AN UNSTABLE REFERENCE

A SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an insight into the relationship between music and language, by providing an analysis of text-based discourses around a newly emerging form of music: 'post-rock'. In the process of providing an in-depth account of the discourses that construct this music, the study demonstrates the continued relevance of a sociological approach to a consideration of aspects of human life, such as music, previously conceptualised as belonging to a realm 'beyond the social' or 'beyond the rational'.

The thesis takes its founding point from a critique of post-structuralist thought, noting an inherent contradiction in that tradition's attempt to subvert claims to rationality both by privileging an essentialist conception of the irrational (for instance, the state of madness, the body, music) and by contending that all reality (presumably including the irrational) is intrinsically linguistically constructed. This study provides a defence of the sociological tradition against post-structuralist criticism by providing a sociological analysis of an aspect of human life (the form of music known as 'post-rock') conceived as beyond rationality and irreducible to societal elements, utilizing the methodology of discourse analysis. Hence it is shown that sociology remains a highly instructive discipline even when the object of study selected is an extreme instance of presumed irrationality and asociality, and when the only relevant approach is a discourse-based focus. Critically, to provide a subcultural analysis (such as those completed by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) is impossible in the light of the substantive area being considered, as post-rock is a phenomenon as 'insubstantial', as fluid and transient, as any in contemporary society (the society sometimes labelled 'postmodern'). In this sense, this study parallels the 'post-subculturalist' work of some scholars in the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, emphasising the importance of the local, the rôie of the media and, above all, the significance of language.

This research identifies a number of discourses that construct post-rock, noting the particular prominence of discourses of insubstantiality and indescribability, and the usage of forms of discourse which can be construed as akin to a public expression of a private language. By, firstly, highlighting the use of such discursive forms across
a spectrum of individual writers and publication types, and the factors in common in
these protestations of the impossibility of representing the music to others in a way
they can understand (i.e., socially and rationally) and how the discourse of
indescribability is itself a socially established form of description, and by, secondly,
showing how the discourses of post-rock solidify over time, and become socially
agreed upon, the richness of data a sociology of language can offer is affirmed.
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between music and language, focusing on the genre of "post-rock" in popular music. The thesis will provide an extremely detailed examination of the discourses which construct post-rock. This study will in addition outline the theoretical importance of the research to sociology as a discipline, and specify in some detail why the particular focus taken in this thesis is likely to prove particularly fruitful in the light of those theoretical concerns. In so doing, it is hoped that resistance to the study both of music and what can be described as the sociology of jouissance will be shown to be misguided, and that an investigation of such topics is very far from being merely the consequence of an academic fad or personal dilettantism. The suitability of considering in particular the aggregate of sounds and approaches that constitute post-rock will be shown. The report will therefore begin with a (very) concise review of certain central theoretical problems inherent in the contemporary sociological project, and how certain thinkers have attempted to answer them, subsequently attempting to illuminate the sociological purpose of this research in this light.

For a number of years certain critiques of aspects of the sociological project have become increasingly apparent and difficult to ignore. The anti-rationalistic/Enlightenment thinking notably of Foucault, Wittgenstein, certain feminist and postmodernist scholars have led to important doubts about the efficacy of pursuing 'pure' knowledge which have become impossible to put aside. As a consequence the idea that knowledge is intrinsically liberatory, that the intellect can change the world alone, by providing 'facts' which will somehow change the way people perceive features of their society, has come to seem more and more absurd.

To the discipline of sociology, I would contend, this lack of a role for the 'discovery' of knowledge in social change is extremely problematic indeed. If we are unable to see the world the way it 'really' is, but rather are faced with a sea of competing interpretations, how can we coherently argue for any meaningful change? In fact, greater attention placed on the 'local', the move from being 'legislators' to 'interpreters' in Bauman's (1992) terminology, and the continued ability of sociology to be able to argue that what is assumed to be 'natural' is in fact socially and
historically contingent, means that the study of human beings in societies remains highly pertinent. Meanwhile, the contention of think-tanks such as Demos that more people than for a number of years now believe in the efficacy of communal as opposed to merely individualistic solutions to problems suggests people still believe in something called society, despite Thatcher's urgings.

A perhaps even tougher problem awaits sociology however. Simply stated, this is the idea that "facts are useless in emergencies" (lyric from "Crosseyed and Painless" by Talking Heads, 1980). The point is that for social change to come about, it is not enough just to state the 'facts' and watch revolution ensue. On the contrary, it seems people must be engaged at a much deeper level. Otherwise the situations that befell the attempted Communist revolutions earlier this century, which either became oppressive because an intellectual or other elite vanguard attempted to lead people somewhere they were not willing to go, or simply failed altogether due to a lack of public empathy for the campaigns, can be the only result. Clearly, the people themselves must be the initiators of any change, more likely unconscious gradual social evolution than total revolution, as opposed to the intellectuals. Yet if this so, and one cannot see any alternative without great risk of some kind of repeat of near-totalitarianism, then we are faced with another seemingly insurmountable obstacle in the way of social change. In the process of historical struggle, in attempts at social change, one common problem seems to emerge - namely that for any set of oppositional discourses to gain much ground against prevailing 'language-games', it seems that they always become as unidimensional, as limiting, as fundamentally incapable of accepting alternatives and basically life-denying as the system of thought they were trying to replace. For anything to gain mass acceptance, it may be necessary for it to become restricted in scope to a very particular identity, for otherwise it cannot be properly consumed/ empathised with by people who quite frankly do not have the resources (primarily time but others too) to become acquainted with the myriad possibilities which this new rupture in the presently existing patterns of thought and behaviour might offer. If this is an over-generalisation for mass movements in general, it has certainly been true of music scenes. 'Punk' began more as a defiant attitude, the idea that anyone could get up on stage and do it, yet degenerated into a very particular style of guitar playing and clearly identifiable look which could well be described as a uniform. The same is equally true of 'psychedelia' (literally, to make the mind, or
soul, manifest), 'Industrial' music and 'Indie' (what started, due to similar origins to punk, as a statement of defiance of the mainstream - being on an independent label - with consequently stunningly eclectic musics emerging from a variety of labels, but declined into a term representative of a particular 'retro' approach to the guitar and conventional band line-up circa 1986 and eventually became little more than a marketing tool; c.f. also the use of the term 'alternative' music by, especially, MTV).

Part of my original interest in post-rock lay precisely in that similar processes appeared to be setting in, but that the term also remained one which incorporates a considerable mixture of sounds and approaches which highlight its continued vitality at the same time as the discourses surrounding it grow ever firmer and less tolerant of diversity. As will be shown in the chapter tracing the meta-discourses of post-rock, ultimately exactly the same fate did befall post-rock, as the scope of the term narrowed very decidedly.

One optimistic possibility for change which eludes this grave difficulty of rationalistic approaches always seeming to grow intolerant of diversity, according to some, lies in the revolutionary nature of desire. In general, in our society in recent times, there has been a shift to an emphasis on play as a source of identity as opposed to work, or even for that sense of self to itself become more fractured and contingent on particular situations (a switch from the 'institutional' self to the 'impulsive' self, in Turner's [1976] words). Perhaps as a consequence of the declining faith in reason and science, as the idea of pure untainted knowledge appears increasingly to be a chimera and the dangers of the unrestrained pursuit of truth and technological innovation become more obvious (if we can assume there really are such obvious dangers, or are our fears unfounded prejudice rooted in a new language-game which is unable itself to view matters from a more balanced vantage point?), we now view emotion as opposed to reason as that which makes us identifiably human. Such a perspective of living for - or rather in - the moment, seems to make increasing sense if, for instance, employment is increasingly contract-based as opposed to permanent (and this remains a contested matter, as it has certainly been argued that the decline in contract permanency is empirically dubious), and indeed such structural changes in society seem to be having an effect on the attitudes of those whose employment is contract-based (c.f. "Generation X and the new work ethic" in The Time Squeeze, Demos; also in Cannon, 1997). In this light, it is perhaps best to be wary of the new irrationalist
thinkers (Lyotard, Deleuze, Barthes, amongst others), as their faith in desire and emotion may well be itself, rather like the faith in reason and science of the Enlightenment, heavily dependent on social changes and a 'postmodern' economy which employs more people in emotion work (the air stewardesses considered by Hochschild (1983) in her classic The Managed Heart, for instance) and leisure industries (and in less permanent posts), and where authority figures (the so-called 'voice of reason'), from politicians to parents to scientists, are less respected. One might also be wary of the trend in social science methodology to believe that in-depth, qualitative interviews, as desired by the symbolic interactionist school, are more likely to get at 'the truth' than the structured approach favoured by the straw person that is positivism, born of the same basic preference for the humanistic discourse which views too much structuring as an invalid approach. (Of course, although interview data can also be used in more constructionist forms of analysis which are not beholden to uncovering any 'truth'). Silverman (1993, p.95-6) convincingly argues that the preference for interviews which allow respondents to use their 'unique ways of defining the world' may "derive not from sociological insight but from a widespread cultural assumption", and points out our fascination with interviews in the media which "aim to deliver us immediate 'personal' experience [when] what they (we) want is simple repetition of familiar tales", then speculating "Perhaps this is part of the post-modern condition. Maybe we feel people are at their most authentic when they are, in effect, reproducing a cultural spirit".

Nevertheless, at one level, the ideas of the irrationalists are extremely seductive. The idea that desire or 'jouissance' will be more of a recipe for social change than rationally planned measures, rests precisely on their supposed freedom from attachment to restrictive 'language-games', which would mean that any oppositional tendency inherent in the discourse will be swamped by its either being fundamentally a product of the present socio-cultural status quo, or as a result of its being forced to be interpretable in the terms of prevailing norms, with the only alternative being to risk ossification by virtue of its needing to be comprehensible to a mass audience, or simply to wither away in the shadow of obscurity forever. The concept of the power of emotion, of some kind of personal involvement in a project, leading to their being some extra quality which purely rationalistic approaches lack, certainly has an 'intuitive' appeal. From the idea of the use of certain drugs as a means
to 'altered states', to other worlds previously unseen, to the emphasis on the realm of emotion in certain religions as way of encountering the divine (arguably on the increase in new age religions and 'Creation spirituality'), to the argument of the philosopher Hume who contended that emotions precede reason (one of the first to doubt the purity of human knowledge), even to changing working practices emphasising the importance of morale (rather than a focus solely on productivity), the basic idea that emotion, as opposed to mere facts, is the way to get results is all pervasive. Adorno’s belief that certain works of art, including musical ones, could negate the ideology of the bourgeois society, and provide a view onto utopia (even if contemporaneous music failed to do so, in his opinion), and his own equivalent aim of "demythification, freeing men [sic] from the bondage of fetishised thought which took on the appearance of second nature" (Buck-Morss, 1972, p.140) also mirrors this.

In the following section, I shall continue to outline in more detail the theoretical importance of researching the subject of what has been conceptualised as the 'non-social', or jouissance, for sociology. Critically, I will also assert the problematic nature of so doing, arguing that it is critical to consider the way ideas of, for instance, pleurisability, or descriptions of a newly evolving musical genre, are discursively constructed in society, rather than beginning with an essentialised view of pleasure as a given before commencing analysis, as Lyotard and Barthes appear to. It is precisely on the subject of how aspects of human life - such as music - which are held to exist in a realm beyond the spheres of the social and the rational, are actually discursively constructed, that this thesis will focus.
THEORY

The theoretical importance of the ‘non-social’ for sociology, and the significance of music

It may be argued that the three core areas under consideration in this research do not belong within the sociological tradition. Whilst the study of discourses and of the relationship between language and society more generally has at least gained a foothold in particular branches of the subject, music remains very much a poor relation even in the sister discipline of cultural studies. The concept of ‘jouissance’, which will be discussed in some depth later, is particularly problematic for sociology.

Fundamentally, the essence of sociological research has operated within a paradigm of rationality. The discipline was born from a specific socio-historical background, and was in the main dependent on a world-view which presumed objective investigation into supposedly clearly identifiable universal phenomena was a possibility. For some time now, there has been a growing tradition which has stressed the need to discern the language-games and beliefs of the subjects of research, and which accepts that the imposition of prior theoretical concerns by academics without reference to the world-views of those being researched is no longer viable. As the emphasis changes in our society to a belief of many working in sociology of the basic incorrigibility of divergent perspectives and an increasing distrust more generally of science and unrestrained rationality, with an accompanying faith that it is emotion, not reason which makes us human\(^1\), a sociology which fails to attend to this changing social climate risks obsolescence. If sociology is to concentrate on those matters which are central to the concerns of the people being studied, as our increasing awareness of the constructed nature of knowledge seems to imply we must, rather than relying on theoretical presumptions born in the academy, then we cannot continue

\(^1\) This is a marked change from Enlightenment times, when men (the gendered discourse is deliberate) were distinguished from animals by virtue of their reason (and males, Europeans and the higher social classes from other groups in the same way). Consider by contrast the vast number of science fiction scenarios which stress the fundamental emotionality of humans in contrast to the rigorous, uncaring hard logic of overly rational aliens of varying types. I would love just to see one film with aliens being shocked at just how rational and unemotional humans are - maybe that’s why we have no official account of human-alien interaction despite the vastness of the universe implying the likelihood of life ‘out there’ : the aliens have never had the inclination to develop technology or had such a compulsive desire for knowledge that they’ve wished to explore the rest of space (or maybe they’re deliberately avoiding beings as cold and formal as us)!
with a study of issues simply because they are more amenable to study by our presently existing analytic tools moulded from times when faith in rationalism was stronger. The obsession with looking at song lyrics at the expense of considering other features of popular music smacks in particular of this academic arrogance, which concentrates on a sphere which can be more easily investigated by already established research methodologies and be more 'meaningfully' analysed because the explicitness of the verbal statement of a lyric provides the comfortable illusion that here is a definitive revelation of a song's/ group's/ genre's true nature. This overlooks the rather crucial point that for many fans and bands the lyric (if there is one) is usually not the major focus of attention, and virtually never the only one. It is partly for this reason that the sociology of popular music is often ridiculed by music writers, despite the fact that they too are basically engaged in the difficult business of analysing and writing about music.

