seemed esoteric: an attempt at a caveat without offering an idea of what historically speaking, charisma might be about. For whenever a charismatic event was linked to a specific historical reality it seemed that that event could be explained in altogether different ways. The rise of Adolf Hitler for example, or the sex appeal of Elvis Presley had alternative and more complex sources than a generalised idea of charisma, which as an "historical product" appeared as a sort of occult force that transcended particular histories to haunt history in general.

I began to think there was a risk of reifying the notion of charisma, and that it might be used as a ruse to dissimulate what was really going on. Were fans somehow affected (filled? enlivened? enslaved?) by charisma, and if so could charisma be measured, manufactured, distilled, abrogated? Etc.

It seemed too, that the idea of charisma might be used to justify a semi-mystical, even occult, notion of the star's uncanny power over an audience: a sort of hypnotic chemistry rather than, as I had begun to consider it, a theatrical pact, a subterfuge, a temporary suspension of disbelief for whatever ends: pleasure, meaning, attention, or madness.

⁸⁴ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 1896, p149

I started to think a way forward might be to bracket the notion of charisma, and claims relating to charismatic attributes, whether of individuals or institutions, and to focus on what was happening almost entirely from the fan's perspective: the perspective of celebrity not from the stage but from the auditorium. This eventually led to a hypothesis of celebrity as a blank screen, and fanhood as the projected fantasies and desires of the fan onto that screen. (Of course, that hypothesis is a temporary construct, floated for the purposes of research, and not intended to explain the phenomenon.)

"Phenomenology"

This emphasis was in line with a turn towards reception theory and audience studies by British cultural studies, a realignment which partly emerged from post-'68 critiques of text-immanence and elitist mystification, and which attempted to emphasize the reader's negotiation of meaning in relation to textual polysemy.⁸⁵

This approach implied semiotic instability and intertextuality and configured the reader/viewer as a potentially recalcitrant and resisting subject. An approach popularised by Barthesian critiques of authorship and straight "reading." While this was suggestive for fan studies it was also sometimes underpinned by a reductive fetishism of "the text," and particularly, an accent (or insistence) on the written text as the guarantee of sense - or nonsense. This perspective was difficult to reconcile with oral sources - interviews and so on, as well as with visual sources and material culture.

The methodology of my research into fanhood developed rather through an interest in phenomenology and phenomenological psychology.

⁸⁵ E.g. Stuart Hall, (1973) *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, 1973

"Phenomenology" is here used loosely, in the sense of empathising with the subject/object of study, or attempting to "get inside" a human situation through participant observation. Admitting all the problems of such an approach - bias, uncomfortable ambiguity, the possibility of a patronising selectivity, wayward subjectivism, etc., it seemed amenable to interviewing methodology as well as to the *dérive* of eclectic sources I had adapted from historical methodology.

However, the phenomenological method proper, was edited selectively, focusing on: privileging the experiential situation of the informant, "bracketing" *a priori* assumptions (about fanhood and celebrity), attending to the "thing" through "thick description," and a corresponding stress on surfaces and elision of notions of "depth" or "hidden layers."

This remit corresponded to William James' manifesto: "the reinstatement of the vague to its proper place in our mental life." ⁸⁶

It also accommodated ambiguity.

In that respect, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's accounting with flux and confusion, and his emphasis on the inevitability (or structural imperative) of ambiguity was useful: "...ambiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think has always several meanings." ⁸⁷ Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's attention to "the inchoate, regressive, and sublimated forms of speech"⁸⁸ and his emphasis on the dynamic ambiguity of intersubjective rapport also clarified problems of objectivising, reifying (or sentimentalising) the "human realities" of fanhood as a tragedy of unrequited love. It was

⁸⁶ Cited in William J. Gavin, William James on the Richness and Intensity of Life, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Jul., 1974), pp. 150-153

⁸⁷ M Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (Trans: Colin Smith), 1974, p169

⁸⁸ "The Problem of Speech," In, *Themes from the Lectures at the College de France, 1952-1960*, (Trans: John O'Niell), 1970, p26

also useful in dealing with the ambiguous experiences of interviewing and collating fanmail and similar materials.

This passage also struck me as significant:

"If I try to study love or hate purely from inner observation, I will find very little to describe: a few pangs, a few heart throbs - in short, trite agitations which do not reveal the essence of love or hate... We must reject the prejudice which makes "inner realities" out of love, hate or anger, leaving them accessible to one single witness: the person who feels them. Anger, shame, hate and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness: they are types of behaviour or styles of conduct which are visible from the outside. They exist on this face or in those gestures, not hidden behind them." ⁸⁹

An associated issue was the phenomenology of belief, or of the act of believing. Specifically, how did a fan believe in fanhood, entertain and negotiate such belief -believe in the unbelievable? "We believe that we believe, but [really] we don't believe." ⁹⁰ The dynamics of this seemed more important than any "truth" that might reside, or not reside, in the beliefs themselves. The way that fans went about believing - their rituals, collections, masturbations, letter writing - were more telling than their summations or justification of fanhood.

In other words, how do you worship Beyonce Knowles or Barry Manilow while holding down a job and running a family? Or consecrate your life and fill days and evenings and dreams with thoughts of Ozzy Osborne or Britney Spears or Brad Pitt or Catherine Zeta Jones...? How can you convince or reassure

⁸⁹ "The Film and the New Psychology," In, *Sense and Nonsense*, (Trans. Dreyfus & Dreyfus), pp 52-53

⁹⁰ Reported by Jean Paul Sartre in "Merleau-Ponty," *Situations*, 1965, p243

yourself that your passion for Madonna is an onrush, that it attacked you from outside, that the emptiness you feel without her is beyond your control, that the pain of adoring her at this impossible distance is unbearable yet tolerable, even necessary?

In all these senses, researching fanhood was an encounter not just with sets of opinions and judgements but with an emotionology. It demanded an immersion and sympathetic identification, but not so much with fans themselves, rather with their situation.⁹¹

An attempt too, to sympathetically engage with discourses of alterity (i.e. fans were Other to me - I did not understand them but sought to do so) and to redeem their exoticism as cultural and scholarly capital. This positioned my research reflexively and problematically.

It also linked it to Sartre's later phenomenology, and specifically, his series of existential biographies and the *Situations* essays, which made use of the devices of fiction as freely as they drew on academic disciplines and on Marxism and psychoanalysis, and which foregrounded the ethical dilemma of

⁹¹ The use of the term also corresponds to what Herbert Spiegelberg defined as the "phenomenological movement," [Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 1965.] a direction of thinking that acknowledges pre Husserlian and Romantic origins, and a movement also prevalent in fiction and the visual arts - in the sense that Merleau-Ponty claims Cezanne for phenomenology. Equally suggestive of this "soft" phenomenology was a passage from the nineteenth century polymath, Francis Galton, seeking to understand paranoia: "The method tried was to invest everything I met, whether human, animal, or inanimate, with the imaginary attributes of a spy. Having arranged plans, I started on my morning's walk from Rutland Gate, and found the experiment only too successful. By the time I had walked one and a half miles, and reached the cabstand in Piccadilly at the east end of the Green Park, every horse on the stand seemed watching me, either with pricked ears or disguising its espionage. Hours passed before this uncanny sensation wore off, and I feel that I could only too easily re-establish it." Francis Galton, *Memories of My Life*, 1908, p276. That was a naïve version of what Ronald Laing and David Cooper later tried to do for the schizophrenic: to understand schizophrenia from an "inside," that is, the experiential inside/outside of the subject: family drama, double binds, word salads...

the biographer (or interviewer). The way Sartre called his own bluff as an observer appealed to me, and influenced my refusal to play the game of a reasonable commentator in an apparently unreasonable discourse. I was equally drawn to the underlying politics:

"Sartre's theory of committed literature is based on the ideology of freedom. A work of art is defined in Sartrean terminology as the free appeal of the writer to the freedom of the reader... A writer's choice of subject-matter and style is at the same time a choice of readership. The importance of the relationship between writer and reader for Sartre's theory cannot be overstressed since the reader/writer relationship lays down the ground rules within which the adventure of freedom takes place."⁹²

1980/1983, "antibiographies" of Kate Bush

The research for *Starlust* took around five years. During that time I also researched and wrote an "antibiography" (as Simon Frith described it) of the singer songwriter, Kate Bush. The rationale being that while I was charting the phenomenology of fanhood through the experiences of fans and associated sources, I thought I should "become" through phenomenological enactment, or participant observation, a fan myself. This experience might serve as a guide, a check, and a stimulus.

I chose Kate Bush as a subject because a) there was an apparent stylistic contrast with punk which I thought would be challenging, and b) I detected a talent in her act that suggested longevity - anticipating this phenomenological adventure might take several years.

The agenda of this text was concealed from the publisher and public. I thought that to "come clean" about my motives might alarm the publisher - as well as her record company EMI, and her

⁹² Michael Scriven, *Sartre's Existential Biographies*, 1984, p50

rather protective entourage. Such alarm might invite stock responses and a *priori* censorship.

The first time the background to this project was revealed was in an article for the niche feminist rock fanzine, *Bitch: The Women's Rock Mag with Bite*. # 23 nd., pp 36-41.⁹³ In this, I sketched my motives as exploring "the power and mythology of celebrity and stardom" and asked, "How is it that the media can turn absence into presence, remoteness into intimacy, make utter strangers (stars) haunt our everyday lives and dreams and our very bodies? How does the pop industry create fans and fantasies? And conversely, how do fans and fan-tasies create the industry?" I described my general aim as "writing about, responding to and subverting the star-making machine."

There were two episodes to the Kate Bush project.

Firstly, a pamphlet co-authored with Judy Vermorel, which masqueraded as a sort of concert programme. *Kate Bush: Princess of Suburbia*, 1980, was printed on thick glossy paper and designed to look like an EMI production. It parodied tabloid gossip in an absurdist style, beginning with a description of the night Kate Bush was conceived. In a feature for *NME* Jane Solanas⁹⁴ wrote that the book:

"...looked harmless enough. Glossy magazine format, plenty of photographs. A must for any Kate Bush fan. But some of the photos weren't quite kosher: Catherine Bush at 13, a

⁹³ *Bitch: The Women's Rock Mag with Bite*, # 23, nd, "Fred Writes" pp37-41. *Bitch* was edited and published in the mid to late 1980s by Lori Twersky. Twersky commissioned the piece on the basis of her own interest in fan culture - she had written, "Devils or Angels? The female teenage audience examined," in 1981, for *Trouser Press*, April 1981, a text described by Cheryl Cline as "one of the few sympathetic articles on teenage girl rock fans," and which Cline cites as demolishing some of the stereotypes around such fans, emphasising the role-plays of fantasy in such fanhood, (Cheryl Cline, "Essays From *Bitch*" in Lisa Lewis, *The Adoring Audience*, 1992. This publication, *Bitch*, is not to be confused with the currently published online, *Bitch*, described as a "Feminist response to pop culture."

⁹⁴ Jane Solanas, "The Secret Files of Fred & Judy," *NME*, 18 February 1984, p43

dummy, forlorn-looking schoolgirl, an aerial shot of the Bush family home with helpful arrows pointing everything out, another shot of the house, this time engulfed in trees, as if Fred were on his hands and knees snapping, one minute ahead of ejection, pictures of Kate's first boyfriend, and worst of all a bloody great mug-shot of Gurdjieff, the highly dodgy mystic... This wasn't the stuff for good, clean Kate Bush fans. The bad news was that they'd probably read the paragraphs as well."⁹⁵

A surprising aspect of this publication was how "seriously" it was taken by mainstream media. Despite a negative libel report, it was carried by major distributors like WH Smith and Music Sales, and sold in the region of 30,000 copies (This figure from memory).

This led to a more substantial contract to write the first biography of Kate Bush for Omnibus Press: *The Secret History of Kate Bush (and the strange art of pop, 1983)*.

Contractually I ensured a degree of editorial freedom by agreeing a packaging deal - whereby the design and visuals as well as the text were under my control.

In a later article for *Village Voice* ⁹⁶ I revealed that the *Secret History* was conceived as, "an absurdist experiment to see how far the rock bio could be stretched without snapping." Adding that, "I adopted the persona of a mad professor so obsessed that he traces Kate Bush's genealogy back to the Vikings." In fact, the text meticulously tracked Kate Bush's genealogy (mostly on the paternal side, as the maternal, Irish,

⁹⁵ Jane Solanas, "The Secret Files of Fred & Judy," *New Musical Express*, 18 February 1984, p43

⁹⁶ Fred Vermorel, "Fantastic Voyeur: Lurking on the Dark Side of Biography," *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, October-November, 2000, pp97-99

side was less accessible). It also tracked the literary and folkloric "genealogy" of her first name, "Kate."