None of this should suggest that sociology should lose its critical edge and degenerate into some kind of glib repetition of the views of the subjects it researches. Stressing that one should consider those issues that appear most germane to people does not mean one has to view such concerns in the same way as they do. For crucially, those areas of human life that have been previously presumed (both by academics and in terms of wider cultural prejudices) to exist in some rarefied realm somewhere 'beyond the social' - areas such as music (both as an art form and as a source of pleasure) - themselves cannot be treated merely as a 'given'. Turner has argued in relationship to the concept of pleasure, "it is time now for the use of the term pleasure to be scrutinised more carefully, for its varieties of power and effect to be defined more scrupulously" (1990, p.228). The concept of pleasure is particularly significant in illuminating aspects of this research, as it has become a central but imprecise concept in the armoury of postmodernist approaches to popular culture. The privileging of pleasure over ideology has corrected prejudicial reactions to the popular, but has led to an evacuation of politics from cultural studies analyses which has arguably yet to be clearly justified.

For, if cultural taste is not simply a reflection of ideology or economic forces, neither can consumption be made to rest on psychological categories, on a biological description of human nature, or pleasure be too hastily reduced to an aspect of the 'unconscious', as psychoanalytic perspectives suggest. Within social psychology,
social constructivist views of the nature of emotion that understand emotion to be socially constituted syndromes or transitory social roles emphasise the constitutive role of language in the construction of emotion, feeling, and desire.

A parallel may be found in the debate between Foucault, who considered (at least in his middle period, when his work had important structuralist resonances) that cultures construct desire (that power plays an integrally productive and creative role in the construction of desire), and Deleuze and Guattari, who argue that, from an essentialist conception of bodies and desire, that our society represses desire. Lash’s (1985) ideal type of cultural postmodernity, derived from his consideration of the work of Deleuze and Lyotard and early and late Foucault, suggests that postmodern art draws on uncoded and semi-coded libido in the unconscious to break with the formalism of modernity, the intensity of desire transmitted to the consumer increasing proportionally as the work of art deviates from the representational. The effect on the consumer or audience is equally through the unconscious according to this perspective (ibid, p.19). Clearly, there are some major methodological difficulties associated with Foucauldian forms of analysis, concerns surrounding the problems involved in operationalising these concepts, and in assessing what counts as evidence for a particular analytic claim. This debate highlights a contradiction at the very heart of the postmodern critique of the emphasis on reason and meaning that is integral to the Enlightenment project and to modernism. Fundamentally, there remains a central tension in poststructuralist thought, “in which a refusal to identify any realm of true meaning and reality conflicts with the desire to privilege the underlying world of chaos, force and flow” (Plant, 1992, p.109).

From this angle, the relevance of researching musical meanings and pleasures seems especially fruitful. Music remains under-researched in comparison to cinema and television in terms of sociological studies of popular culture, but more significantly offers particularly promising material for a consideration of whether one can speak so confidently of the existence of a realm of irrationality beyond the social sphere (outside language, in the unconscious, underneath the signifier). As Bourdieu has written, “music is bound up with ‘interiority’” (1994, p.19), echoing Weber’s similar view that “music is the ‘pure’ art par excellence. It says nothing and has nothing to say ... Music represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world” (discussed in Scaff, 1993).
Deleuze's partner in the irrationalist classic *Anti-Oedipus*, Guattari, has observed that the "the abstract machines of music [are] perhaps the most non-signifying and de-territorializing of all" (quoted in Grossberg, 1984, p.102), and the influence of psychoanalysis is evident in the contention that "music would seem to have... a special relation to the pre-verbal, and thus to the Imaginary or more exactly to something like Kristeva's notion of the semiotic" (Beverley, 1989, p.45). This is a reflection of the traditional view of music which conceptualises its appeal as transcending the social realm. Such words may not be intended for popular music, but they indicate why music is under-researched in social analysis (it supposedly occupies an area beyond the social), and why it is precisely such an important field for research for the purposes outlined above (it is exactly in those areas which have been conceptualised as beyond the social that I am interested).

Perhaps more significantly, this attitude towards music is far from being confined to major names in social thought, but is also reflected in the discourses in and about pop music utilised by its main participants. A stress on sensation and feeling has been observed in such discourses by a number of sociologists, and has been associated by some with Romanticism. The ethic of feeling, of primal pleasure, of the loss of the conscious self, it has been argued, is paramount in popular music. Pattison's study of song lyrics and interviews with pop stars led him to contend that "Rock is a popular adaptation of Romanticism's pantheist universe of feeling... In Rock's primitive, rationality is secondary to emotion" (1987, p.93). Stratton argues that there is an "extreme elaboration of Romantic ideology in the discourse of popular music... that a generalised, as opposed to a self-conscious, Romanticism pervades the praxis of popular music" (1983, p.147). However, clearly such comments remain at a very abstract and general level.

The central importance of considering that which current cultural norms construct as existing 'beyond the social' can now be summarised. Firstly, the realm of the 'beyond the social' is expanding, as a loss of faith in the possibility of discovering objective social structural patterns (the increasing suspicion of science, and, on a more theoretical level, the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism in the academies) begins to take hold, with the possibility of a sharp decline in the status of sociology and social research as a possible outcome. However, the 'beyond the social' realm is seen to be growing in another, quite distinct way, as cultural norms prescribing that
we see ourselves as spontaneous and emotional creatures as opposed to rational and structured ones (the "we are all unique individuals" argument, born of Romanticism), whereby the essence of humanity is perceived as being marked more by biological and psychological factors rather than social and rational ones. Such norms can, ironically, be seen as related to changes at the macro-social level, as related to the development of consumer capitalism (rather than being production-oriented), to a stress on the pleasures of consumption (rooted in supposedly innate urges - at least as far as much of the enjoyment to be gained from music is concerned, an argument to be critiqued later)

Music occupies a particularly significant position in these developments. Seen as the ultimate art, because of its non-social nature (as the comments quoted previously testify), and also supposedly having a biological aspect (that certain of its features resonate physically and physiologically with the human body cross-culturally), music is doubly conceptualised as existing 'beyond the social'. The fast-moving world of popular music - with its rapid turnover of movements mirroring the manner in which the most rapidly changing parts of contemporary society (and hence supposedly least related to clear structural elements) undergo numerous small revolutions - allows one to trace the developments within a given genre within a relatively short timespan, and provide an insight into how the relationship between music and language relating to one genre develops over time. This then allows us to consider how the rational sphere of the written word (necessarily considered and reflected upon, unlike speech) relates to the (hypothesised as) non-rational (and hence non-social) sphere of music.

Theories of 'going beyond rationality': the concept of jouissance

This section will provide an initial brief overview of some theoretical perspectives on the pleasures of popular culture, but concentrating primarily on the work of the French thinker Barthes, and how his ideas relate specifically to music. Pleasure is significant, as it illuminates the concept of the 'beyond the rational' (and therefore that of the 'beyond the social'). Theoretical approaches to pleasure are extremely diverse, and generally share one prominent feature, namely that they tend to be insufficiently grounded in empirical work, perhaps reflecting the tendency to view pleasure as a 'given'. The one exception to this empirical lacuna is the work done in
the burgeoning field of the sociology of emotion, which will be discussed in more depth later, and the development of a sociology of the body offers some promising ground too.

Discussions of the pleasurable of popular culture have in certain cases returned to work which had quite different purposes in mind when written some time ago, as reference has been made to Bakhtin’s theory of “carnivalesque” pleasures and to Bataille’s “pleasures of excess”. Bourdieu’s classic work on “taste” (Distinction, 1984) is more genuinely sociological, but his precise focus - taste as opposed to pleasure - is not quite the same, taste having a more obviously social basis. The writings of Baudrillard, in which he contends for the preferability of passive or intensive consumption which favours a loss of the self (which he rather stereotypically describes as ‘feminine’ consumption), have actually been used as the basis of an account of the pleasurable of a particular genre of popular music. According to Melechi, there is much Baudrillard, who in his tour of America “cares little for the social and historical, [who] has come to chill out”, has in common with those indulging in “the pleasures of loss and abandonment” in Ibiza and through Acid House, for the trance-dance [in Acid House] moves the body beyond the spectacle of the ‘pose’ and the sexuality (‘romance’) of the look, into a ‘cyber-space’ of musical sound, where one attempts to implode (get into) and disappear” (1993, p.32-3). Doubts must remain about the generalisability of Melechi’s account, for he provides little in the way of evidence of methodological rigour, and no clear approach to assigning priority to a particular account. Frith and McRobbie (1978) utilized theories about the socialisation processes of adolescence (and how the construction of adolescent gender roles relate to the formation of subject-positions with regard to pleasure), whilst their work was criticized from a structuralist perspective by Laing and Taylor (1979). All of these perspectives offer alternative ways of grounding a theory of pleasure which does not reduce pleasure entirely to being a function of ideology or of social structural factors, as Marxist perspectives (usually pessimistically) and subcultural outlooks (generally more optimistically) tend to. Nevertheless, I would argue that they are all in essence flawed. They appear too abstract (Bakhtin, Bataille and Baudrillard), or their social aspects are too overt (how one is socialised, prevailing notions of good taste) implying they are not truly related to the pleasure of the moment, but to factors mitigating what one feels comfortable
with. The clear difference between these two types of pleurability - the transgressive joy of the moment and the succour we gain from enjoying something which confirms us in our regular lives - is best highlighted by an examination of the writings of Barthes.

The work of Roland Barthes has come to play an especially prominent part in theorizing about pleasure, and about the pleasures of listening to music in particular. He is the only significant contemporary thinker to write an entire book on the topic of pleasure - The Pleasure of the Text - and his provision of a basic typology of pleasures, namely "jouissance" and "plaisir", has proven influential. Perhaps Barthes is most interesting in his attempts to utilise but also to surpass the ideas around pleasure originating from psychoanalytic and poststructuralist perspectives. Yet, as we shall see, in his dependence on concepts incorporated from that intellectual heritage, there is much one can criticise in his position, which may also indicate some significant limitations which ANY theory of pleasure may necessarily possess.

That there is in the work of Barthes on this subject a subtlety most other commentators working purely at the theoretical level are lacking can be shown in the way that some of those directly involved with popular music have readily accepted his terminology and ideas. Though Barthes’ own empirical work seems very limited - his work on the pleasures of the text is mostly on literary delights and he ignores popular music, concentrating solely on “higher” art forms - and his methodology, to the extent he has one, is little more than a descriptive account of his own subjective reactions, nonetheless his theories have been used considerably both by academics such as Middleton (1990) and by writers for popular music magazines, from the more highbrow The Wire to student-oriented publications such as Melody Maker. Indeed, there even exists an Industrial music group named “Jouissance”.

Why has Barthes’ often complex and dense prose had such a wide appeal? It may be that in distinguishing types of pleasure rather than simply imposing one homogeneous definition of what pleasure is, he has attempted to find a way of resolving, or at least rendering more explicit, the fundamental conflict between the more optimistic and more pessimistic views of the place of pleasure in (post-)modern society. For discussions of pleasure’s role in contemporary society have often degenerated into either perceiving it as some kind of sedative - the opium of the masses that has come to displace religion in that function - preventing some kind of
collective awareness of oppressive conditions and subsequent revolutionary activity (as certain Marxists have suggested, perhaps most famously Adorno), or alternatively as something itself innately revolutionary because going beyond present social boundaries and culturally acquired identities (the work of Deleuze, Marcuse and some postmodernists). In Barthes’ work, “plaisir” - “a pleasure linked to cultural enjoyment and identity, to the cultural enjoyment of identity, to a homogenizing movement of the ego” (1977, p.9), “extraordinary ego-reinforcement (by fantasy), the unconscious muffled” (1990, p.51) - is however explicitly contrasted with “jouissance”, which is “a radically violent pleasure which shatters - dissipates, loses - that cultural identity, that ego” (1977, op. cit.). The idea of plaisir brings out very clearly those aspects of pleasure to be derived from popular culture which the early Frankfurt School so chastise - the tendency to homogenize, to confirm the status quo and thus render it seemingly inviolable, and allow any utopian aspirations to be dissipated into individual fantasy. Jouissance, the term so beloved of the more intellectually informed (in the sense that they occasionally reference academic theory) popular music publications as it coincides with their own ideologies, on the other hand is rather the potent pleasures which supposedly burst asunder the limits of individual identity and be situated at a place somewhere beyond the social (such “desire is revolutionary”, Deleuze would have said).  

2 The term “jouissance” may, ironically, possess even greater potency in English because we have no exactly corresponding term in our language, hence its strangeness, the sense of its being something beyond our world-view, language, society, is augmented yet further. As Barthes’ translator notes, “English lacks a word able to carry the range of meaning in the term jouissance which includes enjoyment in the sense of a legal or social possession (enjoy certain rights, enjoy a privilege), pleasure, and, crucially, the pleasure of sexual climax” (1977). As a result of this lack of clear correspondence, much is often made of the term in English-language commentaries, and one can almost feel the pleasure often a text in descriptions of jouissance as, for instance, “bliss, convulsive ecstasy, a “little death” of the individual and of meaning” by the music journalist Reynolds (1990, p.9), as the writer graduates from a state of heavenly happiness (or “bliss” - this is a term which though used throughout the American translation of The Pleasure of the Text is strongly criticised as a misrepresentation of jouissance by the translator of Image-Music-Text for it “brings with it connotations of religious and social contentment... which damagingly weaken the force of the original” [op. cit.] to one of extreme and uncontrollable physical and potentially sexual movement (“convulsive ecstasy”), finally climaxing to leave one in a state of loss, of dissipation, of “degree zero” to use a Barthesian term from another context. Whether this is a particularly masculine view of pleasure is a question some feminist thinkers may wish to raise. The sexual aspect of jouissance should certainly not be overlooked - its precise translation is “coming”. As Richard Howard in his note on the translation of The Pleasure of the Text by Richard Miller suggests, the French have a distinguishing advantage in allowing in “polite society” terms to describe “the supreme pleasure associated with sexuality at its most abrupt and ruthless pitch” over English awkwardness which reduces it all to “the coarse or the clinical” (op. cit., p.V). Thus, most crucially, “the nomenclature of active pleasure fails us” (ibid), and as a consequence the term jouissance is often left in its untranslated form by many English writers, with the implication perhaps being that it is a fundamentally untranslatable concept. This may be only my own opinion, but this
As someone schooled in the intellectual background of structuralism and poststructuralism, Barthes has a profound interest in the role of language. Barthes' typology of pleasure, the terms "plaisir" and "jouissance", can be linked to a theory of semiosis based on a distinction between signification and what he calls, following Kristeva, "signifiance". An important way of understanding this dichotomy may be to distinguish music as message or as something which communicates, against music as action. For Barthes, signifiance arises

...when the text is read (or written) as a moving play of signifiers, without any possible reference to one or some fixed signifieds... Signifiance is a process in the course of which the "subject" of the text, escaping the logic of the ego-cogito and engaging in other logics (of the signifier, of contradiction), struggles with meaning and is deconstructed ("lost");...Contrary to signification, signifiance cannot be reduced... to communication, representation, expression: it places the subject (of writer, reader) in the text not as projection... but as a "loss", a "disappearance". Hence its identification with the pleasure of jouissance: the text becomes erotic through signifiance (1977, op. cit., p.10).

In this light, jouissance has much in common with Deleuze and Guattari's privileging of desire and the "return to the Imaginary" and Lyotard's celebration of intensity and the "figural" as opposed to the "discursive" realm in art. It suggests there could be a situation when the power of "meaning" is broken, and provides the hope that behind the curtain of meaning stands the possibility of a direct view onto a state when "things" might be "themselves". Clearly, the question of to what extent these concepts relate to particular social and historical constructions cannot be ignored here, however.

In his essay on vocal "grain" ("The Grain of the Voice", in 1977, p.179-89), Barthes analyses the relationship of signification and signifiance in terms of a contrast he draws between the singing of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (expressive, construction of jouissance as being untranslateable is hardly an incidental matter, considering it is precisely the relationship between the jouissance of music and language that is the focus both of this section and of Barthes' discussions in this area.
communicationally explicit, univocal) and of Charles Panzera (the "materiality" or corporeality of whose vowels are supposed to escape from the "tyranny of meaning"). While signification, then, covers all the processes related to communication (meaning, expression, subje ctivity), signifiance in song concerns the "grain" of the voice, "where the melody really works at the language - not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers... The "grain" is... the materiality of the body speaking its mother-tongue" (ibid, p.182), the physical voluptuousness of the work of tongue, larynx, muscles, teeth, the inner cavities of mouth, throat and lungs; it "is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" (ibid, p.187).

Middleton (1990, p.262-3) uses these Barthesian ideas to contrast two better known figures in popular music history - Elvis Presley and Pat Boone - to suggest that Presley's singing "disrupts language through a vivid staging of the vocal body" while Boone "offers unequivocal meaning in which words, melody and tone fuse into a predictable structure". Thus whilst "Presley offered an individual body, unique, untranslatable, outside the familiar cultural framework, exciting and dangerous; in Boone we hear a generalized image, the energy bound, tied into the conventional thoughts and sentiments provoked by the words and the intonational rhetoric - safe because explicit and unambiguous" (ibid, p.263).

However, as Middleton himself points out, there is no clear division between the two performers, in that Presley's singing carries meanings as well as "grain". He then continues to argue that any singing can be analysed utilising the Barthesian dichotomy, but also admits that "so far, the tools of analysis are largely lacking: most attempts (even Barthes') tend to relapse into descriptive accounts of subjective reactions" (ibid). Barthes himself declares the choice between plaisir and jouissance "to be precarious, revocable, the discourse incomplete" (1990, op. cit., p. V). I would argue that a more promising approach would be to adopt a sociological as opposed to musicological or semiological perspectives, and consider how listeners, reviewers in magazines with particular slants etc., declare this choice in their own accounts. What aspects of a musical performance are considered as pleasurable to individuals in a given social group or subculture, how do people discursively construct the idea of experiencing pleasure in ways that can be related to Barthes' original theory?

Nevertheless, in considering the overall usefulness of Barthes' work in attempts to formulate a sociology of pleasure, it is essential to realise, as Middleton
does (op. cit., p.266) that though Barthes lays a theoretical stress on the interplay of signification and signifiance, this is insufficiently maintained in his discussion of musical practices themselves. This is crucial, because it causes Barthes to neglect the particular uses, representations and discourses of the body and of sexuality, which he tends at times to essentialise to the chagrin of sociologists who would urge the necessity of appreciating cultural and historical diversity in the construction of these. For Barthes declares, in a manner which suggests some connection to idealists of desire such as Deleuze, “The asocial character of bliss [jouissance] : it is the abrupt loss of sociality, and yet there follows no recurrence to the subject (subjectivity), the person, solitude : everything is lost, integrally” (1990, op. cit., p.39). Again, he states that “pleasure [plaisir] can be expressed in words, bliss cannot. Bliss is unspeakable, inter-dicted” (ibid, p.21), and goes on to quote Lacan, explicitly acknowledging his similar intellectual heritage (poststructuralism and psychoanalysis) to Deleuze and Lyotard. Yet, as Middleton eloquently puts it, “Since human beings are condemned to meaning, there is no permanent escape into jouissance; rather the “grain” of the musical body is the permanent other side of plaisir ... jouissance is not abstract; its nature varies in relation to the positioning of the semiotically constructed subject who is “lost” (op. cit., p.266). Indeed, there seems to be much evidence to suggest that the pleasures of the musical body are inseparable from their historical construction. The absence of any pre-historical / pre-social, libidinal body is indicated in the way, for example, early jazz could be received by whites as both “primitive” (instinctually liberating) and “modern” (nervous and mechanical).

Thus to conclude this brief synopsis of Barthes texts on pleasure, it seems fair to insist that the richness of his theories be granted due credit, but that an element of critique must of necessity be introduced to render his work more useful in sociological research. Jouissance as well as plaisir must be seen as social, not asocial terms, with a recognition that psychological subjects do not exist separately from social reality but, on the contrary, take their specific forms as the result of its particular machinations.

Popular music and jouissance: a sharper focus

In this segment, I shall be concentrating on justifying the particular area of popular music I intend to focus on in the research, and how this is especially appropriate considering my wider aims and objectives.
As outlined previously, a central theoretical concern underlying the research is the tension in poststructuralist thought, namely between the view that there cannot be any realm of "true" meaning and that human life is fundamentally socially and discursively constructed, on the one hand, which is not easily reconciled with the argument that society represses desires and that an underlying world of chaos, force and flow, indeed of the intense pleasure that is "jouissance", is beyond language. The influence of the diverse literature on the sociology of postmodernism, emphasising cultural fragmentation and a stress on a "perpetual present", provides a further justification for a concentration on the jouissance aspect of pleasure, i.e. that aspect of pleasure which may be considered as consonant with a "loss of the self". Are our pleasures becoming increasingly postmodern, in the sense of there being greater emphasis on losing ourselves in ecstatic states, in contemporary western societies compared to earlier cultures, which, the argument would suggest, place more emphasis on pleasures - or rather plaisirs - which link one to one's culture? Studies on pleasurable experiences as eclectic as world exhibitions (de Cauter, 1993), alcohol consumption and sexual masochism (Baumeister, 1991) suggest that even if simplistic dichotomies into periods of supposed "modernity" and "postmodernity" are not that helpful, there still seems to be some evidence that western societies have subsequent to industrialization placed increasing emphasis on discourses relating to associations between pleasure and the self. One central argument is that the stress on individualism in industrial society created a need for people to develop an autonomous sense of self, required the formation of an identity capable of self-realization. It is this very culture-bound process which consequently engenders the possibility of what has been termed (in another example of borrowing of Freudian language) "secondary narcissism", defined as the failure of individuation (Friedman, "Narcissism, roots and postmodernity", p.337, in Lash and Friedman, 1992). To put this in other words, it is only practicable to lose something one previously had, and it is only in a culture in which there exists the possibility of an autonomous, rational and stable self, that there also exists the opportunity to "lose" that self. Hence there is a considerable difference between the premodern and postmodern forms of narcissism, and therefore of the pleasures of losing oneself, for whereas "the former is part of the constitution of the universe of a particular kind of social life, the latter is the effect of the disintegration of an individualistic experience whose only meaning was the project of modernity, of
self-development” (ibid, p.352). Thus one may suggest that the experience of trance-inducing ecstatic music in western cultures would be qualitatively different to that in premodern societies.

Here, then, is the first part of my rationale for a more concentrated focus - namely upon those aspects of music which may be loosely grouped under a general heading associated with the “loss of self”, in other words, a consideration of the putatively non-rational and non-social elements of music. Such a focus may be at present somewhat abstract, but its importance cannot be denied in terms of relevance to contemporary sociological theory (especially to debates about postmodernity), to discussions about substantive social changes beyond academic fads, and to the classic poststructuralist dilemma relating to the relationship between discourse and the jouissance of music. In the light of this potential significance, there is clearly a need to consider discourses used by cultural gatekeepers and musical fans more generally, about the loss of the self. Though I have hitherto identified some of these in a highly rudimentary fashion for part of a previous M.Sc. dissertation (Hodgkinson, 1995), the variety and extent of usage of these discourses remains unknown, despite the extraordinary proliferation of sociological and socio-psychological theorising and (semi-) empirical work dependent upon such ambivalent notions. This concentration on the pleasure of “losing oneself” - of “jouissance” in Barthes’ term - is a deliberate attempt to highlight precisely that area of pleasure which is supposedly beyond the social sphere, and hence external to sociological considerations. Studies of “jouissance” are shied away from (the latest example being a book on club cultures by Sarah Thornton criticised as recently as 1996 by its reviewer in The Wire precisely for not considering the jouissance of the music), and prominent sociologists such as Elias argue that whereas the topic of “leisure” is a suitable one for sociologists, that of “pleasure” is the province of psychologists and biologists.

Part of the rationale for the original proposal’s focusing on music, as opposed to alternative forms of popular culture, was based in the popular prejudice (also expressed by Bourdieu and Weber) that music is the supreme “pure art” and supposedly occupies an area beyond the social sphere. Hence as a core component of my research interest lies in considering the efficacy of sociological research precisely for those areas and subject matters - such as pleasurability - which have previously been conceptualised as being beyond the social, the focus on musical pleasures seems
especially pertinent. For fundamentally the same reasons, then, I have decided to focus in on an area of popular music which is frequently perceived - in certain music magazines - as tending particularly to induce some kind of disruption in a stable sense of self. This type of music is extremely hard to define, precisely because it attempts to escape mere classification by genre and because it does not represent any subculture. As one enthusiastic fanzine editor (of Obsessive Eye), whose ideas will be considered more critically later, especially in the chapter on the meta-discourses of post-rock, gushingly declares,

> Opposed to the generalizations of any scene, this is rather music as a myriad of sparkling possibilities. Each of these bands exist autonomously, alone in its own vision. (Dave Howell, Obsessive Eye, No.3, 1995, p.3).

The musical focus of the research, then, is on a variety of music - or perhaps better *varieties* of musics which nonetheless share some common properties, or at least tend to be described using similar discourses in those magazines which attend to them, such as Melody Maker and The Wire - variously described as: out-rock, avant-rock, trance-rock and space-rock (but these are all much more general terms), isolationist ambient, and, increasingly (and this will be the term which I shall use from now on), post-rock. Some of the artists involved in this area include better known ones such as Tortoise and Stereolab, and more obscure artists like Main, Techno Animal, Labradford and Bark Psychosis. To my mind, it is a marked advantage that there is a significant diversity in these groups - what type of instruments they use, and how, for instance - as it has not been my intention to limit this research to a particular "scene", following up an interest in a given subculture, in the vein of much previous sociological research into popular music. The very fragmentation of contemporary culture disavows the possibility of such simplistic generalisations, and the relative newness and, in many cases, obscurity, of the individuals and groups involved in the music I intend to focus on, seems advantageous too: partly because the artists are currently active and hence discussion of them will be contemporary ones (a significant issue in the researching contemporary music, as it is almost impossible in the main to obtain copies of written material such as fanzines a year beyond their original publication date), but also because the discourse around these musics was to some
extent still unsettled. Clearly there is some common ground in considering these artists, as I have suggested above, but a total absence of any discursive connection would make it impossible to establish any initial links and associations between any set of music-makers. The only alternative pursuing that line of thought would be to research musical pleasures without any reference to a particular type of music(s) whatsoever, which would assuredly produce such an extensive and heterogeneous array of discourses around pleurability as to be practically meaningless.