In *Village Voice* I also made known that, "...I also stalked the woman, as a phenomenological acting out of that uneasy and twisted boundary between fascination and obsession." ⁹⁷This "performance stalking" was contemporaneous with Sophie Calle's early (1979-1981) experiments with stalking: constructing the identities of strangers from vestiges of their absence. The stranger I was constructing was an idea of "Kate Bush." While doing this I made a record, entitled "Phenomenological Notes," in which I recorded incidents, impressions, dreams and encounters. ⁹⁸

It seemed the genre of the celebrity biog was ripe for experimentation. No one had explored its particular conceits and structures and assumptions. Chief among these was the biography as a surrogate presence, and the biographer as a surrogate gaze: a putative or nominal or nominated, fan. Such biographical texts moreover, seemed only tangentially about the "facts" of the star's life which were recited to summon the star's presence: a fascinated evocation of the fetishistic seduction of the star's presence evoked in their pages.

This sense of breathlessly following in the "footsteps" of the desired and fugitive presence of the celebrity/saint was intriguing. I wondered whether it would be possible to write a biography in which the subject, *per se*, was absent: a text in which the biographee never figured. I wanted however, in line with my general perspective, to write something for the mainstream rather than an avant-garde audience. An avant-garde piece could have gone further stylistically and thematically,

⁹⁷ Vermorel, *ibid*, p99

⁹⁸ I also discussed the project in a public lecture at the RCA, "What I Did to Kate Bush," May 1997. Cited in John Mendelshon, *Waiting for Kate Bush*, London: Omnibus Press, 2004, p 255. "...Fred Vermorel presented a lecture at London's Royal College of Art entitled *What I Did To Kate Bush* in which he revealed that he'd been inspired by Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* to go to her house ... and climb her drainpipe."

and been more complex, but would not have been read by the music fans whose fascinations I was exploring.

I also took my cue from research into varieties of fetishism - on the basis that fanhood was a form of celebrity fetishism, and could be explored as such. So I incorporated areas of sexual and other forms of fetishistic obsession into this celebrity "hagiography," attempting to push it to limits where it might disconcert and critique the very acts of commissioning, writing, and reading such a thing as a celebrity biography.⁹⁹

This attempt to push against the margins of publishability almost backfired when the Omnibus editor (Miles) complained that the text I had handed in ended on the night Kate Bush was born.

¹⁰⁰ I then appended a chapter sketching her life with a commentary on her music. The book was published in February, 1983.

It became the best selling Kate Bush biography (there were soon other contenders) and remained in print for 19 years. Wondering about this success (which surprised me) I concluded that maybe my Kate Bush fetishism had appealed to fantasies which also sourced her popular appeal - in particular, the book overlapped with her perceived "Englishness" and the quirky and elliptical eroticism of her performances.

This book however, was not to the liking of some of Kate Bush's most devoted fans, who were grouped around a longstanding, and

⁹⁹ One fan reviewer, complained that, "it seemed like the author was masturbating extensively while writing every sentence."
http://gaffa.org/dreaming/e3_books.html <retrieved 20/01/2011> In Sue Steward, Sheryl Garratt, *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered: true life stories of women in pop*, London : Pluto Press, 1984, one particularly fetishistic passage was read "straight" as support for an indictment of sexist writing about female performers, "Grave, delicious Kate, plump owl in her tangled nest of puzzled hair, with nipples blowing tiny kisses through a cotton vest. Kate and I joined in instant photolock. Kate Bush, Bushy Kate, laid out for me by the EMI artroom boys, with a gourmet's delight, like a table for guests."

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Omnibus editor, Miles, to Fred Vermorel, October 15, 1982

quasi officially sanctioned, fanzine, *Homeground*. Here, I was called "Fred Vomit" and "Fraud Immorel" and excoriated in detail. The extent of this reaction possibly came from the book's parody of obsessional fanhood, which may have reverberated uncomfortably with these fans' own preoccupations.¹⁰¹

Media reviews ranged from enthused to bemused. London Weekend Television reported the book was, "Excellent... a very interesting read... the mind boggles," The *Essex Evening News* (much of the book was set in that county) called it "Orgasmic," while the *London Evening Standard* opted for "Extraordinary... pornographic." The *Sun* suggested that, "Kate Bush is in for a surprise." *New Musical Express*, reviewed, "...a weird magical atmosphere speaking of witch hunts in the misty Essex countryside, hinting at debauchery in overgrown Victorian gardens and itemizing the lush suburban comfort of KB's family home." A reviewer for Capital Radio exclaimed, "This book makes me angry!" while on Radio 1, the DJ Richard Skinner commented, "Weird!" LAM got the point better, suggesting the book, "Takes the parody of pop and its attendant obsessions to new lengths... a stinging and ironic attack on rock journalism."

Another person who got the point was Factory Records creator, Tony Wilson, himself versed in situationist détournement and the fascinations of pop fetishism. Wilson placed the book in a "punk" genre. In an online interview/discussion with the radical writer and psychogeographer, Stewart Home and the musicians, Jon King, and Mark E Smith, he had this to say:

"If you look at the intersections between British pop and Situationism you see that we [Factory Records] are responsible for references to and popularisation of Situationist ideas. Malcolm [McLaren] and Jamie [Reid]

¹⁰¹ Other aspects of the reception of this book, as well as a wider context discussing the notion of biography are discussed in *Vermorel*, *Village Voice*, *op cit*.

wanted to do something interventionalist and failed.
Because the Sex Pistols turned out to be a fabulous band
whatever fucking genre they are in. I think the only truly
Situationist act in British pop music was... Vermorel's
beautiful glossy book on Kate Bush which can still be
found in Virgin shops
Mark Smith: Are you serious Tony?
Tony Wilson: I'm more serious t[h]an you've ever seen me
Mark! ¹⁰²

Several interpretive texts and all subsequent biographies of
Kate Bush have drawn on *The Secret History*. One reason is that
the book was researched before the singer had become quite so
famously reclusive. And to make sense in its own fetishistic
terms the book had to be thoroughly researched and impeccably
"factual." It was indeed, based on over 50 interviews with ex
school friends and colleagues, record executives and producers,
family members and many others. Bush herself refused to be
interviewed, but her father, Dr Robert Bush, gave a lengthy
interview. (This is still unpublished, as it came too late for
inclusion in the text). Some commentators have picked up on the
more traditionally biographical aspects of the book and extended
my comments about her appeal. Thus Laura Vroomen in "*This
Woman's Work, Kate Bush, Female Fans, and Practices of
Distinction*," PhD submitted to the Centre for the Study of Women
and Gender, University of Warwick, 2002, references and expands
my comments about the "subversive" nature of Bush's work and her
evocation of "Englishness."

Other outcomes of *The Secret History of Kate Bush* (1985-2003)

The Kate Bush project generated much unused introspective and
observational material which fed into the parallel interviews

¹⁰² "tony wilson, jon king, stewart home and mark e smith discussing
situationism at the hacienda, some time in the '90's.,"
<http://abandonyourtimidnotion.blogspot.com/2009/04/tony-wilson-jon-king-stewart-home-and.html> ,Retrieved 28/01/101>

and other research being conducted for *Starlust*. This material also surfaced explicitly in other outcomes.

Firstly, in "My Kate Bush," *Creative Camera* no. 252 (December 1985) pp. 30-3. This photo essay enabled me to play off the resonance of quotations and images in the context of photography's fetishistic allure and its role in communicating the "magic" of celebrity. These themes were developed from the unpublished essay, "Through The Camera," mentioned above. This essay had critiqued the verisimilitude claims of photography in detail, and put forward analyses of photographic fetishism as surrogate materiality, notably by describing the practices of what it called "thick" and "hyper" photography.

In tandem with this piece - but unconnected with the Kate Bush project, I wrote a review of an exhibition of photographs from *The Face* magazine, *Face Photographers* at the Photographers' Gallery, 1984. This too, drew on the unpublished "Through the Camera." It focused on *Face* portraiture as a style developed to articulate the nuances of celebrity as a kind of naturalism of pop celebrity.¹⁰³

Another result of the Kate Bush project was a scripted talk to camera in the context of a Granada TV show, *Just*, hosted by Tony Wilson in front of a live audience, (producers Steven Lock, Dianne Nelmes), November 1989. Here, I was seated behind a desk. On the desk was a precarious looking, approximately three foot high, pile of books on various sexological topics. I gave the talk from an autocue and at the climax made an expansive gesture which sent the books flying - whereupon the camera cut to the audience and Tony Wilson. The subsequent studio discussion focused around the "commodity fetishism" of Kate Bush product explored in the talk. (The script is included in *Publications*).

¹⁰³ Fred Vermorel, "Review of the Face Exhibition," *Creative Camera*, July/August, 1985, pp66-8

In 1997, I was invited by Winchester School of Art to show exhibits relating to fandom - with an emphasis on my Kate Bush work - in a show called, *Living on, Forever* (15-31 May). This was, "an exhibition which begins to explore media cults and the means by which they imbue collectable objects with magical status. As such, the cult collection is formed around a personal obsession, usually an idealised figure sanctified by death, for example, famous pop stars." Here was an opportunity to elaborate the Kate Bush project through the selection and disposition of objects in a gallery space.

These objects included documents from researching *The Secret History of Kate Bush*, as well as artefacts. E.g.: "Cotton Shirt signed by Catherine Bush, aged 16. Owned by Sara Creddey, fellow student, St John's Convent, Abb[e]ywood. Circa 1969-72. 82cm x 58cm, cotton and ballpoint pen." "Two aerial Photographs of the Welling area above the Bush family house. Meridian Airmaps Ltd, Sussex, 1971. 24cm x 22.5cm/25cm x 20cm. Acquisition date: 1980-82." "[Royal] College [of] Agriculture and Horticulture, Hertfordshire County Council, St Albans. 1982. One letter: 21cm x 5cm. Acquisition date: 1982... which analysed soil taken from a ditch between Wakes Colne and Pebmarsh, where Henry Bush, Great Grandfather of Kate Bush drowned in 1872." I participated in a panel discussion about the exhibition in May, 1997.

But the fullest use of unpublished Kate Bush material occurred when I was asked in 2006 to contribute to a TV documentary on Kate Bush "obsessives." The documentary, *Come Back Kate*, directed by Helena Muskens and Quirine Racké, featured several Kate Bush "enthusiasts" - my contribution took up about 15 minutes of the 50 minute programme.¹⁰⁴ I was filmed over four days and took the camera crew to the sites featured in *The Secret History*, from Bush's past and present homes to her "ancestral village," Pebmarsh in Essex. I also

¹⁰⁴ Muskens, Helena; Racké, Quirine, *Come Back Kate*. Snow White Films. TV Channel: NPS. 2007

contributed a voice-over commentary, partly drawn from unpublished notes on the original Kate Bush project. At this remove, around 30 years, and given how fan studies had moved on, and given too, the open minded remit of the programme makers, I was able to give a more wide-ranging and uncompromising account than previously. The programme was shown at the 20th International Documentary Film Festival, Amsterdam, and first broadcast in 2007. I have included the text of this commentary, as broadcast, (See "Come Back Kate - scripted sequences"). Relevant portions of the video can be accessed here: "Come Back Kate - documentary (Vermorel sections)" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpIqkfyKQF0>
<Accessed 20/01/2011>

The development of consumer culture studies and the impact on my work

From the early 1980s another theoretical source of my research was the emerging literature that rethought the boundaries and implications of mass consumer culture. Presaging this new way of thinking about consumerism was Jean Baudrillard's, *La société de consommation : ses mythes, ses structures*, 1976, a more supple and less strident account than was usual from a (revisionist) Marxist perspective. This was useful in suggesting a flexible and ideologically balanced approach to celebrity culture. Up to that point most accounts had been productionist orientated and ideologically negative. Baudrillard's text suggested a more consumer-friendly route. Equally influential was Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* 1978, and their suggestion that:

"Instead of supposing that goods are primarily needed for subsistence plus competitive display, let us suppose that they are needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture." ¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* 1978, p38

This helped focus my research on fan culture and fan artefacts as symbolic constructs. It also pushed me towards situating fans in their material culture and exploring the artefactuality of fanhood. (One outcome of this was a project asking fans to photographically portray themselves with their fan collections.)