The primary rationale for this focus is that it is often described in ways which mirror postmodern diagnoses of contemporary social change. (Frequently in certain magazine articles, if still a minority, writers about this music amongst other types, demonstrate a knowledge of precisely the academic, indeed poststructuralist, terminology they sometimes feign to despise in ridiculing of academic discussions of popular music. Nonetheless, this is not always so.) The supposed “ethereality” of contemporary society is complemented by more ethereal music, and musicians such as Brian Eno have commented that “we are... increasingly un-centred, un-moored, living day to day, engaged in an ongoing attempt to cobble together a credible, or at least workable, set of values, ready to shed it and work out another when the situation demands” (“Perfume, Defence and David Bowie’s Wedding”, lecture, 1992, quoted in D. Toop, 1995, p.11). The focus of Obsessive Eye on “Post-Rock, Electronica, Isolationism” emphasises post-rock’s debt to rave, as in both cases music is “often utterly text-less, pure texture” (op. cit., p.3). Rave may also have been an appropriate musical area to research in its heyday, but there is perhaps too great an association with particular “scenes” or subcultures, and ideas of fashionable appearance - pleasures concerned directly with relations with others rather than ones more directly pertinent to one’s self; “goods [which] can be read and used to classify the status of their bearer” (Featherstone, 1991, p.27; consider also Goffman’s work and most especially in this vein, that of Bourdieu) - involved in much dance music today. Howell continues, “Just as contemporary (urban) experience is fragmented, utterly complex and multi-cultural, we believe that music should be too” (ibid) and later he discusses some of the work of the Aphex Twin (an artist who was originally discussed in the same way as post-rock groups, before more categorical boundaries emerged, which led to a definite separation of his music from post-rock):
But the slipping NOW-ness of his work also relates to another thoroughly-modern condition. As the turnover of information escalates and a sense of historical continuity becomes cut up, increasingly precarious, one of the symptoms of the postmodern era is what both Jameson and Baudrillard refer to as a kind of schizophrenia, the feeling of existing in a fragmentary, “perpetual present”. ...[Aphex Twin’s] aesthetic is jumbled, decentred, skipping through styles and intensities, emotional spaces. ...his is perhaps the perfect soundtrack to contemporary urban experience - fractured, scrambling the organic and synthetic, the abstract and the familiar...., dissolving a sense of linearity, being engulfed by / surrendering to a love of surfaces, to the thrill of its own dynamism, a trajectory-without destination, a kind of cultural homelessness (ibid, p.12).

Clearly, Howell’s emphasis is on the music-maker - and perhaps a rather partial view of the music-maker’s activities as well - as opposed to the consumer who derives some pleasure from listening to such musics. However, this is not always so, as he proclaims

The thing we hate about rock is its obviousness, its linearity. It’s like you always know what to expect: predictable changes, everything occurring in this “classic” set order. A million miles from this, Aphex Twin’s work functions through foregrounding and surrendering to the NOW (ibid).

Howell’s writing about what we may construe as his own pleasurable experiences with this type of music is interesting, for in its reference to “surrendering to the now” there is a tangible discourse of jouissance, yet he clearly wishes also simultaneously to discuss the music’s relation to what he perceives as certain aspects of the “modern condition”, i.e. of contemporary social changes. In Howell’s obvious enthusiasm, one can see parallels with the work of Attali (1977), postulates the coming into being of a fourth type of method of the creation of music, which he terms “composition”, and which he argues will not merely mirror social change but even produce it. Attali contends that
the very absence of meaning in pure noise or in the meaningless repetition of a message, by unchanelling auditory sensations, frees the listener's imagination. The absence of meaning is in this case the presence of all meanings, absolute ambiguity, a construction outside meaning. The presence of noise makes sense, makes meaning. It makes possible the creation of a new order on another level of organization, of a new code in another network. (ibid, p.33)

Attali's theses are complex, but an interpretation developing both his insights and others from the poststructuralist and even branches of the Marxist traditions, might be to propose that "pure noise", or music which has no apparent affiliations to a given culture or subculture, may have greater revolutionary potential than explicit messages, as any explicit message must necessarily operate within the confines of a particular language-game and hence be easily co-opted by the presently dominant cultural and discursive arrangements. An absence of meaning, a loss of stable identity, a lack of connection to the prevalent cultural status quo - this is more of a recipe for change in his vision than any rational, deliberately conceived approach. Indeed, this potentially socially changing aspect was inherent even in Barthes' own discussions of jouissance. Any turn to a definite scene, with stable meanings and activities associated with it, is resisted accordingly; Howell declares "our ultimate aim is a move towards: spontaneity, chaos, intermedia, multiple viewpoints; new situations and environments in which sounds can occur" (op. cit., p.3).

In this light, the still developing nature and heterogeneity of the musical focus selected herein seems even more appropriate. This would hopefully prevent the effect of musical snobbishness becoming the paramount consideration in the formation of tastes with regard to a fashionable "scene". It may be useful at this point to summarise precisely why post-rock is an especially appropriate music to consider in the light of my expressed research aims:

1) It is a living, breathing, still developing scene, which has yet to establish a fully coherent identity - discourses around it have not yet stabilized (and in this sense the possibility of jouissance remains). The music journalist Reynolds (whose development of meta-discourses around post-rock will be examined in detail) had argued (though it was in 1994) that the term 'post-rock' is particularly useful as a very
general name for such a disparate number of sounds and approaches - "perhaps the only term open ended yet precise enough to cover all this activity is 'post-rock'" (The Wire, May 1994, 123, p.28).

(2) Nevertheless, the discourses were certainly tightening at the time of the onset of the research - the description ‘post-rock’ was itself increasingly prevalent and specific in its meaning. A post-rock compilation album had been released by Virgin in 1996, showing the term now has specific marketing connotations. This transformation is itself interesting, and a historical trace of the development of discourses surrounding post-rock groups, as the term stabilises, was considered potentially highly instructive.

(3) Post-rock had (and has still) yet to be co-opted by the mainstream. Despite some contending it might be “the music of the 21st century” and the prediction that leading post-rock bands would invade the top 40 in 1997, it remains a music favoured only by a minority.

(4) Even a rudimentary consideration of discourses around post-rock reveals that the idea of the pleasurable loss of the self (discourses of the ‘beyond the social’ and ‘beyond the rational’) were present.

(5) Moreover, this discourse of the loss of self was noted as not simply being an academic imposition, but significantly one utilised by some of the main participants (fanzine writers, music journalists, even some groups).

(6) In addition, the ecstasy of the consumer losing themselves in the music is not the only aspect of jouissance present in these discourses. The utopian features inherent in the Barthesian understanding of the term are also referenced, in the writings of Howell and others.
The central purpose of this section of the discussion is to consider recent diverse sociological approaches to the question of emotion. Clearly such theorizing (and empirical research, though there is relatively less of that) is of potentially profound relevance to my area of research, investigating social aspects of the “jouissance” of a particular kind of contemporary music. It will enable an insight into how empirical research has previously been conducted in attempts to resolve such entrenched philosophical battles as the very ‘mind/ body problem’, which is at the heart of this research. In other words, this necessarily concise investigation of the sociological literature around, in particular, the debate between whether emotions have a biological (‘beyond the social’ and ‘beyond the rational’) essence, or whether emotions are socially constructed is included in order to illuminate as an exemplar how sociology has previously attempted to consider those areas of human life that our culture constructs as existing ‘beyond the social’.

I shall attempt to provide a brief overview of the ways emotion has been considered sociologically in the past two decades, discussing the key theoretical distinction between positivist and social constructionist theories, but also examining how these ideas relate to empirical work by Wouters (following Elias) and Hochschild on emotion, to the new school of Cultural Psychology, and finally concluding by suggesting that certain major problems and points of dispute these almost philosophical dilemmas raise can be given more empirical salience and more sociological promise by a return to a re-evaluation of the work of Wittgenstein, the significance of whose thought for sociology and psychology alike is often misunderstood to involve a descent into relativistic, deconstructive hell.

Three core sociological issues in studies of emotion can be identified. These are 1) the socialization of emotion, by which a cultural vocabulary of sentiments becomes an interpretative resource of individuals, which generates variability in affective experience across cultures - through time and place; 2) the construction of emotions by the actor - whether related to the definitions surrounding a specific situation or to wider social norms; 3) how social structure patterns affective
experience - how being one class, gender, age-group, rather than another, exposes one to certain types of experiences and thus to feeling particular emotions more often or more intensely than others (based on Shott, 1979, p. 1318, plus Scheff, 1983, p.333-4). It is worth bearing in mind that those working in this field seem to accept the relevance of all these factors - in particular the salience of both social structure and cultural definitions - for a great amount of print has been occupied by the two principal sides in the central theoretical dispute on the sociology of emotions, the social constructionists and the positivists, misguidedly accusing each other of the grievous error of not paying sufficient lip-service to their own perspective. Indeed, reviewing the many articles on this topic (especially the continuing debate through the pages of the American Journal of Sociology in the early 1980s, notably between Hochschild and Kemper) has provided me with a fascinating insight into the development of sociological arguments, which in this instance seems to consist primarily of each side taking it in turns to accuse the other of over-simplifying their argument!

The debate between the social constructionists and the positivists is mirrored in wider theoretical differences in sociology - the broad division between those who favour explanations of social phenomena in terms of social structure and those who consider cultural norms more salient - differences whose nature is ultimately philosophical, and which are unlikely to be resolved by referring to particular empirical investigations. It is difficult to summarise effectively the differences between the two perspectives as they relate to emotion, as any presentation of them is always biased by the particular preferences of individual authors. For instance, Kemper (1981, p.336), a committed exponent of the positivist position, suggests that three differences exist, namely that social constructionists: 1) “generally reject the importance of the biological and physiological [components for] the determination of specific emotions”; 2) they “suppose that emotions are largely determined by social norms for emotion, or ‘feeling rules’, while positivists assert that social structure... determines emotion”; 3) they “suppose that actors must define situations before emotions will be experienced”. Yet none of those in the social constructionist tradition I have read deny biology in the way Kemper suggests, and in places they deliberately affirm the relevance of physiology (Hochschild, Shott {1979, p.1321-3}, Averill, Hunsaker {p.436}). For instance, Averill (1980, p.305), though he says he is arguing
against the ‘traditional’ view in which “the emotions have been viewed from a biological perspective” and proposes they be defined instead as “socially constituted syndromes or transitory social roles”, he goes on to contend that

A role conception does not deny the contribution of biological systems to emotional syndromes; it does, however, imply that the functional significance of emotional responses is to be found largely within the sociocultural system.

Averill, who is posited by Kemper as one of those “Having largely rejected the influences of biology on emotions” in fact states “I’m not suggesting that a social level of analysis is sufficient for an understanding of emotion, only that it is necessary” (1980, p.336). This suggests that the differences between the camps are ones of degree, not the absolutes the contenders themselves mistakenly appear to believe they are dealing in. The constructionists, for their part, make much of experimental evidence that suggests “physiological arousal alone does not constitute an emotion” (Shott, 1979, p.1321) - affective labelling is necessary too. Yet this is a point conceded by Kemper, namely that an actor has to define a situation appositely for it to be pertinent, as he comments that the positivist has the view that “emotions are ‘automatically triggered’ once the social stimulus, properly defined by the actor, is in place” (1981, p.359, my italics).

Thus it can be seen that, as the participants occasionally recognise, “to an important degree the two approaches are not so much antagonistic as complementary” (Kemper, 1981, p.337). All parties concerned accept that a complex interplay of impulse, definition and socialization is integral to the construction of feeling, even if they do not always accept that their opponents accept this too. Shott’s remark is key, that “within the limits set by social norms and internal stimuli, individuals construct their emotions” (1979, p.1323), because it raises the core matter of just what are those limits. For Shott, these limits are those indicated in the experiments of Nisbett and Schachter, where “we should be able to alter the labelling of a bodily state only within a range bounded at the lower end by the existence of some arousal, and at the upper end by experiences so extreme that no amount of manipulation of cognitions will persuade the individual to attribute his bodily state to an artificial source” (1966, p.228, quoted in ibid) - within this range, “the construction of emotions is fairly
malleable and therefore subject to considerable definitional shaping and social and cultural influence" (ibid). Kemper on the other hand, holds the view that these cultural definitions play a far less significant role, and that they arise solely as a consequence of social structure anyway - they are useful to study only as an indication of structure and do not play a determining role in what an individual feels. He goes into some detail to examine and expose the flaws in those psychology experiments which have often been quoted as suggesting that labelling processes rather than physiological factors are especially important in emotion (see especially 1980, p.1419-21). Considering how the obsession with the effects of labelling has been shown to be crucially flawed in relation to another psychological topic - that of mental health issues, especially the diagnosis of schizophrenia - I personally find this part of Kemper's argument more reasonable, but I cannot accept his reduction of cultural or particular situational factors to broader structural features in a given society.