At this remove it is difficult to disentangle the impact of the subsequent flurry of consumerist oriented scholarship on my work. In particular, my research was carried out in tandem with refinements and corrections suggested by my continuous reading of this scholarship. What I also found valuable in this new work was the initial emphasis on original research and the cultural history underpinning.¹⁰⁶ Jean Christophe Agnew summarises this scholarship:

"First, historians have shifted the birth of western consumer culture to the early modern period and deferred the arrival of mass consumer culture to the mid-twentieth century. Second, they have rejected the Weberian dichotomies between Puritanism and romanticism and, correspondingly, between saving and spending and in some instances, they have also abandoned the classic Marxist distinction between use-value and symbolic value. [My

¹⁰⁶ In general, I have found cultural/social history and analysis (as practiced in American and French universities) more congenial and persuasive than some of the British cultural studies tradition, which can be narrowly focused and weak on empirical data. An example might be the contrast between Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 1979 and Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction*, 1979. Both works are concerned with taste and style in relation to class and hegemonic codes and pressures. But Hebdige's research base is skimpy, overemphasising an anecdotal enthusiasm for the punk that was emerging as he wrote the book. Bourdieu's research, by comparison, is superior in extent and depth, lending itself to a theoretically richer and more wide-ranging perspective. Also, compare Hebdige's analysis of punk in *Subculture*, with the writings of the American Greil Marcus, who (even from across the Atlantic) mined a more substantial research base and used a cultural history methodology that plausibly linked a diversity of sources. Greil Marcus, *In the Fascist Bathroom : punk in pop music, 1977-1992*, 1999., and *Lipstick Traces : a secret history of the twentieth century*, 1989. Another American cultural history I later found useful in refining ideas around fanhood, particularly in relation to fanhood's Romantic origins and tenor, was Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarly : rock music in the mirror of romanticism*, 1987.

emphasis] Finally, they have revalued the political and moral dimensions of fantasy, fetishism, dream and wish - the keywords of consumer mystification as it has heretofore been understood. [My emphasis]. As a result, the productionist, supply-side and hegemonic interpretation of consumer culture has been shaken, if not overthrown, leaving one-dimensional man marooned on a small and ever shrinking island of history." ¹⁰⁷ ¹⁰⁸

The material that was the basis for Starlust

The research that led to *Starlust*, 1985, (and later, *Fandemonium!*, 1990), carried out in tandem with the Kate Bush project, resulted in a mass of material about fan experiences and life histories. Not all of this made it into *Starlust* - for reasons discussed below, but all of it was important in guiding the research and framing the text.

This material split roughly into two categories:

1) *Material sourced directly from fans*

This including interviews, photos, itemisations and descriptions of collections, solicited and unsolicited photos, fan mail, dream reports (some extensive), questionnaire responses, conversations, recorded phone calls, diaries and other personal written material and solicited written texts, fan poetry, unofficial fanzines, unofficial (fan created and distributed) merchandise.

The fan mail was collected from a variety of places, mostly record companies and merchandising and fan clubs. Fan contacts

¹⁰⁷ JC Agnew, "Coming Up for Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective," In John Brewer & Roy Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 1992, pp 22-3

¹⁰⁸ I was later particularly influenced by Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic And The Spirit Of Modern Consumerism*, 1987. Campbell's meticulous dissection of the historically unique nature of modern consumerism, and his association of consumerist mentality with day dreaming and fantasy modes seemed very pertinent to my work.

were solicited through fan club and commercial mailing lists, small ads in *NME* and *Melody Maker*, a dedicated telephone line with an answer-phone, appeals on radio and in (promo) press interviews, approaches in concert queues and venues like fan club conventions and concerts, questionnaires posted to mailing groups supplied by some of the above organisations (this was pre-Internet), or posted individually to addresses collected from fan mail.

Participant observation was also conducted at fan conventions and other meeting places.

Care was taken to ensure that fan accounts were not filtered or mediated by official or quasi-official bodies. Thus, in the case of Manilow fans, the official fan club tried to prohibit direct contact with Manilow fans. Couching this as a means of "protecting" such fans they apparently felt that that some Manilow fans might be indiscreet or tarnish the brand. These fans were contacted individually or through ad hoc and "unofficial" groups.

The fan mail was a logistical problem, given its quantity - over 40,000 letters. It was carefully read and given a content analysis. This analysis guided the balance of the final selection. It also supplied background information which fed into questionnaires and interviews.

The fan base initially was rather UK based, but gradually became international.

2) Material relating to fans sourced from professionals and institutions.

More specifically, anyone with a paid function in relation to any aspect of the production, management and commercialisation of fan related product, or any organisation with a commercial remit.

This material included interviews with organisers of (official and non-official) fan clubs, agents and managers of music acts, merchandisers, professional lookalikes - eg two Marilyn Monroe lookalikes, several Elvis impersonators, and a Sean Connery lookalike (as well as the manager of Ugly Agency - specialising in lookalikes), celebrity photographers (e.g. Jay Myrdal), record producers (e.g. Mickey Most and Trevor Horn), showbiz journalists (e.g. the veteran showbiz commentator, Jack Lewis and several music industry journalists and columnists), DJs (e.g. Mike Reid), Record Company executives, (e.g. Tony Wilson Factory, Mike Andrews, marketing, EMI), security personnel, managers, roadies, miscellaneous concert hall workers, psychologists and members of the St John's Ambulance Brigade.

At a later stage, with the endorsement especially of Pete Townshend full access was obtained to research Peter Gabriel's extensive and meticulously kept collection of fan mail, the complete archive of letters sent to "Bizarre," the showbiz column of *The Sun*, (these were reviewed in Lisa Lewis, *The Adoring Audience*, 1992, pp201-202), and a selective archive of letters to *Rock Over London*.¹⁰⁹ All this material was content-analysed.

The material in category 2 was used as background for Category 1. Enough material was left over after the first edition for a second volume of material. This unused material is currently archived by Fred Vermorel.

¹⁰⁹ A British series syndicated throughout the USA, whose remit was to promote UK music in the USA. It ran from the early 1980s-mid 1990s and was hosted by Graham Dene, then Capital FM's morning DJ.

Decisions about the form of the text, and the publishing history of *Starlust*

Given the volume of material, a decision was taken to devote the first publication entirely to fan's "unmediated" accounts. This was because such material had never been published before in its raw, unexpurgated form and it seemed to shed unexpected and new light on fan culture, and hence on the celebrity industry. It was felt important not to compromise (dilute or emasculate) the accounts given by fans.

As with previous and subsequent books, the publishing history of *Starlust* was connected to the eventual text.

The book was originally commissioned in 1983 by Constable, the editor being Elfrida Powell. The book was announced in the Jan-July 1984 Catalogue. Elfrida Powell then asked for the inclusion of mediating commentary and supporting material from the professionals' material. Discussions about this began that would have involved contractual changes - the authors were pushing for two volumes, or at least two distinct parts.

During negotiations, the typescript was read by Constable managing director, Ben Glazebrook. According to Elfrida Powell (in a telephone conversation with Judy Vermorel) Glazebrook "hit the roof" when he realised the contentious and obscene nature of some of the material. Constable then attempted to annul the original contract on the allegation that the material delivered differed from what had been promised in the original outline.

While this issue was between solicitors, Pete Townshend, who was then an editor for Faber, read the typescript and endorsed it in strong terms. He attempted to convince Faber to publish it but encountered the same reticence about the material as displayed by Constable.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Even so, extracts were published in Jon Savage and Hanif Kureshi (Eds), *The Faber Book of Pop*, 1995, and Faber has recently suggested

Meanwhile, the book was taken on by WH Allen and eventually published in the form it had originally been presented to Constable.

During the publication process at WH Allen the text generated further controversy within the company. A freelance reader who the book was sent to for proofing urged it should never be published! There was also a gendered split inside WH Allen whereby most of the women in the company were pro the book and most of the men anti - one male marketing executive apparently protesting in an editorial meeting, "Look, I've got a teenage daughter!"

Partly as a result of this, there were disputes with the editor about material to be excluded. The (female) editor initially insisted that any hint of male violence towards women should be excluded. After discussion this prohibition was toned down, but several such passages were excised. In general however, the company remained faithful to the original project and appeared excited about the book.

The reception of *Starlust*

Since the book's publication many reviews have been generated.

¹¹¹ The originality of the material and approach was commented on by Simon Frith:

a reissue of *Starlust* in its entirety as a POD (electronic) "classic" for their Faber Finds series.

¹¹¹ Selected reviews 1985-2004: *Melody Maker*, 1985: With a sharp combination of painstaking, investigative journalism and pop cultural commentary, Fred and Judy Vermorel have come up with *Starlust* - an extraordinary revelation of the hidden force of fanhood. Culled from diaries and confessions, letters and interviews, the book presents the tearstained fantasies of fans, almost all written in a strange language of delirium that is half pornographic, half mystical./ But fans aren't screaming lunatics, say the Vermorels. Neither are they the passive victims of showbiz hype that the highbrow media portrays. If fans are touched by madness, it's media madness that we all share; *LBC Radio*, 1985: Forget stardust, this is starlust. One of the most disturbing evenings I've had for a long time was spent reading Fred and Judy Vermorel's *Starlust*; *Toronto Star*, 1985: There were some bits that were so sick I had to read them three times." *BBC Radio One*, 1985: This book will change a lot of people's ideas about how

"These obsessive, devotional voices supply the missing strand in accounts of rock and sexuality, the consumer view." ¹¹²

Greil Marcus' review in *Art Forum*, December, 1985 is worth quoting at length, as he correctly divined the purpose behind the methodology - a "treatise by example," and extracted the underlying thesis:

"Anyone who has ever been a true fan of any pop figure will find a queasy self recognition here. *Starlust* is about commonplace responses to singers, but it can speak for the sphere of film stars or even authors. The book never loses its maniacal tinge. After a hundred pages you might think you've come to be almost at home in the cathedrals of blocked desire and impossible hope built by everyday housewives in tribute to Barry Manilow and then a wish so awful, so ugly in its dissociation from anything close to reality, sends you running for your life. It

the fan and star system works; Robert Christgau, *Village Voice*, 1995: American music journalism has never produced anything remotely like *Starlust*... In these mash notes gone bonkers, craven entreaties are often indistinguishable from empowered fantasies. The fans read their needs into the music with a single-minded certainty humbling for anyone in the aesthetic analysis business - and frightening, I would imagine, for any artist so rash as to read the stuff. There are some things that could make Mick Jagger himself think about retiring to the Shetlands; Tom Ebros cDnetcomuk.co.uk [Internet chat group] <Retrieved 23/9/2003>: Right now I'm reading... *Starlust*, which says more about rock music than every issue of *Rolling Stone* (or *Maximumrockanroll*, for that matter) back to back. It's the disturbing entrancing and beautiful collection of fan letters, fan fantasies and fan confessions, made in the 80s. Some of the fantasies, especially, veer into that territory occupied by Nancy Friday, where the most outrageous sexual acts are democratized into bland soft focus by the leveling tawdriness of language. But some are genuinely poignant or transgressive or both, and the confessions of the 'groupies' are unbearably sad... this is a marvellous book and echoes absolutely my views on music and the people who like it. As Fred Vermorel writes in his afterword (the texts themselves are presented without comment) "When did Robert Plant ever write anything as beautiful as [fan]'s fantasy about him?" ; *London Review of Books*, March 2004: ... *Starlust: The Secret Life of Fans*, a book which has no trouble persuading you that the desires and preoccupations of fans are the most beautiful and worrying things about modern pop.

¹¹² Simon Frith, "Afterthoughts" In, Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin, *On Record, Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, 1990 p422

might be a particularly pornographic fantasy, it might be a simple weekly exchange of what's new letters between 30ish Manilovers. The response will be the same: give me air!

"The state of fandom that people fall into in their teens and 20s begins to seem at once like a disease and a marketplace of hysteria commercially promoted for sound commercial reasons: a commercially promoted disease. What if you discovered a cure for a disease spread by a virus that had yet to infect human beings? Why, you'd set about infecting people, to create a market for your product. But what if, once disseminated among human beings, the disease proved not fatal, but simultaneously disabling and pleasurable? Well, on the one hand, pleasure sells but fear sells better, so you go back to work intensifying the disease. After reading Starlust you might think the proper regulatory agency for pop music is not some ad hoc group demanding warning labels but the Food and Drug Administration and the Surgeon General.

"Starlust is an inescapably fascinating treatise by example on culture as perceived not as a comprehensible continuum of works but as a wholly unpredictable series of visitations by magical beings: celebrities with the power to turn ordinary men and women into nonentities; into entities who exist only in terms of their imagined relationships with celebrities. The book makes you wonder why, so far, Mark Chapman is a unique figure. As Fred Vermorel writes in his afterward, 'It is hardly surprising when stars offer themselves so lavishly for consumption, that some fans will take the invitation literally ... After all, one plausible way to "consume people" is to annihilate them'

"Taken to its extreme - the extreme that supports and criticizes both stardom and spectatorship fandom is cannibalism. Since most often the star is out of reach,

fandom becomes schizophrenia: a cannibalism of the self. But what if not even schizophrenia is adequate, what if, given the process of celebrity, which draws nutrients from the fans, the self can no longer sustain the alienated self which wants to eat it? Some people leave the table and go on to live real lives, perhaps invigorated by a lust for what they cannot have, perhaps crippled by it. Some gnaw at the table legs. In Starlust, they all speak."

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Several of the rock stars featured were reportedly shocked, and Adam Ant was said to be "upset" by the sexual fantasy about him, (which played back his early S/M stage persona from a female fan's point of view). There were however, no legal issues. (I was not shown the legal report but assumed it was positive as no changes were required by the lawyers). Many music industry figures were supportive - albeit sometimes nonplussed.

In general, I thought that the decision to foreground fan accounts and exclude a framing analysis (an afterword I supplied was deliberately perfunctory) had been justified.

One drawback of the publication format was the absence of illustrations. Though some facsimiles were provided the visuality of fan culture was underrepresented.

Starlust can fairly be said to have inaugurated the field of fan studies. The decisions taken in respect of its "unmediated" presentation have however, made the book difficult to reconcile with academic discourse. A companion volume is still needed to rectify this and to develop the argument. I have been researching changes in fanhood and updating material continuously, and hope to produce the required text within the next three years.

¹¹³ Greil Marcus, *Art Forum*, 1986, pp16-17

The issue of "theorising" fanhood

The intention behind the text's "unmediated" approach was a refusal to soften or patronise the fan material. At that time I also felt that the most relevant theory was that of the fans themselves and that while lacking a conventional "theoretical" vocabulary, fans were often self-aware and reflexive, through their nuanced and self critical - often playful and ironic, performances of fanhood. Fan culture, in other words, implied its own critique.

I debated this point in 1990 with David Morley, the authority on audience studies and reception theory. Morley had commissioned for Comedia, Routledge, a book which looked at TV audiences in the same way and with the same methodology as *Starlust*. But he later queried the lack of analysis.

At one point Morley framed his objection (in a conversation with me) by saying that a theoretical perspective on fanhood wasn't "available" to fans. This suggested that a theoretical or analytical perspective could only be constructed and applied instrumentally from outside the lived situation of fanhood.

However, considered phenomenologically, fan culture articulates itself inside out, candidly, even brutally.

In the event, the Comedia book was never delivered.

1987, Fans, BBC documentary

Following the publication of *Starlust*, the BBC made an approach to film a documentary based on the book.¹¹⁴ The producer was Andy Batten-Foster of BBC West Bristol. The documentary was based around interviews with fans, most of whom had appeared in *Starlust*. The others - "Aphrodite," a self confessed groupie, several anonymous Curiosity Killed The Cat fans, and Mary and

¹¹⁴ The programme was broadcast on BBC 2 at 9pm on 28 May 1987

Suzanne, both Shaking Stevens fans - were sourced from continuing work on this project.

The interviews were by Fred and Judy Vermorel. The voice-over script (read by Annie Nightingale) was by Fred Vermorel.

The 40 minute film also featured enacted scenes of a series of fan letters being written to Nick Heyward - letters that had appeared in *Starlust*. These letters told a story of mounting obsessionality, culminating in an attempted suicide. They provided a narrative spine around which other episodes were assembled.

What was most distinctive in the documentary was the interviews with Barry Manilow fans, especially Jean and Maureen (who created and traded in Manilow dolls), and the footage of a "Barry Weekend" held in a Manilow fan's home. The "Barry weekend" and the Manilow fans in general, cut against the stereotype of the asocial, solipsistic fan, to present images of camaraderie and ribald good humour. The engineered meeting between Suzanne and Shakin' Stevens was also revealing in that it showed the typical "flight" reaction of such encounters.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ A background dossier was compiled of fan accounts and observations about fans meeting stars in the flesh. To gloss the findings of this material:

On encountering the star, fans typically absent or evacuate themselves. They will flee the scene, either physically, or symbolically. Fans will faint. Or will feel faint. They become confused and inarticulate. They make what they report as heavy, useless, cumbersome gestures. They recall that the encounter "was like a dream," or, it was "unreal." The pressing issues they have thought about for so long, the questions they were burning to ask, all disappear. They desire only to escape from what has become an enormous, embarrassing and incoherent presence. It is a sort of abnegation: playing dead: they become a void. They are frequently tongue-tied. "I had so much to say, but..." The fantasy has imploded into this banal presence: this person here and now. Grandeur is suddenly shrunk, "I imagined her bigger." Indeed, a common report of such encounters is how surprisingly "small" the star was. As if fans had mentally infantilised themselves in relation to the star. Or magnified the star to fill the space she ought to occupy. Noticeable too, are the accompanying glazed or blank looks, very like the vacated resignation of fans waiting... In queues to meet the star;

The documentary overall, steered away from the usual "moral panic" discourse of such programs. The fans were presented as far as possible in a non exoticised manner. The subtext that these fans might be freakish and unrepresentative was - as far as possible - moderated by the (sparse) commentary.

Several reviewers commented on the fact that most fans featured were not "hysterical" teenage girls but (as the *Daily Mail* review put it) "ordinary, suburban housewives."¹¹⁶ *The Daily Telegraph* commented that, "Not all fans are sexually deprived teenagers: many are middle-aged women."¹¹⁷ *The Western Daily Press*, further noted that, "They were hardly teenagers whose lack of a more balanced perspective might be understood or at least excused. They were mainly mature women with husbands and families. Most of them also knew perfectly well that their feelings about their idols, whether it was David Bowie, Shakin' Stevens or Barry Manilow, had nothing to do with reality. The obsession was on another plane."¹¹⁸

In *The Observer*, James Naughton developed this point,

"We are accustomed to thinking about this as something which afflicts only teenage girls. One remembers, for example, the expression 'not a dry seat in the house' being the cynical journalistic description of a Beatles concert in which thousands of these waifs wept and screamed their way to a collective orgasm. But 'Fans' had more interesting footage of 30 and 40-year-old women who regularly gather for weekend sessions in which they slaver over videos of Barry Manilow apparently simulating sexual intercourse with an electronic keyboard."¹¹⁹

outside ticket booths... A Virgin Records employee remarked, "They always look like they're waiting outside their own bodies."

¹¹⁶ *Daily Mail*, May 29 1987

¹¹⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, May 29 1987

¹¹⁸ *The Western Daily Press*, May 29 1987

¹¹⁹ James Naughton, *The Observer*, May 31 1987

A flaw in this documentary was that all the fans interviewed were women. This gave the impression that fanhood was a female gendered phenomenon. The reason for this imbalance was banal - principally lack of research time. The documentary was filmed on an approximately £11,000 budget and consequently, a tight schedule. One thing I learned early in my research career is that women will talk more freely (and quickly) about things close to them than men. Men generally need more convincing and reassurance to open areas of their life which might be deemed socially embarrassing or revelatory - especially on camera. Whereas there had been ample time to "groom" male participants for the book, this proved impossible in the time-frame of the documentary. (I sometimes use this example to raise gender-specific issues when teaching interviewing technique to students.)

Andy Batten-Foster rarely intervened in the interviews. However, at one stage he shouted "Cut!" when he became embarrassed that Suzanne was weeping while recounting her meeting with Shakin' Stevens. He was also perturbed that both of the Bowie fans featured (Patricia and Julie) confessed they had fantasised about murdering Bowie. After discussion, he allowed Patricia's confession, but edited out Julie's.

Patricia's thoughts of suicide and murder were unsurprisingly, commented on by several reviewers. *The Daily Mail* commented, "The programme was revealing, but there was a constant, ugly, frightening strain, echoed by the emotionally blackmailing aspect of the fan's pursuit of the idol." ¹²⁰

Overall, the program was successful in undercutting the fans' "exoticism." It also addressed the politics of fan/star relationships and the responsibility of the music industry and the media. Several reviewers commented that "Aphrodite," the groupie interviewed, had with her "ruthless calculation" ¹²¹

¹²⁰ *The Daily Mail*, op cit

¹²¹ *The Daily Telegraph*, op cit

upset the usual balance of power. The final comment came from Julie who queried whether pop stars were aware of the impact they had on fans, concluding, "I doubt it, somehow."

The producer, Batten -Foster, had agreed that the programme should, like the book, avoid framing analyses from "experts" or any theoretical perspective other than that could be read out of the behaviour and beliefs of the fans portrayed. A notion of pop as a "frustration machine," intrinsic to the theorisation behind the overall project, was however, suggested by the programme's structure - the term was also used in promotional interviews.

The film has dated, particularly because the stars featured (Nick Heyward, Curiosity Killed the Cat) have faded, and David Bowie is no longer as prominent. However, this film is still a valuable teaching aid as it managed to be as uncompromising as possible within a mainstream TV framework. Once it is explained (and grasped) that Nick Hayward "is" Justin Bieber, and Curiosity Killed the Cat is whatever boy band is climbing the charts at the moment, the depiction of the fans and the situation of fanhood portrayed elicits discussion, as well as consternation. Part of the challenge of teaching (and writing) in this contested area is precisely to show that tastes are ephemeral and transitory but the stereotypes recur again and again, albeit with different names and faces.

Ancillary Starlust and fan studies related journalism, 1985-1994

Starlust (and *The Secret History*) generated media interviews and profiles on TV and radio, and in the press. It also produced additional journalistic pieces. These enabled me to popularise the "concealed" thinking behind those projects.

Below is a selection of this published material.

Jane Solanas, "Vermorality," Time Out, August 22-28 1985.

Review feature based on an interview.

"Fred takes his cue from the economist Schumpeter:
'Capitalism will be destroyed not because of what it
can't deliver but because it overdelivers. Everything you
want to fantasise. Someone will supply that demand, and
that demand then spirals and the institutions, e.g. pop,
will reach a stage where they can no longer cope with the
demands they are exciting..."

Frank Owen, "The Nature of the Beast," Melody Maker, October
5, 1985. [Interview extracts]

"Fred: 'The soft porn vocabulary of the fans nearly
always covers up a more mystical approach to the star.
People don't really want to screw stars, they want to
have them, they want to possess them, and they want to be
them. When they talk about sexual attractiveness what
they are doing is expressing another kind of
attractiveness but in a language which is socially
acceptable. It's OK to talk about Barry's 12 inchers but
it would sound weird if you went into mystical eulogy
about him..."

"A fan is someone who is obsessed with a star. But that
obsession is a priori. The obsession comes first, the
liking for the music comes afterwards. You are a fan
first and then you choose your star..."

"At first we were shocked [by the degree of hostility
fans expressed about stars] but after a while it started
to make sense. Psychoanalysis shows convincingly that
the basis of fetishism - and we talking about celebrity
fetishism here - is sadism. There is a will to kill the
love object..."

"It's interesting the way that Chapman's murder of Lennon is constantly enacted in lots of people's minds in [Starlust]. It's always being referred to. It's as if they understand perfectly why he did it and they are also understand that it was a perfectly "rational" thing to do...

"Given the kind of desire that the pop industry excites and that it has to keep on delivering, it's no wonder that there comes a point when the institution of pop can't contain the desires that it's created."

Fred Vermorel, "Fantasia," New Musical Express, 18 January, 1986, was a commissioned piece about Starlust, (see Publications, enclosed).

Richard North, "The Vermorels," Zigzag, January 1986, was an interview in which I expanded on themes behind Starlust.

[Extracts]

"Question: IN THE AFTERWORD TO STARLUST YOU WRITE 'IN THEIR PASSION, IN THEIR ECSTASIES, IN THEIR DELIRIUM, FANS SHOW THEMSELVES TO BE THE TRUE HEIRS OF UTOPIAN ROMANTICISM.' WHAT'S THAT?

F: Utopian Romanticism is a current of feeling which is difficult to pin down in terms of ideology. And it has given various ideologies a lot of trouble. Perhaps I can explain with a couple of examples. In the French Revolution people spontaneously took over churches and enacted their own crazy religions. It came out of a utopian feeling that was divorced from any ideology, be it Jacobean [sic - misspelt from "Jacobin"] or whatever.