Thus the disagreements originate not simply from the extent of sociological opposition to psychological methods and theories, but rather from conflicts within sociology, and also within psychology itself - intra-disciplinary conflicts rather than inter-disciplinary ones. I shall now briefly consider this psychological literature, as much of the disputes within the sociology of emotion continually relate themselves back to it. The classic James-Lange theory suggested that we experience emotions when we become aware of bodily processes that follow upon some event (real or imagined). However, Cannon dissented to this perspective, arguing that certain more or less identical physiological processes underlay such 'emotions' as pain, hunger, fear and rage, and hence argued that "visceral responses are too uniform to provide individuals with a means of differentiating subjectively distinct emotions". The Cannon position was subsequently updated by a number of psychologists working especially in the 1960s, with the classic study being that by Schachter and Singer. Their work suggested that "experimental subjects appeared to feel widely different emotions under supposedly identical conditions of physiological arousal, thus making it appear that only differences in the definition of the situation give rise to different felt emotions". However, a series of studies, done mainly in the 1950s, found different physiological underpinnings for different emotions, in particular it was found that "fear and/or anxiety is associated with increased secretion of epinephrine and anger with increased secretion of norepinephrine", known as the 'Funkenstein hypothesis'
(see, e.g., Kemper, 1980, p.1419-21 or Shott, 1979, p.1321-3). In the articles I have read on these and related subjects (see bibliography), there is much in-depth consideration of possible problems with these studies and their subsequent interpretations, but ultimately to no conclusive result. The final words by Shott (who seems to take the matter less personally than Kemper and Hochschild, both of whom become quite bitter and lapse into accusations of moral impecunities in places) on this matter are perhaps the most sensible, namely that "unanimity would be quite premature, given the incomplete and conflicting evidence now available. Ultimately, I think, continued debate may best serve to advance us down the more fruitful road" (1980, p.1425).

All this may serve to as a reminder to the sociological reader that psychology as a discipline is highly diversified. Research in this arena is not, then, a case of sociology versus psychology, but debates within these disciplines - whatever, there is clearly a need for a cross-disciplinary fertilisation of ideas. Another relevant early 1980s academic phenomena in psychology was the emergence of Cultural Psychology. A point of connection between anthropology and psychology, the key point of focus in this sub-discipline is the role of symbols and meaning - the content of culture - in the development of mind, self and emotion. Their perspective may perhaps best be understood by the fact that the early anthology of their work - *Culture Theory* - features Geertz's classic essay "From the Natives' point of View"; Geertz's view is enshrined in his remark that "Not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artefacts" (*The Interpretation of Cultures* 1973, p.81). Nevertheless, the division between psychology and sociology is far from defunct, for all the detailed debate about the interpretation of the Schachter-Singer versus Funkenstein positions - the 'specificity question', or whether emotions are specific to physiology - one may note the fundamental unsuitability of the experimental method per se for sociological investigation, the point being that "laboratory-induced arousal sans prior cognition is of little sociological import since persons do not typically experience emotion-based arousal in cognitive vacuums" (Hunsaker, p.435).

It should at this point be stressed, then, that any resolution of the specificity question, even in favour of biology, would not remove sociological interest in the topic of emotion. Kemper and Shott agree that "from a strictly sociological viewpoint, it does not matter whether specificity theory is correct or not. Sociologists must still
detail the range and extent of systematic variability of social conditions that are associated with the production of emotions” (Kemper, quoted by Shott, 1980, p.1423). Of course the question of cultural symbols and meanings is integral to this debate, but the topic of how emotion relates to social structure, the matter of the relationship between social change and values regarding emotional expression, and the question of socialization remain most valid. A number of important pieces of research have been conducted in these veins, not least Hochschild’s study *The Managed Heart* (1983), which examines the cost of the ‘emotional labour’ of airline stewardesses, or what happens when people have to adapt ‘emotion work’ or the system of adjusting emotions to the commercial purposes of jobs which require estrangement from personal feelings. Hochschild’s study aims to consider the relationship between capitalism and emotion and between gender and emotion in her particular chosen field. Though her work has been criticized (Kemper, 1985, and Wouters, 1989, 1990; see Hochschild, 1990, for her response to Wouters) it provides some idea of the potentially considerable significance of studies of emotion for sociology.

However, for my purposes, perhaps the most interesting sociologist of emotion (amongst many other studies) is Norbert Elias, along with his protégé, Wouters (other key references here are Wouters, 1986, 1987, 1989; Elias and Dunning, 1986; and for a larger overview which covers much else but which relates some of Elias’ ideas to thinking and research in the sociology of postmodernism, Featherstone, 1991). The core reason for Elias’ significance to my intended line of work is that his research and writings can be seen to help provide a context, especially from a socio-historical perspective, for some of the recent social and cultural changes in the West, which some authors have interpreted as the ‘postmodernization’ of our society, notably the greater stress on pleasure and the (it is argued) increased desire for ‘jouissance’ or the enjoyment of losing oneself. A central thesis of Elias is that a marked trend of *informalization*, or a “controlled decontrolling of emotional controls” has asserted itself through the last century. Elias’ classic works on western civilizing processes have shown that in the course of several centuries the more basic functions of life - such as eating, drinking, sleeping - and the more primary urges and impulses have become overlaid with fears, especially those of the loss of respect and self-respect. Thus impulses and emotions were channelled into increasingly formalised modes of social conduct. From the 1880s onwards, however, as changes in the
interdependencies between people brought about a levelling and intermixing of modes of conduct and lifestyle, the conditions for a new development were set in place. The lack of impetus to further and further differentiation in manners between social groups, and in time a greater feeling of economic security, created the conditions for successive generations, aided and abetted by Freudian thinking, to become increasingly aware of the fears overlaying their urges, and feel the need to surmount these concerns to allow a less rigid channelling of impulses and emotions into more varied and informal paths. An increase in people's self-knowledge and in the varieties of social conduct and lifestyle was the result when put into practice, in what is seen as an ideal as well as a factual process. For instance, and clearly of central importance for socialization processes, according to this ideal parents provided their children with a wider scope for living in accordance with the emotional and libidinal urges of the moment, treating them more as equal human beings (Wouters, 1986, p.3). In the context of my own research interest, the crucial point is that “informalization is also the conscious effort to re-learn more primal and concealed impulses and emotions. ...the ideal spread that precisely the more primary impulses and emotions were the ones it was most necessary to discover and bring to the surface” (ibid, p.4).

The work of Elias, though obviously central to any consideration of the study of emotion which wishes to consider social structural and socio-historical factors, clearly requires supplementing with a consideration of the role of cultural norms and discourse for a full understanding of social aspects of emotion. Elias is a firm believer in the necessity of including biology in research into emotions (see his argument in his 1987 article), has a keen interest in psychology (he was a psychologist once), and it is noticeable that the early 1980s debate between Hochschild and Kemper in the American Journal of Sociology has by the end of that decade become a dispute, if by no means a re-working of the old territory, between Hochschild and the Eliasian protégé Wouters in Theory, Culture and Society. More significantly, Elias' work on the civilizing processes receives considerable praise and is discussed in some depth by Kemper (1981, p.346-7) as an exemplar of his approach: “The relationship between social structure and norms for emotion was brilliantly conveyed by Elias”. Elias' work is used by Kemper to support his claim that cultural norms are simply the after-effects of social structure and that language has no active role of its own in creating the reality of an emotion, for
as Elias shows, social structure determines the norms and the ensuing emotions. As the social structure of Renaissance Europe changed... so did the prescriptions for behaviour whose violation engendered specific emotions. But as Elias makes incontrovertibly clear, the process of behaviour change, of prescription, of emotional differentiation resulted from the effort to maintain or enlarge status differences, to demarcate social relations and social structure with unmissable clarity (ibid, p.346).

However, as a number of sociological research projects in various areas of the discipline have shown that the realm of the cultural cannot be simplistically reduced to the level of just being an adjunct of the structural features of a society, and as Elias’ historical research cannot be verified by interviews with people living in Renaissance Europe, there must remain scepticism about whether culture and language played such a minimal role. Perhaps it is worth adding that it may well be the case that given the contemporary social context with its emphasis on informality and increasing varieties of lifestyle, informalisation has provided the context for a much greater autonomy for the cultural realm, and for norms to emerge within specific local situations as opposed to be dictated so directly by social structural factors. Thus changes in social structure may have created the conditions for a change in the relationship between culture and structure. Elias’ findings about Renaissance Europe may then stand firm, but his approach may not be so utilisable for studies regarding the origins and expressions of emotions in the world today.

Neither positivism nor social constructivism are without their considerable drawbacks, then, both more generally and for the particular topic of the sociology of emotion we are considering here. Positivism is increasingly disavowed as a result in part of the work of the later Wittgenstein, who convincingly argued that the function of language cannot and should not be reduced to that of representation, i.e. the relation between our language and our experience of the world could no longer be conceived as a relation of fixed correspondence between words as names and the entities named by them. "The meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Philosophical Investigations), and the sets of usage rules of our language-games result, Wittgenstein argued, from the various 'forms of life', or the forms of our experience of the world.
Such a view may appear to be meat and drink to the social constructionist philosophy, with its focus on the social and historical origins of human phenomena. However, as van der Merwe and Voestermans (1995) contend, such a perspective on Wittgenstein’s relevance for psychology and sociology is fundamentally incorrect in its view of Wittgenstein’s thought and, more significantly, disturbingly limiting in what it leaves in its wake as possible topics of research, especially for those with an interest in the emotions (and for anyone attempting to consider social structure). They claim that “Wittgenstein’s legacy, rather than leading us towards the postmodernist dead-end of social constructionism, challenges us to go beyond the assumptions and claims of modernism and postmodernism alike” (p.37).

The crucial point is that, though our use of language structures our experiences of the world, this structuring is never arbitrary, but always necessitated and conditioned by the forms of life which characterize our experiences of the world. Van der Merwe and Voestermans continue to attest that the realization that language should not be regarded as the symbolic representation of our experience of the world per se “does not imply that our language cannot refer to, or reflect, experiences of reality given outside or independent of our language, and that we should therefore accept that we are caught within the confines of a closed, self-referential system of language... as post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories...” suggest (p.36). Their point is that there are language-games other than the representational or descriptive use of language (these latter may include, e.g., the games of specific scientific practices) which are “as meaningful and necessary in our endeavour to understand the phenomena of our experience, because they apply to those forms of life which cannot be referred to in a representational way, the content of which we can, however, express and communicate meaningfully by our use of language” (ibid). They then integrate this idea that language and meaning-giving/-taking belong to people’s way of going about things in the world they inhabit with the phenomenological thought of Husserl, and especially how Merleau-Ponty developed Husserl’s legacy. Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the body emphasizes “that meaning does not start with a mental consciousness, but with a so-called ‘ego-body’ as the origin of the perceiving, motoric, elementary-practical, sexual and expressive intentions” and talks of a corps sujet - a body-subject - and its behavioural structures “which are neither consciousness, nor a thing, but manifest a ‘third way of being’” (p.37). It is through
the innovation of linking Wittgenstein's concept of 'forms of life' to Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body-subject, that van der Merwe and Voestermans aim to articulate this 'third way', beyond positivism and social constructivism, beyond modernism and postmodernism.

The representatives of the social constructivist tradition I have hitherto discussed (Hochschild et al) in the sociology of emotion all made some necessary allowance for the body and for physiology, as we have seen. In its pure, 'ideal-type' form, this tradition can have no truck with biology - it is 'body-less'. Such an opposition to the idea of a fixed biological substratum, and emphasis on the socially constituted nature of the body, clearly is potentially very useful for sociological thought and research. Yet, "things and events are not just meaningful in that they are caught in concepts, schemes and networks of meanings" (p.40) - this does not allow for those forms of life which cannot be referred to in a representational way. Words and concepts do not match the bodily experience of a chair which has meaning because we bend ourselves so that we can sit down, or of a mountain which is impressive because of our own size and the foreseeable tiring effort to reach the top. Hence, when meaning is generated in such a direct way that any 'construction' whatsoever will bear its mark, will have, in other words, undeniable bodily/physical effects, then realism in some form is irrefutable (ibid). This point is similar to the admission made by Shott, that "the affective labelling of physiological states is not infinitely plastic" (1979, p.1323).

Against the social constructivist view of the body, van der Merwe and Voestermans suggest that the body becomes culturally inscripted as a result of the way it embodies certain practices, and not because certain meanings get attached to it. Merleau-Ponty's view that it is through the "not yet personal 'ego-body' that I come to know about the world" rather than through a consciousness that knows itself by means of reflection, is supplemented by the use of the work of Strasser. To the practical-biological level of the ego-body/ body-subject of Merleau-Ponty, is added an emotional aspect - a body which is equipped with primal 'feeling structures'. The argument is thus that the body and its emotional equipment are 'conditions of reason' - they constitute the first sources of giving meaning, and are the fundamental structuring forces before reasoning (op. cit., p.41-2). This view has some empirical foundation, as Scheff (1983) discusses the work of the psychologist Zajonc, who notes
that the traditional contention in cognitive psychology that emotions are seen as reactions to thoughts is refuted by the evidence of a number of studies he reviews in which "the emotion comes first, followed by a thought" (p.336).