"Question... YOUR BOOKS CONTAIN NO PERSONAL OVERVIEW.

F: We do feel strongly that as so-called artists we despise, really, people who are into self-expression because you only have to look around to find that the guy

next door is far more interesting than you and that they've been living through some emotions that are far more intriguing. We like to go out and collect information and put it together rather than sit down and think 'am I sad today?' or 'what am I thinking today?' Having feelings and expressing them is a very old-fashioned way of being an artist.

"Question: DOESN'T THAT ATTITUDE LIMIT YOU?

F: On the contrary, it opens us up to all the influences that are coming in. I can't understand why artists in 1985, with videos, TV, telephones, etc can just sit at home and ponder. That was fine for the 18th and 19th centuries, but for 1985 I find it a very insular type of expression, whether it be writing books or music.

"Question: WHAT'S THE UNDERLYING POINT TO STARLUST?

F: We were trying to show that fans weren't exceptional people who were aberrations or who were odd or who'd had a gap in their life - that's the favourite way of describing fans. Its emphasis was to show that we're all fans because we're all consumers and as a consumer in this culture you consume pop because you can't avoid it. These people actually highlight that."

Frank Owen and Carolyn Brown, "An A-Z of Post-Modernism," I-d, Pop Issue April 1987. This series of capsule concepts included three of my formulations from around that time:

"CONSENSUS TERRORISM: A phrase invented.. to signal the way that after Live Aid pop has assumed a new role as moral imperative, as a universal conscriptor of emotion, as an organiser of mass sentimentality so that a "We" is constructed that wants to feed the world, halt the spread of AIDS, get rid of heroin. This consensus is terroristic because this mood of moral

evangelism makes it impossible to ask whether pop is a suitable medium to solve such problems.

"CONSUMER MYSTICISM: ...[Quoting from Starlust] 'Pop is the Romantic movement of our consumer civilisation.' Pop's greatest weapon is its ability to imbue ordinary people and everyday emotions with a sort of mystic grandeur. As Nik Cohn well knew, [what] the individual performers (who are really interchangeable idols) bring to pop hardly matter in the face of the hype, hysteria and dazzle of the pop process itself. Never mind the quality, feel the myth or to put it another way, pop is never about good songs, talented musicians etc., but about flows of tears-cum-sweat

PLANET POP: The increasing global penetration of consumer music means that there are no longer any corners on Planet Pop. Pop is now so universally ubiquitous that everyone is forced into some sort of relation with it - Margaret Thatcher on Saturday Swap Shop, Norman Tebbit at the BPI Awards and Ronald Reagan's endorsement of Bruce Springsteen as a patriotic American are all examples of Planet Pop.

In 1987 Melody Maker commissioned two double-page features: "Desires Within Young Girls," Melody Maker, February 14, 1987, and "Fetishism, Death and Fantasy," February 21, 1987. These features were essentially visual: photographs, captions and quotations. They aimed to popularise the concepts underlying Starlust and The Secret History of Kate Bush. They were editorialised as "a collage of impressions" based on a "study into the relationships between desire, fetishism and hysteria." (See extracts in Publications, enclosed). Another kind of audience was offered by two linked features in Penthouse, the international magazine for men, "Fantasies," September 1985, and "Starlust," January 1986. This was not a serialisation of Starlust material but based on some of the framing interviews and research, and featured unpublished

fantasy material. The piece was heavily editorialised but some commentary came though: a potted history of the phenomenon and "political" asides like:

"Nowadays fanhood is an art form in its own right. Since punk especially, fans are more aware of the nature of the game, and want more of the showbiz pay-off for themselves. At pop concerts today the audience is sometimes more exotic, energetic and entertaining than the acts. Especially in today's multi-ethnic, multi-cultured clubland scene.

"Another example of fans stealing the show is how they are asserting their own fantasies over official showbiz dreams. Barry Manilow fans are possibly the most ribald of all. He may have a squeaky-clean image, but Manilow himself is well aware that his fans trade in 'bum shots'-- highly prized photos of Barry's posterior. He will occasionally pose suitably in concerts to gasps and screams of ecstasy."¹²²

Fred Vermorel, "Believe the Hype - the new groupies, The Modern Review, April-May, 1994 p12

This article replayed some of the above themes through a focus on self-confessed "new" groupies. It particularly critiqued an American groupie fanzine, Slapper. Extracts:

"Groupies are the most intensely spiritual of all fans, they are the Mother Teresas of popular music. They actually believe where most of us hesitate and pretend, and they worship directly at the ordinary shrine of celebrity: the star's body. Only, instead of braving the lepers and sewers of downtown Delhi, these sisters brave other kinds of disgust and disease to snuggle up to,

¹²² Fred and Judy Vermorel, "Fantasies," *Penthouse*, September 1985, p80

inhale, and minister to the phalluses of our favourite stars.

"Their own explanation of this as the thrill of sexual acrobatics and therapeutics doesn't fool us and we can see that it cloaks a profound innocence about sex, and also about power... with their self-denial and exemplary erotic stupidity goes an unshakeable faith in the consumerist magic of celebrity...

"Fans are especially interesting because they enact consumerism so transparently. The word 'fan' comes from 'fanatic', which itself comes from 'fanaticus'. The fanaticus were a sect of ancient Greek priests notorious in the ancient world for two things: wild orgies and self-castration. This conjunction, of sexual excess with self-mutilation and practical impotence, seems an apt precursor to the situation of the modern fan who embodies our modern version of desire, one specific to consumerist societies: desire for desire, an endless loop in which the object of desire is the occasion for more desire, or what the sociologist of consumption, Colin Campbell, calls an "enjoyable discomfort." The groupie is always just fucking an idea through a screen of fantasy. But then again, isn't everyone nowadays?"

1988, Stereo/Porno and the Brit Awards

My association with Factory had continued and in 1988 led to a joint project with Chappell Music, who I had signed to as a songwriter. This project aimed to critique the 1988 British Phonographic Industry (BPI) Awards. ¹²³

¹²³ I signed to Chappell Music in May, 1985 as a lyricist and a promoter for their some of their artists. I left in 1988 after this independent music publishing company had been taken over by Warner and became Warner Chappell. While at Chappell I developed music, principally in partnership with Phil Johnstone. Johnstone at the time was working with the producer, Dave Barratt, and they had formed a band called The Rest is History. The band folded after Johnstone was

A music track, Stereo/Porno was intended as the focus of this critique. The title was taken from Jean Baudrillard's essay, "Stereo-Porno."¹²⁴ In this essay, Baudrillard evokes the voyeuristic seductions of perfection and perfectibility offered by technologies of re-production, "Porno is the quadriphonics of sex. It adds a third and fourth channel to the sexual act. The hallucination of detail predominates..."

The lyric and song production, packaging and promotion played with slippages between voyeurism, fetishism and marketing, as a comment on the way the pop music industry appeared to be ransacking the collective and individual psyche for marketable sexual and other "perversions" to render as commodities.

The track was released as a single and as a 12" featuring alternative mixes.¹²⁵ The lyric¹²⁶ was by Fred Vermorel, the

asked by Robert Plant on the basis of a demo to work on Plant's solo projects. This led to Johnstone co-authoring music with Plant and also co-producing Plant's *Now and Zen* album (1988) and three subsequent Plant albums. Dave Barratt went on to become a producer. He remixed David Bowie's *Fame '90* (Absolutely Nothing Premeditated/Epic Mix), 1990, and included audio documentary supplied by me of Patricia, a Bowie fan, who featured in *Starlust* and the video, *Fans*. Johnstone co-wrote music to my lyrics or themes, produced in the Chappell Music recording studio. One of these was the demo for Stereo/Porno.

¹²⁴ In *The Revenge of the Crystal : selected writings on the modern object and its destiny, 1968-1983* / Jean Baudrillard, (edited and translated by Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis), 1990.

¹²⁵ [VERMOREL "Stereo / Porno," *Factory Fac* 198/7, January 1988. FAC 197, 3:46

Stereo / Porno; 4:07; Stereo / Porno (Ballad). The run-out grooves on side one read: VIP / RIP. Fac 198, 6:35

Stereo / Porno (Extended); 4:5

Stereo / Schizo; 4:07

Stereo / Porno (Ballad); 3:57

Plastic Flowers]

¹²⁶ Sweat shops of Porno

Cold Eros reigns

Nothing is sacred

The devil's a gentleman

Sweetly he took me

Up to the edge...

CHORUS 1

Stereo Porno

Rock and roll hero

Take the money and run for cover

Psycho show...

CHORUS 2

music was by Fred and Judy Vermorel, co-written with Ginnie Clee, and based on a demo by Phil Johnstone and Fred Vermorel. Clee, a Chappell Music signed artist, was also the vocalist. The track was produced in its various stages by Phil Johnstone, Dave Barratt and Ross Cullum. It was produced at the Chocolate Factory in London and remixed at Pete Townshend's Eel Pie Studios, Twickenham.

An accompanying "tactical campaign" against the BPI Awards was given the Factory catalogue number, (Fac 197). This partly took the form of spoof press releases intended to ridicule and undermine the Awards agenda and process.

These press releases were taken at face value by the media to begin with.¹²⁷ Spoof "fanatickets" to the Awards ceremony were distributed to Borstals and homeless people. Letters appearing to emanate from the pop magazine, *Smash Hits*, suggested that furnished with such "fanatickets," delinquents and outcasts might see how they could "turn their disabilities into actual commercial advantage." It was also announced that special prizes would be awarded that year to David Bowie and Michael Jackson for popularising schizophrenia and sexual fetishism respectively.¹²⁸

Accompanying this PR hack, a nation-wide poster campaign, "Bums for BPI" was launched in the form of reproductions of the image on the Stereo/Porno record sleeve.

This image was one of a series taken by me of Ginny Clee, the singer. It was created as ambiguously "pornographic": Ginny

The camera erotica
I'm drowning in hysteria
Take the money and run for cover
Psycho show...

¹²⁷ Adam Sweeting, "BPI pop awards hoaxer hits rock bottom," *The Guardian*, Feb 6, 1988; "British Pornographic Industry!," *Cut*, April 1988.

¹²⁸ The Awards ceremony that year was held in the Royal Albert Hall, and a map of the sewers and underground tunnels underneath and around the Albert Hall was issued to indicate alternative exit routes in case of disturbances. Eventually the BPI issued an injunction, but to the wrong person, a mysterious figure called "Judy Frederick."

Clee's buttocks with strands of pubic hair in extreme close-up.
¹²⁹ Baudrillard's "hallucination of detail" veiled in blue-tinted tonalities.

This photo was the centrepiece of Peter Saville's design for the Stereo/Porno sleeve. Copies were acquired by the V&A. (For the vinyl record and outer sleeve see E.2266 and 2264-1990 respectively), and exhibited in 2000 in a show featuring influential record sleeves. The design is cited in Edge, Kevin, *The Art of Selling Songs : Graphics for the Music Business, 1690-1990*, 1991.

The overall intention of this project was to go beyond moralistic polemics around sexuality in the music industry and culture generally as well as liberationist clichés about "breaking down walls," "exploring boundaries" etc. ¹³⁰

All this was rather a mouthful for a record and promo campaign. Stereo/Porno the record did moderately well in dance circuits and in continental Europe. Its didactic purpose however, overshadowed its production values and entertainment function. This is a familiar problem of artists-with-a-message. I seem to have been trapped here by that very "ton weight of irony" ridiculed in the Keith Tryard episode. However, I would collaborate with Factory again in the early 1990s on developing

¹²⁹ Ginny herself commented, "Well, it is my best feature!"

¹³⁰ The thinking behind this was that the dynamics involved in the sexualisation of consumer culture generally could be understood by adapting the work of the cultural economist Joseph Schumpeter, particularly *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 1966. Turning Marx on his head, Schumpeter had suggested that capitalism would eventually destroy itself from within, but that this destruction would not come about, as Marx had supposed, through the failures of capitalism: immiseration and class conflict. Rather, Schumpeter thought that capitalism's overweening success, its ability to over-deliver and over-fulfil the desires of its population would tend to exaggerate those desires and thus encourage behaviours and fantasies that would eventually erode capitalism's legal basis and unravel the social fabric on which it depended.

these ideas through an audio novel CD called *The Pornucopia Experiment*.¹³¹ ¹³² ¹³³

1989, *Fandemonium!*

Since the publication of *Starlust* I had gradually began to work the material from the professionals' archive into published work.

In particular, in *Fandemonium!*, 1990. This book, delivered as a package, for which I wrote the captions and commentary, and edited and supervised the design of, represented the more visual aspects of fan culture. Again, it used a collage technique, intended to suggest rather than explain, and aiming to create spaces for association and provocation.

By this time I had added to my research base by trawling picture archives for depictions of fans. This enabled me to make historical and cross cultural comparisons of deportment,

¹³¹ This was after Factory Records had gone bust in 1992 and been revived by Tony Wilson as Factory Too. The catalogue number was FAC2.16. It was billed as "A recording of obsessions created by the obsessed themselves." Underfunded, the project was never completed or released. (Referenced in David Nolan, *You're Entitled To An Opinion - The High Times and Many Lives of Tony Wilson, Factory Records and The Hacienda*, 2009, pp271-2. Also in James Nice, *Shadowplayers: The Rise and Fall of Factory Records*, 2010, p350

¹³² Another factor was artistic control: in a literal sense, control of the means of production. Not being a musician, and lacking audio engineering skills I was dependent on conveying ideas to people who, however talented, did not necessarily share my enthusiasms or allusions. They responded either too literally, or wide of the mark. The period from my signing to Chappell and working with Factory however, began the digitalisation of music production. Twenty years on, that has now reached a stage where affordable virtual studios have the capacity and "toys" of major studios, and no need of musicians or engineers, since those skills can be imported and deployed "off the shelf." All you need now, is to be a DJ.

¹³³ Completed fragments have since been posted online with accompanying videos, see:

NOT TO ORGASM IS NOT TO EXIST

<http://vimeo.com/8813694>

DAVID BOWIE WELL AND TRULY ON THE LINE

<http://vimeo.com/8779183>

GET OUT OF MY HEAD

<http://vimeo.com/13195229>

HOLLOW BULLETS

<http://vimeo.com/13461264>

<All retrieved 21/01/2011>

gesture, facial expression and interaction in images of audiences for popular entertainment. (I was of course, aware that such archives are selective according to commercial agendas.) I also gained access to the BBC video library and obtained around five hours of fan related footage, some of it raw and unedited, mostly from the late 1950s to late 1970s.

I also searched newspaper archives (this was before digitalised databases) for references to fan cults and audience behaviour in general. One of the problems I encountered here was that such archives do not always categorise material according to keywords like "fans" or "fan behaviour" but are organised in the more obviously commercial categories according to celebrity or event. A way round this was to search by venue (e.g. "Hammersmith Odeon") or by subculture (e.g. "Teddy boys") or by dance genre (e.g. "The Twist").

For the first time too, I extended my research to dance crazes associated with fan cults. *Fandemonium!* enabled me to assemble and begin to organise much new material which also found its way into associated journalism, as well as my teaching.

Most of the material cited in *Fandemonium!* was referenced sketchily and sometimes not at all. This was a design decision. It was felt that the book's public was unlikely to want a scholarly apparatus. In retrospect however, even though a periodisation was provided by the commentary, the unattributed quotes tended to de-historicize the material.

1989-1992, Theoretical development at the Royal College of Art:
"The Soul of a Fan" / "The Unconscious: your place or mine?" /
(Conference paper, enclosed)

From 1989 to 1992, elements of a different kind of analysis were put into place through work on a PhD I had registered for at the Royal College of Art. The PhD was never completed due to teaching and other writing commitments. However, my three

years at the RCA resulted in a several seminars and conference papers. The fullest of these papers was "The Soul of a Fan," optionally titled in its more psychoanalytically weighted version, "The Unconscious: your place or mine?" Both versions of this paper were given at academic conferences.

"The Soul of a Fan" was first delivered at "It's Only Rock 'n' Roll: Popular Music and Cultural Theory, one day symposium, Southampton Institute of Higher Education, February, 1992. (Speakers: Simon Frith, Paul Willis, Alex Seago, Fred Vermorel, Arlene Oak, Rod Clark). It was also given in updated form at Sounds of the City, four-day conference, University College, Salford, 9-12 Sept 1992, Day Three: Sexing the Groove, (Speakers: Sara Cohen, Paul McDonald, Jon Savage, Steve Nixon, Fred Vermorel, Mavis Bayton, Debra King, Sheila Whitely, Charlotte Greig). "The Unconscious: your place or mine," was first given at The Unconscious and Popular Culture, one day symposium, Royal College of Art, 22 May 1991. (Speakers: Dick Hebdige, Barry Richards, Peter Swales, Fred Vermorel)

Both versions of this paper were also given by invitation at the Design Institute, Copenhagen, 1997, 1998.

A cut-down version of "The Soul of a Fan" was given at, "All of Me Loves All Of You: Fan Love," Institute of Contemporary Arts, 27 March 1995 - presentation and panel discussion.¹³⁴

One area that particularly interested me while at the RCA was the way many fans seemed to apply Romantic and Freudian perspectives to their situations. I linked this to their Romantic emotionology: fanhood had Romantic roots in confessional strategies, fantasy modes etc., and this was congenial to popularised Freudian versions of the Self -

¹³⁴ Also issued as a sound cassette, "All of Me Loves All of You: Fan Love," ICA, 1995

psychoanalysis itself, being a profoundly Romantic psychology.

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The dreams reported by fans were interesting in this respect. In fact, this perspective influenced me to focus on the dream and fantasy life of fans more than I might otherwise have done. But rather than analysing such fan material by refracting it through a Freudian theorisation, it seemed to me I should investigate why this dramaturgy seemed to be so "Freudian" in the first place.

There was a popularised psychoanalysis already inside fan culture, and this expressed and framed the experiences of fans *a priori*. For example, the model of "self" that fans used to describe themselves - to couch and project their subjectivity - and their phantasmic, surrogate relationships with stars and the mass media in general: the rhetorical structures, discursive strategies and narrative patterns they resorted to, their determinations of desire and motive and denial and subterfuge, their confessional self expressivity, their self-ascribed motives and erotic narratives, and their notions of memory and recollection, all were fundamentally Freudian. The reason for this was that since the early twentieth century, a vulgarised psychoanalysis had been promulgated and promoted through mainstream mass culture to the point where - from the 1940s-1950s, this once rather exotic psychological model had become "common sense."

It was therefore naïve to seek to apply psychoanalytical perspectives to a fan culture which was already intrinsically psychoanalytical. As James Twitchell remarked, "Freudian dreamers have Freudian dreams" ¹³⁶

¹³⁵ The issues around this and the arguments developed can be found in *The Soul of a Fan*, (enclosed).

¹³⁶ James B Twitchell *Dreadful Pleasures: an anatomy of modern horror*, 1985.

At the same time it was important to resist a device common in cultural studies and some of its canonical texts, of setting up straw issues - naïve subjects - which are then revealed through irony and criticism to have "hidden meanings." Meanings put there in the first place by the people supposedly mystified or duped.

As Juliet Sychrava put it in *Schiller to Derrida : idealism in aesthetics*, 1989, in commenting on Derrida's, *Of Grammatology*,

"...the opposition [being made by Derrida] between "natural" speech and "conventional" writing, whilst being demolished, is the dynamic of the whole critique."
Continuing, "We tend to forget, that this opposition is something that is in the first place set up as the given."

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1990/1995, Anthologising Starlust

In 1990, a reader on music industry studies, Simon Frith & Andrew Goodwin, *On Record, Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1990, featured 10 pages of extracts from *Starlust*. These extracts concluded the volume, and were in a separate chapter. The editors' commented:

"...*Starlust* was the first publication of its kind - a study that offered a theory of the music industry through the words of the fans themselves. These extracts from that book serve as the best conclusion to this reader that we can imagine: a reminder that pop meanings are ultimately made by the consumers (albeit under social

¹³⁷ Juliet Sychrava put it in *Schiller to Derrida : idealism in aesthetics*, 1989, p175

¹³⁸ This strategy was further discussed in a seminar I gave at the RCA, "Cultural Studies and the Naïve," September 1992. I particularly critiqued Roland Barthes in this respect, as well as the psychoanalyst, Mark Cousins.

conditions that are not of their own choosing)... whatever the intentions of industries, musicians, and critics." ¹³⁹

An extract from *Starlust* was also anthologised in Hanif Kureishi and Jon Savage, (Eds) *The Faber Book of Pop*, London : Faber, c1995. ¹⁴⁰

1992, *The Adoring Audience*

In 1991 Lisa Lewis commissioned a piece for a collection on fan studies she was editing. ¹⁴¹The piece was called, "A Glimpse Inside the Fan Factory." This was another collage or "mood piece," juxtaposing fan letters with other texts, for example, a quotation from the psychoanalyst, Rollo May. ¹⁴²

This approach was commented on by Janice Winship in a review for the *Journal of Design History*, ¹⁴³ in which she described this collage as "the most powerful piece of all" in the collection. Winship continued that, "Coming across this piece in the book is a revelatory shock, it is a window onto a strange fantasy world." She concluded that,

"Excess and obsessiveness, loneliness and social inadequacy, and, dare I say it, madness, break out from

¹³⁹ Simon Frith & Andrew Goodwin, *On Record, Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1990 p279

¹⁴⁰ pp 456-464

¹⁴¹ Lisa Lewis (Ed), *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, 1992.

¹⁴² In a letter to the editor, Lisa Lewis, I explained: "I'm not sure if this is quite what you expected... What took most time was writing and rejecting several versions of an 'introduction' to the piece. In the end we felt it better to let the fans' theorizations stand in their own terms - with just a few nudges... As you will see we have focused on the schizophrenia (in the sense of a breakdown of language/communication) of possible and impossible, probable and recurring communications within the discourse of fanhood. The moods, predicaments and strategies portrayed are not in our experience especially radical or bizarre, and are also evident (but less nakedly) in many media texts about stars... the practice of fans is way ahead of any available theory - but perhaps your book will change that. (Letter to Lisa Lewis, 6 August, 1990)

¹⁴³ Janice Winship, *Journal of Design History* Vol 7, No. 3, 1994, pp 218-219

the controlling frame within which other articles in their concern to redeem fandom, strive to place it. Such disruption of any ordering narrative is a useful corrective."

These comments seemed to partly vindicate the (in Winship's phrase) "relatively unmediated" approach taken in the Glimpses essay and elsewhere.

Since fan studies has boomed there has been a tendency to sanitise or circumvent its more troubling aspects. This is partly due to insufficient or superficial research, allied with prurience, a reluctance to, in the sociologist Robert Parks' words (instructing PhD students of subcultural topics), "get the seats of your pants dirty in real research."¹⁴⁴

In part, this comes from the problem of getting research grants to study apparently alarming or scabrous topics. That is a problem of academic politics. It is also however, a wider issue of cultural politics, since failing to confront the phenomenon of fanhood squarely, effectively censors and also celebrates celebrity, eliding questions of its power and influence.

¹⁴⁴ Rolf Lindner, *The reportage of urban culture: Robert park and the Chicago school*, 1996, p81. The entire passage reads: "You have been told to go grubbing in the library, thereby accumulating a mass of notes and a liberal coating of grime. You have been told to choose problems wherever you can find musty stacks of routine records based on trivial schedules prepared by tired bureaucrats and filled out by reluctant applicants for aid or fussy do-gooders or indifferent clerks. This is called "getting your hands dirty in real research." Those who thus counsel you are wise and honourable; the reasons they offer are of great value. But one thing is more needful; first-hand observation. Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedowns; sit in Orchestra Hall and in the Star and in the Garter Burlesk. In short, gentlemen, go get the seats of your pants dirty in real research."

1993, Research and writing, a handbook, (pedagogy)

I began university teaching in 1990. My research and publications from then on intersected with the courses I taught on and devised.

Having been enthusiastic about British cultural studies as an undergraduate I became disappointed with what I thought were sometimes over-theorised and under-researched approaches. It also seemed that by the 1990s, as far as teaching the subject went, a reading list had ossified into a canon. This canon was in line with Bourdieu's observations in *Homo Academicus*, 1990,¹⁴⁵ about how the sociological basis of Anglo Saxon academics inclined them to emphasise a sample of academically (in their own territories) marginal, as well as avowedly contentious and "rebellious" figures - such as Barthes, Lacan, or Foucault. Bourdieu suggested this attraction was partly founded on Anglo academics' self-perceived (as well as sociologically documented) lack of political authority and cultural status. Whatever the truth of that, it seemed to me that the readings underpinning courses to (particularly Design) students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels were sometimes inappropriate, and often elicited stock responses and formulaic approaches, rather than the vaunted "critical perspectives."

I therefore attempted to resolve what I saw as both a pedagogical and theoretical problem in my own teaching. In terms of published output this led directly to a 1993 guide, *Researching & Writing*. (Indirectly it also led to the approach taken in *Fashion & Perversity*, 1996/7.)