However, this perspective is itself unsatisfactory. Crucially, the practical-biological level and that of language and naming cannot be set apart from each other so easily. The body and feelings are part of the forms of life too - the dualistic view of Merleau-Ponty/Strasser which attempts to postulate a clear nature-culture dichotomy, which wrongly interprets the embodied nature of the forms of life as merely the influence of biological structures, and hence attempts too rigid a demarcation of what belongs to the realm of forms of life as opposed to what belongs to that of language, is fundamentally flawed (ibid, p.42-3). Forms of life bring along with them practices that are related to body and sentiment as the hard core of culture. Thus the challenge becomes that of having to come to grips with the forms of life themselves, requiring a thorough analysis of the culture-body-sentiment nexus.

Middleton (1990) relates this discussion on the pleasures of the body specifically to popular music. Criticising Barthes, he comments that the "body does not exist in any unqualified sense - only in the historical forms constructed by particular uses, representations, discourses" (p.266). Middleton argues that there is "no 'pre-historical' libidinal body", and asserts that there is much evidence that the pleasures of the musical body are inseparable from their historical construction. Commenting on the work of Dyer, for example, he suggests that we can

reasonably think of disco (music and dance) as favouring a less phallocentric, more 'whole body' eroticism than mainstream rock; but only because the divergent social constituencies of these styles were able to locate their differing rhythmic textures within different practices and discourses of pleasure and gender (ibid).

In his extensive book On Understanding Emotion (1984), Denzin notes that

The importance of the human body for the study of emotion is not disputed, for emotions are embodied experiences. What is disputed, however, are the interpretations to be brought to the study of the body (p. 108).
Denzin also utilises the work of Merleau-Ponty in this context, and similarly contends for the need to go beyond physiological and chemical considerations, and beyond an appreciation of the fact that the body occupies time and space. Using the work of Heidegger, Denzin remarks that the body does this occupying with meaning, for it is an extension of the person; "The body does not fill up space in the same way that other real, physical things do or a piece of equipment does. The person takes space in and determines her own locations, making room for herself as she moves about and draws things near. The lived body is in space but understands itself temporally and relationally" (ibid, p.109). Denzin then uses Plessner to observe that persons have a threefold relation to their bodies: "They are their bodies; they are in their bodies; and they are outside their bodies, looking in on the interior life they experience from within" (ibid, p.111). He concludes that only a stance which reconciles this relation between having a body and being a body, from both the inside and the outside, must be developed.

This utilisation of Wittgenstein and Heidegger aids one's understandings of some of the critical dilemmas raised in considering the relationship between emotion, body, culture and society, but it remains extremely theoretical. Research that has been conducted on the pleasures (and other feelings) aroused by certain drugs seems highly relevant here. Considering the effects of MDMA, or ecstasy, which has a clear physiological effect on its users (release of serotonin and dopamine - Saunders, 1995, p.34), this drug "produces a unique effect among recreational drugs: empathy. It provides pleasure through increasing open-hearted communication" (ibid, p.36). However, though the physiological component is certainly uncontestable (though still not fully understood, as the release of the same neurotransmitters by other drugs does not result in the same effects), nonetheless it does not necessarily result in the same emotional effects always being evoked:

The most predictable feelings experienced are empathy, openness, peace and caring. However, what people experience can vary from paranoia to sleep, depending greatly on other factors called 'set and setting' which include their cultural beliefs, expectations and state of mind at the time. (ibid).
Becker's work, on how an individual learns to derive pleasure from marihuana, is also highly revealing, but it has an additional relevance for my research topic which centres on the very particular and peculiar sort of emotion of pleasure. The three stages necessary to enjoy marihuana use according to Becker were, firstly, to learn to smoke it in a way that will produce real effects, secondly, to be aware of the effects and connect them with drug use (the element of cognition is thus salient here), and, thirdly and most interestingly for us, the user had to learn to enjoy the sensations s/he perceived. Becker describes the effects of the drug,

The user feels dizzy, thirsty; his[sic] scalp tingles; he misjudges time and distances; and so on. Are these thing pleasurable? He isn't sure. If he is to continue marihuana use, he must decide that they are. Otherwise, getting high, while a real enough experience, will be an unpleasant one he would rather avoid (p.239).

Becker continues to argue that use will not continue without a redefinition of the effects as enjoyable. Such "enjoyment is introduced by the favourable definition of the experience that one acquires from others" (p.241). More experienced users reassure a novice user in a number of ways - from the practical advice to regulate the amount of smoke inhaled, to minimising thought of the unpleasant sensations by emphasising the more enjoyable aspects, to the most intriguing aspect for our purposes, that the more experienced user simply

    teaches the new user that he can 'get to like it after awhile'. He teaches him to regard those ambiguous experiences formerly defined as unpleasant as enjoyable (p.240).

Thus it is strongly suggested by Becker's research that pleasure is not automatically triggered by certain physiological changes - even if the drug aroused the same feeling every time for every individual (which Saunders' remarks above indicate that it does not do so anyway), if it always created a feeling which, say, lessened ego boundaries, this would not then be a guarantee of an individual feeling pleasure - a particular individual has to find those effects pleasurable. The question then remains -
why is the lessening of ego boundaries found to be pleasurable? Is it found to be more pleasurable by some cultures, or by some groups within a given society, compared to others? (For example, in the sixties, the predominantly working-class mods favoured the drug speed, whilst the mostly middle-class hippies' preferred drug of choice was cannabis or LSD [S. Hall & T. Jefferson, 1975] - just what are the relationships between class background, lifestyle [or economic status, as speed is much cheaper] and choice of drug-induced pleasure [increased energy or altered state of consciousness], and, indeed, music preferences, in this instance? More recently, commentators have remarked on the fit between the so-called 'E generation' and changes in social values, such as the eradication of rigid barriers between social groups - which neatly coincides with Wouters and Elias' theory of 'Informalization' [e.g., Saunders, p.50]. To the extent this vague generalization has any substance, may it not be considerably more likely that E has been favoured because the effects it produces, especially when combined with particular kinds of musics and the pleasures they themselves provide, suit trends towards Informalization, rather than the extremely spurious claim that the drug itself somehow causes these trends?) These are empirical questions, which require specific pieces of research to investigate them. They definitely cannot be answered by relying on biologistic assumptions about universal instincts inherent in human nature.

What then, at this early stage, can usefully be learnt from this selective examination of the recent history (of a recently developed topic) of the sociology of emotions? The most valuable lesson is perhaps that one should avoid too hasty a neglect of certain areas for the sake of others. For the classic dualism bom of Enlightenment thought, which separates mind and body so clearly, must be resisted, and some attempt made to appreciate the interrelationships between body, culture/discourse and social structure.
LITERATURE (2): APPEAL OF MUSIC

In this section, I aim to provide an overview of a subject clearly central to my overall research but with a highly involved and complex history - namely how people have attempted to consider just what it is about music that appeals to us. Much of my discussion will relate to work in the psychology of music, but will stress especially some sociological criticisms of these approaches. Clearly, in some sense, there are strong parallels between this kind of debate and that in the field of the sociology of emotion - those stressing universalistic, biological aspects to emotion, both in its arousal and expression, against those emphasising more culture-specific and/or discourse-specific facets - but however the province of music psychology has very much its own unique concerns to contend with.

Undeniably, the area I am undertaking to consider here - the appeal of music - is by far the largest. It has an extremely long history to it, with a great deal more speculation involved than arguments based in empirical research. The literature in this area is exceptionally diverse, ranging from highly subjective and chatty personal preferences embroidered with intellectual generalisations, to very complex and detailed accounts which feature in-depth expositions of the physics of sounds or which require a much greater understanding of music theory than a layperson such as myself possesses. To cut a path through this treacherous and difficult terrain, I shall therefore begin this discussion at the broadest level, and hone in on particular areas which I believe shall prove to be of special relevance for my own research purposes. I will also emphasise the sociological naivety of many of these perspectives by considering how ideas already considered in my previous essays illuminate (or highlight the shortfalls of) these arguments.

As the music psychologists Dowling and Harwood (1986, p.202) put it, "When we discuss our work with nonpsychologists, the questions that most often arise concern music and emotion. Music arouses strong emotional responses in people, and they want to know why." The relationship between music and arousal of emotion (as opposed to the issue of how music expresses the emotion of its author, which is a separate matter again) is of interest to the layperson as much as the expert, but the latter is often as baffled as the former, for Dowling and Harwood continue, this
question has “puzzled psychologists as well”. The origins of music are unknown - it is simply not understood how the development of music began, despite the fact that it is found in all known societies. One suggestion often made is that music has its origins in the relationship of mother and child, either in the communication between mother and infant (baby-talk or glossalalia) or even in the sounds of the mother’s body resonating in the womb. Blacking, the key researcher in the anthropology of music, notes that music is used to accompany activities as diverse as feasts, funerals, initiation ceremonies, work, religious worship, protest and to prepare for war. Music plays a central part in group rituals which motivate cooperative action, and Storr (1992) argues that music expresses social relations. To use an example, Baumann suggests the high degree of cooperation shown by the Miri of Sudan is motivated by the many song and dance festivals staged there, in which the whole village participates and shares an intense emotional experience, almost to a state of trance (Argyle, 1996, p.199).

The use of music (and drugs) to induce trances on a collective level in societies of simple technology has been compared to rave culture. A kind of biological essentialist argument suggesting rave has some innate appeal to a human essence, originating in the womb, has been made by Fraser Clark. Writing in Evolution magazine, which he created to evangelise for the techno-pagan promise of rave culture, Clark argues that house music’s 120 beats-per-minute is the same as “the baby’s heartbeat in the womb....Imagine twenty-thousand young Westerners dervish-dancing to 120 bpm all night till the sun comes up. You get to feeling you’re in the same womb” (quoted in Reynolds & Press, 1995, p.174). Reynolds and Press continue to urge “the astonishing similarities between the structure of the working-class raver’s weekend and the elements that make up the dance rites practised by prehistoric Great Mother Goddess cults” (p.175), and indeed no-one can deny both feature (according to accounts of the latter in Moore [1988], and in comparison to preliterate societies such as the Miri more generally) “enraptured abandonment to a syncopated musical beat”. The crucial difference though, that means one cannot hold out too much hope that “the experience of dancefloor communion that rave offers is actually a faint echo of the lost Edenic rites” (which Reynolds, to be fair, only proposes as a speculative possibility - he is too aware of the particularistic nature of the link between music and society to be so naive), is found in why Moore (and Clark and others) find such
abandonment desirable. They desire it because it leads (supposedly) to the transcending of ego boundaries, linking people to ‘Mother Earth’. Again, there is an emphasis on the role of trance in a given culture affirming the pagan belief systems upon which the society hinges. The “working-class raver’s weekend” (and the term ‘weekend’ gives it away - stressing its status as leisure activity, very different to the normal ‘workaday’ cultural patterns of behaviour) is not (rarely anyway) about affirming a belief system or social connectedness, as contacts made at the rave are rarely maintained. Rather, it is about pleasure.

This at least serves to emphasise that generalisations about the use of music in one culture are not that helpful in contemplating why music is appealing in others. The fondness for “enraptures abandonment” today I would argue is not connected with a desire to strengthen social bonds or affirm religious beliefs but rather because we live in a culture which is presently practise a “controlled de-control of emotions”, to use Elias’ phrase. We now more generally believe trances are desirable because our belief-system is one which stresses the removal of inhibitions, individual freedom and a return to ‘nature’. One should notice especially the words ‘removal’ and ‘return’ - it is a reaction to earlier, though still recent, eras. These eras we perceive as repressive, though as Foucault has argued in his studies of the history of sexuality, such periods were actually creative in their constrictions of sexuality. Obviously, looking back to even earlier, more ‘primitive’ (read more natural perhaps?) societies (or preliterate societies still surviving today) and seeing musical trances existing in them, this aids us in believing we are indulging in a universal, natural phenomenon, though what is going on is fundamentally very different. However, I would not agree with Argyle’s contention that “Music may play a more important part in primitive than in modern society” (op. cit., p.198). Pleasure, the stress on removing inhibitions and individual freedom may actually be what unites us in our culture - the fact that we have these shared beliefs in the importance of being happy and doing your own thing may constitute us as a coherent society, just as preliterate societies gained cohesion from shared beliefs in group unity and a mother-goddess or other deity. Most moderns relate to music as consumers rather than producers (though this is not so true of fans of post-rock), as pre-moderns necessarily would have had to, and plaisir is the critical category in the everyday processes of consumption. Music and musical trances are useful in both societies, but in entirely different ways.
It is not only between different societies that the way music is significant varies. Within the same society, the same musical genre can be put to several different cultural uses, with alternative meanings and pleasure-configurations as a result. In Bali, the *ketjak*, a piece of music characterised by dramatic dynamic (loudness) contrasts and tempo changes, has distinct meanings depending on the context, the intention of the sponsors of the performance, and the audience (Dowling & Harwood, p.232-3). The fundamental distinction is that between the original religious role of the ketjak, which has a serious ritual meaning and serves the essentially sacramental function of revealing the latent sacred level of reality, and the secular context of performing the ketjak for tourists. Crucially, the latter are not participants in the ritual, as they do not know the proper behaviours and are not part of the social system in which the ritual has meaning, and so the focus of the ketjak shifts from ritual propriety to showmanship, involving elaborate choreography, lavish costumes and elegant staging. The point is that factors intrinsic to the music are not the sole determinants of emotional reaction and meaning - extramusical factors affect emotion and meaning too. Thus the ‘same’ music may evoke very different reactions depending on the circumstances in which it is heard, and also depending on the spirit in which it is performed. A recent example of this is in debates about the relative merits of drum ‘n’ bass music made by people outside that community. Some have argued that the efforts of such as Squarepusher and Plug (the acronym of Luke Vibert which he uses for this music) lack depth, are too ‘joky’ in nature, and are just jumping on a bandwagon, because they make many other kinds of dance music and are not really associated with the drum ‘n’ bass subculture. Others, however, counter that their position as outsiders makes their contributions fresh and original in a field which would otherwise be liable to ossify and stagnate. Another instance of how situational factors affect enjoyment is the difference in hearing the ‘same’ music - same songs, even - in such diverse contexts as the gig where a particular band is headlining for a night versus the four-day festival where the band are eighth on the bill in the smallest venue. Konecni’s whole essay (1982) is a firm argument against “the vast majority of research studies and most of the theoretical attempts [which] have treated aesthetic preference and choice as if they, and the process of appreciation itself, normally occur in a social, emotional, and cognitive vacuum, as if they were independent of the contexts in which people enjoy aesthetic stimuli in daily life” (p.498). Highlighting the way music
appreciation has been radically changed by social and technological changes this century, as music has become widely available, penetrated into every corner of people's lives, and become the basis for social subcultures, Konecni points out that the most frequent, prototypical situations in which people listen to music have changed dramatically, and argues that "a thorough understanding of aesthetic behaviour cannot be achieved without examining how it changes as a function of its immediate social and nonsocial antecedents, concurrent cognitive activity, and resultant emotional states". He then goes on to prove his point experimentally by recounting his own laboratory-based research which shows clearly how social stimulation, information load, and arousing nonsocial stimulation affected his subjects' aesthetic choices. I shall not reveal the details of this work (in what way the factors seem to interrelate), as other than its overall conclusion, that social interaction affects musical preference in some way, the laboratory basis (a weakness he acknowledges himself, indeed he has to, considering the nature of his theories and findings) of Konecni's work means its finer points are of limited interest to us.