Researching & Writing was intended as a pragmatic - as opposed to programmatic - guide to researching. It was written for undergraduate as well as postgraduate students, and also aimed to be useful in a post-university context. The emphasis was on

¹⁴⁵ In the Foreword to the English edition, 1990

students identifying, accessing, exploring and using scholarly resources for themselves and in their own terms.

In particular, it worked against the tendency for course "Readers" and set texts - texts reduced to snippets of "pure knowledge, or fetishized as the issue of Exemplary Thinkers.

This guide was predicated on the need for students to engage with sources in their originating contexts and to be aware of the sometimes not so obvious remits and agendas (and politics) of the institutions and academics producing this knowledge. (In the spirit too, of the situationist remark, "Knowledge is inseparable from the use to which it is put.")

The text mostly dealt with the process of researching and creating an essay or dissertation. It was intended to be clear and readable, and was occasionally tongue in cheek. After it was published by Southampton Institute I was approached by Dr Philip Hills of the Centre for Research into Human Communication and Learning, University of Cambridge, who had come by a copy via Southampton University, to write an expanded version for Butterworth/Heinneman, more generally directed at arts and humanities students. This project was never realised as I felt the digitalisation of the research process was proceeding so rapidly a book would be out of date before publication. I thought to let things settle before embarking on such a text. Meanwhile, I developed the subject through research lectures and seminars. Versions of these have been given at a variety of design and media studies departments in universities. 1992-present.

The 1993 text is a little out of date, particularly in its references to the superior Internet and digital resources available nowadays. Its general lessons however, stand. Its clarity and instrumental purpose have also weathered well. ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Copies of the text are even now sold on the Internet for around £17. I quote from a recent UK E-bid auction blurb:

Another outcome of this work was a review of key research libraries and other resources as a guide to London libraries: Fred Vermorel, "Bibliophiles," *Time Out*, September 25-October 2, 1991, pp 36-39.

1996, *Fashion & Perversity*

In 1995 I approached publishers with a view to writing the first biography of Vivienne Westwood. Initially I thought of this as a straightforward illustrated book, and began negotiating a deal with Phaidon Press, London. However, working through the ideas, and in the context of my teaching design and fashion students, I realised what was needed was a book that explored the origins and timbre of Westwood's singular imagination: more about how to become like Westwood than how to admire her.

By this time Westwood was in danger of canonisation, having been adopted by the burgeoning "design" establishment. A lavishly illustrated book, while useful for displaying her work to advantage, could turn into a celebration, which I thought antithetical to her originality, and not useful for students and fashion aspirants.

I therefore devised a more text-based approach and this was accepted by Bloomsbury.¹⁴⁷

"This is the most real book on getting one through their dissertation or major project, I have ever come across. It cuts through some of the lengthy and laborious nonsense found in the 'How to... bla bla... dissertation' books published by the big publishing houses.

This cuts to the chase! It is an unbelievably easy route into getting prepared for and finally presenting an excellent dissertation or final project.

The key is that it is based on what REAL researchers (rather than academics) actually DO!

<http://uk.ebid.net/for-sale/researching-writing-fred-vermorel-dissertation-etc-33820090.htm> <Retrieved 21/01/2011>

¹⁴⁷ Fred Vermorel, *Fashion and Perversity : a life of Vivienne Westwood and the sixties laid bare*, 1996/ 1997; Vivienne Westwood: *Fashion and perversity & the sixties laid bare*, New York: The Overlook Press, 1996

I approached Westwood herself and she was happy to co-operate. She gave me *carte blanche* to explore her organisation. I embarked on a series of interviews with people in Vivienne Westwood Ltd and its subsidiaries, as well as with family members, and former colleagues and associates. As well as the advance from Bloomsbury I had, for the first time in my career, academic support, and used this to fund a research assistant.

I began a series of interviews with Westwood. However, I realised that for all her encouragement she found it difficult to narrate her life in a way that wasn't proselytizing her current enthusiasms. Her idea of an interview was a pitch, done in her own terms. She also keeps a store of ready-made narratives about episodes in her life which correspond to the needs of copy writers. These narratives overlap so much that reading interviews with her in archives gives a sense of déjà vu down to particular phrases, images and eccentricities of diction and emphasis.

I then thought that maybe I had no need to interview her in this conventional way. I had known her intimately for over 30 years and been involved in or seen close-up much of her career. In effect, throughout those years we had engaged in endless "interviews." That is how I had the idea of recollecting and concocting the "imaginary interview" which occupies a third of the book.

Westwood was also resistant to the distinctiveness of her story, at one point saying that her life was no more or less interesting than anyone else's. Her remark sparked another idea, that to get under the skin of her creativity I should compile a sort of group biography of Westwood and the people who had undergone a parallel cultural formation. Chief of these of course, was Malcolm McLaren. I then also decided to explore these themes in more depth and candour by interpolating my own relevant (and naturally, selective)

experiences as part of her cultural milieu. Hence the ironically inflected "autobiographical" element of Part Two of the Book : "Growing up as a genius in the sixties." ¹⁴⁸

In Part Two I developed ideas relevant to the resonance of punk, and the interactions between punk and its actors and context. Into this, I imported work from my RCA research, principally about how the avant-garde, as mediated through the British art college, had filtered a consumerist-Freudian agenda into popular culture by staging transgressions and commodifying "perversions" - of taste as well as sexuality. ¹⁴⁹

A significant element running through the book had to do with the particular culture of the British art college and its fusions of style, music, image and attitude. This has been a consistent theme in my writing. Building on established literature ¹⁵⁰ I attempted to provide an unsentimentalised account as a case study in the general transmission of images and themes from the avant-garde to popular (consumerist) culture.

I equally attempted to deconstruct the "sixties" that Westwood and Co had inhabited, the unglamorous and mundane realities of which I felt were at variance with stereotypes of that decade, particularly in the areas of fine art and fashion.

¹⁴⁸ The title (which scandalised some reviewers as presumptuous) refers to the way baby boomers tended to render their comings of age. It was suggested by this passage about the Romantic artist (AKA hippies, not to mention punks) as: "...the carrier of madness and uncanny inspiration, deliberately placing himself in the margins of society and moving frenetically between the crowd and solitude... [his] unique talent was in transforming idiosyncrasy into poetry and the reproofs of others into the proofs of genius..." Tobin Siebers, *The Romantic Fantastic*, 1984, p167

¹⁴⁹ This theme was taken up independently and thoroughly explored from a Foucauldian viewpoint in Paul Rutherford's *A World made Sexy: Freud to Madonna*, 2007. Rutherford has an international perspective and uses the evocative phrase, "The Theatre of the Id."

¹⁵⁰ Charles Madge & Barbara Weinberger *Art students observed*, London, Faber, 1973; Simon Frith & Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*, 1987; George Melly, *Revolt into Style: the Pop Arts in Britain*, Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1972; Alex Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things: The Development of a Postmodern Sensibility*, 1995

I was aware that some of this material would be seen as contentious by lawyers, and was likely to run into trouble in the process of being "legalised." I was also aware that my association with Westwood made it unlikely she would object to anything in the book. (I had been scrupulous with respect to other parties mentioned in the text). However, British lawyers at that pre-publication stage were not likely to take an equitable view of the text.

I handed my typescript to Bloomsbury just before Christmas 1995, when it was already booked into the printers. As luck would have it, the book was printed without being legally vetted. Indeed, it had been serialised in the *Sunday Mirror* over two weeks (January 7 and January 14, 2006) and been in book shops for over a month before Bloomsbury became aware of the situation. At that point they accepted my reassurances that all would be well. As indeed, it proved. ¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ The reviews were "mixed": *The Spectator*: "A deeply shocking book, an outrage, a scandal" [which Bloomsbury used as a tagline on the cover of the paperback edition]; Lynn Barber, *Daily Telegraph*, [after attacking me for the theoretical content] "There are pages of such dazzling insight as to make this book unforgettable" ; *i-D Magazine*: "Fred Vermorel... is a brilliantly scornful and scathingly funny writer, and he's set out to rewrite the received histories of both the '60s and punk. A wicked, malicious, brilliant book, as impatient and restless as its author and its subject" ; *Times Literary Supplement* [after castigating me for impertinence] "...a gripping three-hander about peer group rivalry, the negative fall-put from celebrity, the discomforts of friendship, and the vampiric nature of fame;" Janet Street-Porter, *The Times*: "This book will enrage, irritate and amuse you"; Ted Leventhal, *Booklist*: "Vermorel... has compiled a witty oral history of the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s and some of its most memorable heroes"; *The Independent on Sunday*: "Vermorel manages to convey Westwood's autocratic/anarchic world view ('I am an elitist') as vividly as her intriguing beliefs and theories about clothes... The fruity tone makes it enjoyable, fascinating, and mildly horrifying"; *Sunday Telegraph*: "Richly appropriate"; *Village Voice*: Fred Vermorel has produced his most mischievous deconstruction of the star biography yet... What emerges from Vermorel's wonderfully overheated mind is a portrait of a woman who is part monster, part visionary, and part charlatan;" *Publishers Weekly*: "Rock critic Vermorel (The Secret History of Kate Bush) here parlays a decades-long acquaintance with Westwood into an intriguing biography that is noteworthy for its focus on its subject's engagement with the intellectual currents that seized the countercultural imagination at various stages in her career. He also charts her stormy but creatively fertile relationship with McLaren and explores the evolution of her philosophy of fashion. Utilizing an unusual technique that works surprisingly well, Vermorel devotes the second

1997-2003, "Schools for Scandal," Paris, and supplementary
fashion-related pieces

In 1997 I was commissioned by the New York style magazine, Avenue, to write a piece on the influence of British art colleges on the fashion industry. I focused on the careers of John Galliano, Alexander McQueen and Vivienne Westwood.¹⁵²

From 2000 to 2003 I lived in Paris and taught fashion communication at the American University there. During this period I also wrote journalistic pieces for two Paris based fashion magazines, *Upstreet* and *Rebel*:

"Sound Architecture. When Design Helps Music Creation."
Upstreet, March 2002, p32.

"Wandering Around the City - after coming back to New York from Moscow, Andrei Vovk bounces back from ground zero,"
[profile of Russian architect Vovk], *Upstreet*, June 2002, pp24-5.

half of his narrative to an account of his own coming-of-age under the auspices of countercultural ideologies... Vermorel's self-scrutiny permits a sustained and highly insightful examination of the kinds of ideas that fuelled Westwood's own creative imagination. 'The secret which McLaren and Westwood learned by heart,' Vermorel concludes, is "how to paint your subjectivity in the codes of culture and foment an insurrection of like-minded solitudes"; and finally, Guisi Ferré in *Vogue* (January 1997): "The book comes as something of a shock for those of us accustomed to the polished gloss which normally coats the facts and work of everyday fashion folk, past masters at the art of attaching to themselves stories in which 'defeat', 'fatigue' and 'shame' are dirty words. No blood, sweat and tears here, thank you very much: just splendour and taffeta. Eccentric to the last, though, the lady in point talks about herself warts and all, describing an England that's as harsh and tough as in any Ken Loach movie: all poverty, social subsidies, conflict and energy. Plus that kamikaze-like rage which generated punk, of which she was the leading theorist - along with the inventor of the Sex Pistols, Malcolm McLaren, the man she once loved and who ultimately changed her."

<http://www.staffinternational.com/westwood/wespress/vwpress.html>
<Retrieved 15/07/00>

¹⁵² Fred Vermorel, "Schools for Scandal," Avenue, December, 1997 p10

"In Moscow, a unique studio for kids has been producing surreal and uncannily "adult" artefacts." [Project by Art Blya founder, Michel Labazov] *Upstreet*, June 2002, pp26-7.

"A Very Classy Dropout" [Profile of underground novelist and poet Alexander Trocchi], *Rebel*, Autumn/Winter 2003, [Bilingual article English/French], pp72-75.