The musical research conducted on the Balinese ketjak cited above can be seen as having more in common with a Geertz-like methodology of 'thick description', a finer-grained analysis involving seeing how music functions in actual cultural contexts and which utilises the perspectives of the participants themselves to do so. This will be more the approach I intend to adopt, but certain more quantitative or cross-cultural generalization approaches have also been used to stress the importance of societal factors as opposed to the more universalistic claims of some music scholars. Such an approach was used by Lomax, and his attempts to categorize a large number of societies according to two dimensions, those describing musical style and performance practices, and those describing socio-economic organization, earned him much deserved criticism for over-simplification (see Dowling and Harwood, p.226-31; also Martin, 1995, p.131-3). Nevertheless, even after much controversial debate and counter-research, a few strong relationships emerged as still valid. These were the linking of (1) a harsh and restricted vocal quality to restrictions on female premarital sexual activity, that is, the more permissive the society, the more open and relaxed the vocal chords in singing; (2) polyphonic (many-voiced, i.e. not solo) singing and male-female equality; (3) the use of interlocking, contrapuntal choral parts and a small-scale gatherer type of social organization. A side-effect of this type of research was the
discovery of how patterns of singing style appear to be extremely stable despite changes in socio-economic organization, implying that as human groups’ economic and social affairs undergo change, the people involved tend to maintain basic features of their musical style. The music of a culture provides a focus for the representation of cultural identity, and as Erickson (who made an extensive analysis of Lomax’s data) wrote, “Song style appears to be less directly reflective of the institutions of society than of something whose definition is far more elusive: cultural identity” (quoted in ibid, p. 231). If musical pleasures are not simply biological, universal ones, nor can they be simply reduced to socio-economic matters, though clearly this does not mean neither biology nor economy have no part at all to play.

The fact that there seems to be no universal kind of music which appeals to all human beings across different cultures (whether at 120 b.p.m. or not) is highlighted in the developmental psychological literature as much as the anthropological investigations. Research into the musical taste of children reveals that they are initially very open-eared and have such a high tolerance they will listen to ‘anything’. This open-earedness declines in late childhood, reaching a low point in adolescence (though could this be a cultural effect of the importance of peer pressure on taste at this age in our society?), before raising a little once more to finally decline again in old age. Most significantly, children will not follow ‘our’ ideas on consonance and dissonance - on what is tuneful and pleasant and what is not - and it is only later that they become socialised into ‘our’ tonal system. (‘Our’ is in inverted commas, because I think what is meant is the tonal system of western classical music, which I doubt is the tonal system of all in today’s diverse multi-cultural society, or even my own tonal system, come to that). (information taken from Radio 3 broadcast, involving discussion with experts in the field of music psychology and development).

Having now emphasised the significant caveat of how musical pleasure is affected by situation and cultural background, it is possible to consider in detail how researchers in music psychology have attempted to understand the nature of the affective response to music. Lundin (1967, p.150-89) provides a good summary of much of this data and his approach is in itself revealing. Lundin divides much of his discussion into two sections - the affective response to music as a physiological response, and as a verbal report, which immediately we can see has parallels with the debates in the sociology of emotion. As a psychologist, Lundin favours the former as a
data source, saying of verbal responses that "although they often are inadequate expressions, we have to depend on them until more adequate measurements are available" (p.151). However, more recent theoretical perspectives would stress the importance of investigating the verbal reports in their own right, as being integral in the arousal of emotion themselves. Lundin, however, makes a poignant remark himself when he comments that "Our inadequate measures of feeling reactions, plus the inadequate referents for these terms in actual behaviour, have served to place this area of psychology often in the realm of the mystic" and asserts that lists of affective reactions "are limited only by our capacity to measure them directly or our ability to describe them" (p.152). This may be true (or alternatively the descriptions may have a much more active role in creating the feeling reaction), but even if it were, it points to one topic worthy of research - namely investigating how descriptions actually operate to delimit certain emotional possibilities. With regard to music, as Lundin points out, the inadequacy of the available descriptions is such that music is placed "in the realm of the mystic", in a zone which, the cliché goes, is 'beyond words'. Placing music in such a zone serves to limit its potential potency, making it - in a culture which has at least until very recently been slanted towards a world-view favouring science and rationality - somehow supplementary to requirements. This could be seen to complement Shepherd's claim that "the existence of music... is potentially threatening... to the extent that it sonically insists on the social relatedness of human worlds and as a consequence implicitly demands that individual respond" (1991, p.159), which he contends is in marked contrast to the atrophying nature of present-day capitalist/individualist society. I shall discuss Shepherd's ideas more thoroughly later.

Considering firstly the relationship between music and various physiological reactions, the various studies all agree that music does give rise to changes in the rates of these reactions, incorporating respiratory, cardiac and blood pressure changes. The tendency is more to increase the rate of these activities than to decrease it. Secondly, music that is strongly vigorous and rhythmic has a greater tendency to increase these physiological processes than other kinds of compositions. The more definite the melodic and rhythmic elements, the more certain the physiological reactions, and one experiment found that "selections that were popular or semiclassical in nature tended to raise both pulse rate and blood pressure, indicating an exhilarating effect on the
listener responses" (p.154). The emphasis on the exhilarating effect of the 'popular' choices (and of the 'semiclassical', considering that the experiment, by Washco, was originally published in 1933) suggests to me, considering the rapid changes in musical fashion nowadays, that it may not simply be the innate characteristics of the music which is crucial in producing reactions here. Another experiment (Hyde, published in 1927) however found that 'most people are unfavourably affected psychologically and physiologically by music that is characterized by tragic, mournful tones, and favourably affected by gay, rhythmical, rich-toned harmonic melodies... The indications are that these selections of music... exert a favourable reflex action on the cardiovascular system, have also a favourable influence upon the muscle tone, working power, digestion, secretions, and other functions of the body" (quoted in ibid, p,155). Apart from the rather peculiar value-judgments implied in 'favourable' and 'unfavourable' affect, it is possible to understand what is meant here. Hyde's arguments seem to me to be the less extreme version of the deranged contentions of the right-wing Tame (1984) and the suggestion that there is a 'good' music - one which fits our 'natural' psychic and bodily states in a harmonious manner - and a 'bad' music, which introduces chaos and disharmony into us. This is, in a way, a kind of watered-down version of the infamous "rock 'n' roll/ jazz/ other disapproved of music is the devil's music" argument. Yet, perhaps it has some foundation - music therapy has revealed that some music more than others has healing properties, and apparently plants respond favourably to some music and wilt in the presence of other types. However, the universal responses of vegetative matter are surely irrelevant in considering the complexity of human life, with its basis in specific cultures, and perhaps therapeutically 'good' music is only good within particular societies too. A final counter to Tame et al may be that we actively embrace disharmony - the pleasures of chaos - as any fan of horror films, fairground rides or darkcore jungle would be able to testify.

One more physiological response to music considered by Lundin is that of galvanic skin responses (GSR). GSR occurs due to the depolarization of the cell membranes of the skin through the action of the sweat glands, and this reaction has been demonstrated to be definitely a part of the affective response pattern. Music does indeed affect GSR, and one finding by Dreher (1947 experiment, quoted in Lundin, p.158-9) is highly revealing. He found that musically trained subjects both showed a
relationship between affective mood as expressed by reported responses (checked words on an adjective circle) and the GSR, but this did not hold true for the untrained subjects. Such findings strongly suggest that affective reactions to music are learned behaviours acquired throughout an individual’s life history of interaction with the stimuli. Lundin criticises the view of Helmholtz, Gurney and Britain who argue in some depth for the inseparable relationship between the minor mode and feelings of grief and melancholy. Instead of the view that the mood of certain modes inherently calls forth affective responses, Lundin states that consonance and dissonance themselves are responses subject to the same cultural conditioning as any other kind of psychological activity. Indeed, such a claim reflects well my earlier point that children have to be socialised into accepting a culture’s ideas about what is consonant and what dissonant.

Music itself has a clear association with social structure, as demonstrated in a number of diverse studies. Musical taste varies according to social class, gender, ethnicity, age and geographical area (Shepherd, 1986; Hall and Blau, 1987; Christenson, 1988). Different social groups obtain different gratifications from listening to music, and use it in different ways. Thus a statistically significant greater proportion of adolescent girls thought about the meaning of lyrics than did adolescents boys in one survey (66.5%:49.1%), and it was also found that “pop music appears to be more functional for adolescent girls, at least in terms of frequency of gratifications obtained than for adolescent boys” (Gantz et al, 1978, p.85). Thus music was more useful for the girls surveyed in getting them in a mood they wanted to be in, in passing the time, in making them feel less alone, and in setting a mood with others. Here the role of music is decidedly functional and utilitarian - this is not a discourse of extreme rapture, of the abandonment of the self. The implication, which the authors do not discuss and which requires closer consideration, is that utility as opposed to pleasure is more of a concern for one gender than for the other, and that the more recent concern may be of greater interest to men. This would complement certain research in other areas of sociology, such as Deem’s (1986) work on women and leisure, which show that in general women are unable to derive as much pleasure from leisure activities as men as a result of the additional pressures and unpaid other-oriented labour they face. Similarly, women in romantic relationships may be required to do more ‘emotion work’, as indicated by a finding “that men less often than women use
metaphors of ‘work’, and are more likely than women to view their relationships as play and relaxation” (Illouz, 1991, p.246). Pleasure for some, it would seem, is work for others.

Similarly, generalisations about the primacy of pleasure may not be generalisable to ethnic groups. Representations of alcohol in white popular culture and in black popular culture in certain periods have been very contrasting, for instance. For blacks, as evidenced in the lyrics of the blues, “alcohol is associated with other experiences of suffering and/or it is a cause of suffering itself”, whereas for whites (notably college students), “it signified rejection of normative structures impeding the bohemian lifestyle” and “indeed, the ‘fun morality’ so central to emancipatory activities was inextricably linked to drinking” (Cruz, 1988, p.180). Overall, “depending upon the group, class or subculture, the meanings of alcohol in this decade [the 1930s] were clearly varied” (ibid, p.181), because the white bohemians merely wanted something different, while the blacks struggled for subsistence. Though the contemporary social situation has changed much since the 1930s, as racism and inequality still prevail, the significance of music may be contrasting too for blacks and whites. For black groups, inveighing against the racism around them in their lyrics may be of crucial concern to them, and therefore issues of identity and the need to retain an emphasis on meaning (as opposed to pleasure alone), in order to be able to effect a potent critique of racism, may be more significant to them. Hip-hop has been much used as a source of identity by non-white populations in many countries, for example “German hip hop is being used as a medium for the expression of issues relating to racism and the problems of national identity often experienced by the younger members of ethnic communities in Germany” (Bennett, 1995, p.1).