In 2003 I contributed 15 entries to *From Couture to Chaos*, *Encyclopaedia of Fashion*, (Ed.) Paul Smith, Politikens Forlag, Denmark, 2002

Antimode. (Anti-fashion) p21

BIBA p48

Fetishism p135

Barbara Hulanicki, p183

Malcolm McLaren p236

Mods p254

Narcissism p269

New Romantics p272

Punk pp294-295

Sex Pistols p323

SEX/Seditionaries p323

Swinging London p347

Transvestism (Cross-dressing) p356

Voyeurism p386

Vivienne Westwood pp391-392

2002, "Fantastic Voyeur"

A commission from *Village Voice* enabled me to develop ideas around celebrity and biography, and to review some of my published work, through the concept of biography. I stressed how biography had become increasingly inflected by Romanticism and psychoanalysis, and also revealed for the first time the extent of my engagement with the Kate Bush project. ¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Fred Vermorel, "Fantastic Voyeur," *Village Voice Literary supplement*, October - November 2000, pp97-99, op cit

2004-5, IDM at Kingston University

From 2004 I collaborated with Teal Triggs on the IDM (interdisciplinary research module) initiative at Kingston Art College, which I then led after she left. I imported interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives on research in a variety of design and academic disciplines into the course. After the IDM initiative was abandoned at Kingston, I continued to research the area for my own work, with a particular interest in innovators in different media discussing their research methods - for example, the novelist Julian Barnes, the musician Pete Townshend, the artist, John Virtue, and the architect, Zaha Hadid. Some of this material has found its way into my published work. (It is also intended as a separate book on research practices in the cultural industries.)

2007, Kate Moss

In 2005 I approached the editor at Omnibus Books with an idea for a biography of the supermodel, Kate Moss.

I thought that my track record with this publisher (in particular, *The Secret History of Kate Bush*, 1983) would enable me a freer rein than with other publishers. Moss' career provided a test case of the intersections of fashion and the avant-garde and the intertwining of the "art school dance" and popular culture. Her career was also an example of the intensification of celebrity culture from the 1980s.

I had already interviewed Kate Moss (and other models), backstage at the Autumn 1995 Vivienne Westwood show in Paris ¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ "Les femmes connaissant pas leur coquetterie," Le Grand Hotel, Paris, 1995. These general and impromptu interviews were a tester for a book I was thinking of writing about the experiential side of being a fashion model. Tizer Bailey (at that point Westwood's preferred model) was the most lucid and perceptive model I talked with, and

In 1995-6 my attention had been caught by Kate Moss's then emerging liaison with the musician Pete Doherty. Doherty was biographically enacting a Romantic scenario of self-destruction in the mould of Sid Vicious and other Romantic anti-heroes. That made the relationship a suitable case for study. I was also intrigued by the connections between Moss, the rock establishment, and the YBAs. How did all that come about - how did it work? And, in a wider sense, how did her career work?

My "research question" was suggested by the photographer and Moss confidante, Juergen Teller. Teller confessed in the *New Statesman*, "I'm astonished about the Kate Moss story, full stop. I don't quite understand it. ...to get to be such an icon, to have exploded like a rocket - I don't really get it."

My strategy was to unpick Moss' career and chart her ascent through specific contacts and images.

I began from the outside, working in towards her unusually closed circle, interviewing former friends and colleagues, paparazzo and fashion photographers, neighbours and family members, backers and associates, and researching her finances and real estate portfolio.

While much of the relevant press material was digitalised I accessed non-digitised material from the extraordinary hardcopy archive kept by Edda Tasiemka. Many leads developed from this which had been missed by journalists reliant on digitalised sources. In general, I treated the Kate Moss story as an economic and cultural case study rather than a "fairy story," exploring what it revealed about the under-researched industry of fashion modelling.

Around six months into researching this book the notorious "Cocaine Kate" scandal occurred. Moss then absented herself from

material from several interviews I subsequently did with Tizer Bailey featured in *Fashion and Perversity*.

Britain for several months. This meant she was unavailable for "questioning" either to Scotland Yard or to a putative biographer. It also resulted in several sources closing down. It also meant that my editor began to put significant pressure on me to deliver a typescript quickly, so he could capitalise on publicity surrounding the case.

More ominously, it meant that every word in the book would now be subjected to an almost paranoid degree of legal scrutiny.

In the event I had more contact with the libel lawyer Philip Conway (of Davenport Lyons) than with the Omnibus editor. Conway began his first libel report with the admonition, "... I have spoken to my friend at The Sun who tells me that even yesterday, threats were made against the newspaper in relation to material that was to be published. I cannot over-emphasise the reliance Kate Moss places on her lawyers who are extremely pro-active."

At an early stage, Conway began acting like an *ex officio* editor, requiring that I rewrite sections and scrawling comments on the typescript like "tone it down!" I objected as an author to being told to adjust my "tone" - tone being essential to authorial strategy (and pride). But Conway was adamant. ¹⁵⁵

Conway also sabotaged mind games I had intended to play with Kate Moss's celebrity. For example, I had obtained items of Moss' underwear and subjected it to laboratory analysis for ancestral MDNA. (This is not the same as DNA and carries no medical or similarly intimate information. ¹⁵⁶) I then used the information obtained in an account of her genealogy going back

¹⁵⁵ He also excised paragraphs which were not legally contentious with comments like "Is this necessary?" and deleted previously published material he appeared to find in poor taste - like Noel Gallagher's well documented quip about "the Primrose Hill set" being, "The whores on the Hill." Some of his interventions seemed curious. For example, when I commented that Richard Branson had offered to act as "amanuensis" for Moss' projected autobiography, Conway corrected "amanuensis" to "artistic assistant."]

¹⁵⁶ In any case, the items had been handled by several people, so it was matter of speculation whose MDNA was analysed.

to before the ice age. (As in the Kate Bush project, the idea here was to throw into doubt (or confusion) the "epistemology" of stardom.) But Conway thought this implicated the text (and hence the publisher) in "handling stolen goods." After argument, my MDNA conceit was allowed to remain. But I was obliged to rephrase so it could be read as a facetious claim - rather than a facetious fact.

Most crucially of all, the lawyer repeatedly invoked issues of "privacy." The notion of privacy as it is currently being defined and redefined in UK law is increasingly burdensome for authors. ¹⁵⁷

The issue was especially fraught because of Naomi Campbell's use of privacy legislation to sue the *Daily Mirror* in 2004. In that case, even though Campbell's case was effectively thrown out by the lower court, and she was eventually awarded by the House of Lords what were seen as nominal costs against the *Mirror*, she was still able to burden the *Mirror* with costs of over £1 million. ¹⁵⁸ The lesson, clearly, was: don't mess with supermodels.

At several points I thought I should abandon the project. But apart from financial considerations (I was not at that time salaried) I thought I should see the project through, for better or worse, and push what opportunities I could find to develop the themes that interested me. As it is, the text is the most compromised I have published.

¹⁵⁷ The legal right to privacy has recently been imported from EU legislation to English law - which has no such concept of legislated privacy. In Europe this right of privacy is counterbalanced by the right of free expression - again, there is no such legislated right in English law. The result is an unending debate through English case law precedents and a situation where lawyers feel obliged to alert publishers to every possibility of infringement, even when these are surreal.

¹⁵⁸ This was overturned in January 2011 by the European Court of Human Rights which decided the amount was disproportionate. The *Mirror* will however, have to apply for compensation from the UK government.

I was still able however, to chart the links and explore the chances that led to Moss's celebrity. I was also able to illuminate links between fashion, celebrity and the media.

Additionally, the book also gave me an opportunity to: unravel in detail (and thereby partly demystify) themes around Moss's career (like her spurious connection with Croydon), to analyse the politics and economics around the celebrification of the fashion industry, to chart the creation of factoids in fashion journalism (and how these proliferate in cyberspace), and to illustrate the intimate connections between fashion media and the fashion industry through the details of her career. I also attempted to deconstruct familiar "anorexia" and "heroin chic" fashion discourses as well as the Romantic dramaturgy of drug "addiction" that operates in popular culture, and to explain the intersections of artists, designers and musicians in her biography, as a self-consciously bohemian milieu.

In particular, I established that Kate Moss, supermodel, was essentially created by Corinne Day, who marked out the stylistic parameters future photographers would refer to again and again. But it was Mario Sorrenti who copied and then masculinised Day's erotic version of a marginalised (edgy) teenager which "sold" Kate Moss to Calvin Klein, and who in turn, projected Moss to covergirl status and eventual stardom.

Finally, I gathered material - partly through Freedom of Information requests to Scotland Yard, which suggested that despite protestations to the contrary, the British police may have been politically leant on to not pursue the "Cocaine Kate" case with due vigilance, by an Establishment fearful of creating another "Redlands" bust fiasco.¹⁵⁹

With the second (updated) edition of the book, I was able to restructure the text a little more to my original intentions, and also to smuggle in previously barred material.

¹⁵⁹ I have also developed the above themes in lectures and seminars.

2008, Girls Aloud and the CPS

In 2008 I wrote a piece for the online magazine *The Register*, about the then impending prosecution of Darryn Walker under the Obscene Publications Act, 1959, for posting a pornographic fantasy about the pop band, Girls Aloud, on the Internet. The editor asked me to context this with a brief explanation of the areas covered by Starlust.¹⁶⁰

I sketched the transmission and promotion of pop bands through the Internet, from the first major band with an Internet fan base, Hanson. I also suggested that the prosecution might be difficult and unwise. (In the event the CPS abandoned the case.)

2010, "Tracey Emin's Front Door"

In 2010 I contributed a piece to *Kiosk Magazine*.¹⁶¹ This was intended as a pastiche of the research process delivered in a "Wikipedia" voice. Wikipedia seems to have popularised a punctilious, earnest and gauche tone, particularly in its dutiful appropriation of the scholarly apparatus. I tried to bring out some of the comical aspects of Wikipedia erudition, tintured with what Bourdieu called "the solecisms of over-correctness one hears in the speeches delivered at agricultural shows and fireman's galas."¹⁶² The piece was one of a series I have been writing intermittently.

¹⁶⁰ Fred Vermorel, *Starlust: love, hate and celebrity fantasies*, *The Register*, November 2008, http://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/11/12/fred_vermorel_girls_aloud/ <Retrieved 21/01/2011>

¹⁶¹ Fred Vermorel, "Tracey Emin's Front Door," *Kiosk Magazine*, 04, pp12-21

¹⁶² Pierre Bourdieu, "The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges," *Social Science Information*, 16, December, 1977, p658

2010, Death of Malcolm McLaren

In 2010 Malcolm McLaren died. The previous year I had approached him with a view idea to collaboration on a biographical exploration of his career, particularly in relation to the punk adventure. He had previously asked me to assist in biographical pieces but I had demurred as I thought his sometimes bombastic viewpoint detracted from his real achievements.

In my email of 2009 I reminded him of this and also suggested that a corrective was needed, since the generation of students I was now teaching had all heard of Vivienne Westwood and even his son, the lingerie entrepreneur, Joseph Corre, but not of Malcolm McLaren.

There was no response and I later realised that at that time McLaren was already aware of his terminal diagnosis. (Fiercely proud, he told no one). After he died I thought I should counter the celebratory, and as I saw it, shallow, tributes, with a piece more reflective of the man - warts and all - but as the French say, "people always have the vices of their virtues" (and vice versa). My agent, Leslie Gardner, approached the editor at GQ and I was commissioned to write a retrospective piece, "Malcolm McLaren," GQ, January 2011, pp204-211.

Conclusion

My published work has experimented with tones and approaches. It has generally been based on interviews and archival research. It has explored methodological, cultural and legal issues around the study and transmission of popular culture.

The focus of the work has been interdisciplinary. Popular culture has been explored using categories and concepts derived from cultural history, ethnography, and social history.

The work has consistently adapted to opportunities created by electronic and digital resources. These developments have enabled me to explore and connect with research in diverse disciplines.

I have tried to marry research and publication with pedagogical outcomes. One concern has been to emphasise to students how the quality of research is intrinsic to the quality of the text.

An associated interest is the dynamics and performativity of research in design and the visual arts and music, as well as in academia.

The work has aimed to fuse studio-based and academic interests and to use first hand experience in the music industry and in fashion and design related journalism, as touchstones for effective and accessible communication.

One issue highlighted by the present review has been the emphasis on collage and juxtaposition. This has advantages as well as problematic aspects. The advantages and difficulties of employing a reflexive and biographical position are also addressed.

All these issues are being developed in my continuing research into the cultural history of fandom in the 19th century: Romantic fanhood as, in Tom Moles phrase, "a hermeneutic of intimacy."¹⁶³

Another strand of my current work is a book length study of bohemian subcultures in 1950s London. This explores connections between bohemian milieus and gay subculture: the intersecting micro-worlds of fashion and design, theatre and show business. It also provides an account of 1950s London bohemia based on lesser (or hitherto un)-researched figures, organisations and events. This work has built on interests and methods consistent with previous work: interviewing, research in primary archives, and locating and exploring private archives, (some of which have been passed on to the V&A).

¹⁶³ Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity. Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy*, 2007

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