What is particularly interesting is that, if there is any foundation in these generalisations that link the dominant social groupings (male, white, one may tentatively add middle-class, at least as far as most college students are concerned) with values that stress pleasure, and women and blacks with work and a concern for identity and meaning, this represents a complete turnaround from earlier discourses and stereotypes. Women have long been associated with the realm of feeling and emotion, but it may be this very association which actually decreases women’s potential to experience pleasure relative to men, as a shift in world values to emotion for them may represent an increase in their workload at a time when the so-called
'Puritan Ethic', stressing the importance of hard work, may be losing its cultural dominance. The emphasis on pleasure, feeling and the loss of the self in popular music discourses has been historically much more connected to black and working-class audiences, and frequently disparaged by a middle-class aesthetic which favoured so-called "rational recreation" (Stratton, 1989, p.38-9). "Black music has always provided the 'emotional', 'involving' songs and the dance music off which rock and roll has traditionally fed" (ibid., p.34), whilst "for the working class, pleasure was located in a loss of self-consciousness". In the nineteenth century, "pleasure for the middle class, however, was precisely an affirmation of the self as the site of productive thought" (ibid., p.39).

One of the most perceptive analyses to consider the relationship between music and society this decade has been the work of John Shepherd (1991 and, with Wicke, 1997). Nevertheless, there are some significant inconsistencies in his argument, which will serve to illuminate some of the difficulties inherent in attempting to provide a sociology of music, and to demonstrate why only a theoretical and methodological approach which is discourse-based can be suitable for such a project. Some of the attempts to consider social aspects of music which I have outlined above, such as that of Lomax, engage in a macro-sociological analysis which must be refuted as failing to understand the nature of how significance is attached to any musical form. Music's value and meaning, like that of language, cannot simply be posited as inherent, and its appeal then simply be understood in terms of the psychology of individuals.

Such a view is certainly held by Shepherd, who contends that "any significance assigned to music must be ultimately and necessarily located in the commonly agreed meanings of the group or society in which the particular music is created" (1977, p.7). Shepherd continues to attack the idea that musical meanings are inherent as a misunderstanding of music's real social nature born out of the world-view of capitalist industrial societies, which privilege visual and rational modes of communication at the expense of aural and emotional ones. Hence only those aspects of music which are amenable to visual-rational approaches - melody, harmony and rhythm, which can be depicted in western notation - are studied seriously. Thus, what is for Shepherd, the essential character of music - its sonic means of communication, which cannot be reduced to visual or verbal representations - is ignored, as western
notation cannot deal with qualities such as the specific timbres of different voices and instruments, or the irregular variations of pitch and rhythm which are characteristic of most non-western music and of Afro-American influenced popular music. It is exactly such elements which give music its immediacy, and the ignorance of them is the ignorance of what music, for Shepherd, communicates - namely, a sense of human relatedness (as the earlier quotation suggests).

The music of functional tonality corresponding to capitalist society is, suggests Shepherd, characterised by regular metre, stylized stress patterns in rhythm, notes with discrete stable pitch, no improvisation, the creation and resolution of harmonic tensions, and clean and stable timbres (each instrument has a 'correct' tone). Afro-American music (the foundation of pop and rock) has, however, stable but non-complex rhythms nonetheless featuring rhythmic inflection, and some additive metrical principles which seem to be symptomatic of a desire to break free from the stylized rhythmical framework of functional tonality. It also uses melodic inflection or 'bent' notes, and has a melodically improvisational nature which nonetheless takes place around a standard melody within a harmonic-rhythmic framework. It also uses 'dirty' timbres - the individuality of, say, a jazz musician's tone - and though uses the basic harmonic framework of functional tonality, uses it as a 'given' to work out inflected and improvised statements. To sum, Afro-American music has an emphasis on freeing somewhat the constraints of classical music, giving a performer more leeway, which may mirror the stress on individual freedom in twentieth century western societies.

Shepherd's view, which put really simply, equates classical music with functional tonality, and functional tonality with industrial society, in contrast to the earlier association of pentatonicism with feudal society, can itself be admonished as promoting too premature a closure, just as he censures the western classical tradition in its approach to music. According to Shepherd, medieval music is organised in terms of pentatonic (five-note) scales, and each note in the scales is heard as being equally important and independent; hence unlike functional tonality, there is no fundamental note, no 'tonal centre' or keynote to which a melody will eventually return, and therefore no hierarchy of notes determined by their relationship to the keynote (a chant can finish on any of the five notes). Shepherd believes such a structure articulates the ideal feudal structure, whose elements are separate but equal -
decentralised and localised, not centralised and organised, as in functional tonality/capitalist society. However, some medieval historians characterise feudal social groups as conceptualised as centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary oriented and horizontal, which clearly cannot be reconciled with Shepherd's contentions. (I am especially indebted to Martin's [1995] discussion of Shepherd, pp.133-48, for these points). Shepherd's view that there is a definite, underlying social structure is obviously entirely at odds with his professed attachment to social constructionism.

Functional tonality differs from pentatonicism in that the notes of the scales are no longer autonomous, but must form a hierarchy dominated by the keynote - melodic lines and harmonic movement must return to affirm the tonic, and thus create a sense of progress, and of tension and release (such a presence of tension and release in pieces link with what some psychologists of music misguidedly regard as the essence of music's appeal) when 'alien' elements are introduced and subsequently reintegrated into the system. It also has regular rhythm and its harmony is a culturally unique system which attempts to rationalise the natural properties of sound. For Shepherd, functional tonality, with its hierarchical and centralised nature, its expression of time as linear (not cyclical) and its representation of the idea of progress, encodes the industrial world-view of the ruling classes. It can certainly be accepted as the basis of the musical system of the west - deviation from it is immediately perceived as 'wrong' by musicians - but I would argue his view of industrial society is over-simplified. An alternative series of discourses rooted in Romanticism, favouring emotion to reason and antithetical to hierarchy, have existed throughout the past two centuries, and according to sociologists such as Campbell (1987), this Romantic ethic was fundamental in the origins of capitalism and consumer society - indeed, one could make an excellent case for such an ethic, with its links more with consumption than production, as being much more fundamental to dominant discourses in contemporary capitalist society than a naive emphasis on hierarchical, fixed social relations.

Afro-American music, the foundation of popular music, is conceptualised by Shepherd, as described above, as much freer and less hierarchical in nature. Such music is perceived as being rooted in the experience of those located at a decidedly different point in the social structure to the ruling classes, who therefore attempt to set aside the conventions of functional tonality whilst being unable to work entirely
outside its constraints. The music's popularity more generally can be seen in terms, he suggests, of the growing number of whites feeling in some way materially, intellectually and emotionally dispossessed. The dirty timbres and inflected notes of the Afro-American tradition offer a "less alienated, more intimate relationship to both self and others" (1991, p.134), and "avant-garde jazz and progressive rock [have a potential to] collapse the literate and oral worlds, to collapse intellect and emotion, thought and action, into one another" (ibid, p.149).

Such a view is extremely similar to the perspective of the irrationalist thinkers considered previously. They too viewed capitalist-rationalistic-individualistic society as fundamentally alienating, and sought a human essence in the sphere of 'desire' which could not be reduced to the linguistic realm (as pop exceeds traditional western notation) instead. However, as we have seen, this does not provide an answer to the puzzle of from where such a preference was itself constructed. One essential criticism of Shepherd's approach, as we have seen, is that his own view of there being what he terms a 'structural homology' between approaches to music and social formations can itself be criticised from the social constructionist perspective he proclaims to uphold. Perhaps an even more telling criticism is that Shepherd's argument that music cannot help but stress the integrative and relational between people and, indeed, that some musics have inherent qualities that allow them to perform this role particularly successfully, is totally at loggerheads with a view that musical meanings (and the pleasures we gain from them) are created by the activity of human beings as they collaboratively create and sustain meaningful social contexts. This is the exact same critique which I have hitherto posited as being especially pertinent to an examination of the irrationalist thinkers deifying of desire or jouissance. If one is to take seriously the radical loss of faith in the idea of untainted knowledge, the ultimate impossibility of discerning the 'true' nature of some social phenomenon, then Shepherd's analysis, much as it wishes itself to attack the false notions of rationality and universality applied by musicologists and certain music psychologists, is found wanting. Attention must shift from a concern with producing an authoritative reading of a text to a consideration of the process by which readings are produced and sustained. In this light, one cannot conclude anything about the inherent nature of a musical piece - instead, researchers must establish what the piece is taken to mean, the discourses surrounding it. To argue that a particular piece of music is 'about' resisting
orthodoxies by virtue of its ambiguity is to suggest a definite meaning, to attempt closure. Instead, we should recognise that all music is inherently ambiguous, in that it is available to be interpreted in different ways for different purposes. The analytic focus which sociology can then provide is to consider precisely what interpretations are placed on the meaning of the music and how those interpretations are justified.

It is illuminating to perceive a parallel between the arguments of Shepherd and those of the post-structuralists. For, as Shepherd criticised the emphasis on the verbal and visual aspects of music, and argued that one should look to its sonic characteristics instead as a way of concentrating on what he took to be those aspects which mattered most to people, the irrationalists suggest we should turn our attention to subjects such as the body, death, madness, and, above all, desire - jouissance - instead of concentrating on macro-sociological issues or narrowly textual concerns. Most importantly, as Shepherd recognised the way the verbal and visual aspects were socially mediated but failed to appreciate that the same could apply to sonic aspects - that an identical series of sounds could be perceived differently by different people in distinct cultures - the irrationalists assert the socially constructed nature of knowledge and rationality, but overlook that emotion, music and the body may be discursively constructed in diverse ways by diverse social, cultural and historical formations.

Yet, as noted previously, the obsession with musical pleasures may in fact be more the interest of some social groups than others, and quite possibly, and in opposition to general presuppositions based on prejudiced discourses which link women, blacks and the lower social classes with emotion and physicality, the dominant social groupings, the white middle-class males - again, if theorists appreciated capitalism as a multi-dimensional socio-economic system dependent on Romanticism as well as Rationalism, consumption as well as production, spontaneity as well as science and logic, this would not appear so incomprehensible.
LITERATURE (3): SOCIOLOGY OF POPULAR MUSIC: ADORNO, SUBCULTURAL THEORY AND BEYOND

Music is a social activity, and, as such, the proper object of sociological scrutiny. The 'social order' rests on a number of shared meanings, and on the processes by which some interpretations become established as authoritative and others not. The confusion and mysticism - that is, the romanticism - of contemporary viewpoints of music may find the spread of a realistic, social view of music anathemic, but arguably that is exactly why it is so necessary.

The idea of a close link between the realm of the social and of music may disturb the romanticised yearnings of a culture such as ours which identifies emotionality and spontaneous self-expression as the cornerstone of true being, but it has an extensive history. Thus Merriam's (1964, p.6) comment that "musical sound is the result of human behavioural processes that are shaped by the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the people who comprise a particular culture" is only a refining of a perspective which can be traced back as far as Plato; "the music of a well-ordered age is calm and cheerful, and so is its government. The music of a restive age is excited and fierce, and its government is perverted. The music of a decaying state is sentimental and sad, and its government is imperilled" (in this instance, the quotation comes from Hesse, 1970, p.31-2). For Ballantine, the very essence of the sociology of music consists in the elaboration of forms of society and forms of music, as it undertakes "an investigation of the ways in which social formations crystallize in musical structures" (1984, xvi).

However, as Frith - perhaps the pre-eminent figure in the sociology of music in the last two decades - has remarked, the sociology of music "has usually rested on more or less crude reflection theories: the music is taken to reflect, to be 'homologous' to, the society or social group that makes it" (1983, p. 269), and it is not difficult to detect the note of justified scepticism in his voice. As was discussed in the previous chapter with regard to the considerably more sophisticated work of Shepherd, such an approach must be doomed to failure because it assumes a definitive objective reality of both musical and societal formations which can be appealed to, to discern any possible homology. The argument has already been rehearsed that such
formations are constructed in ongoing interactions, and it is imperative to trace how certain interpretations are established as authoritative, or rather how those 'interpretations' serve to construct the formations themselves.

One of the most influential theorists who considered the relationship between music and society was Theodor Adorno. However, his influence has often been of a negative nature, with later authors reacting to what they perceive as his undue hostility to popular music (in his day, jazz). For academics in the cultural studies tradition, Adorno has often played the role of whipping boy, a straw person to be rubbished before the author in question continues to attest to the supposedly revolutionary potential of music which can be invested with multiple meanings by a dissenting audience. In actual fact, Adorno's work is of such a complex and substantial nature that it makes one decidedly wary of simplistic generalisation or concise summary. In considering Adorno, as elsewhere, my approach then is to extract what I believe to be of direct relevance for this study rather than providing an overarching account of the extraordinary body of work he developed in this field.

The Frankfurt School of theorists which included Adorno criticised mass culture in general, arguing that under the capitalist system of production culture had become just another object, what they termed "the culture industry", devoid of critical thought and any oppositional political possibilities. It was Adorno in particular who applied this view to popular music, especially the sounds of Tin Pan Alley and jazz. Adorno criticised what he perceived as the standardisation of such music, born of its dependence on the standardisation of the capitalist system of commodity production. He declared "A clear judgment concerning the relation of serious to popular music can be arrived at only by strict attention to the fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardisation. The whole structure of popular music is standardized even when the attempt is made to circumvent standardisation" (1941, p.17). Adorno was unequivocal about the effects of mass culture and more especially popular music, opining "Music today is largely a social cement. And the meaning listeners attribute to a material, the inherent logic of which is inaccessible to them, is above all a means by which they achieve some psychical adjustment to the mechanisms of present-day life" (1990, p.311-2). The pattern of repetition was omnipresent in popular music for Adorno, and was associated with a 'regression of listening' in the public.

Such a generalisation about all popular music clearly cannot withstand in-
depth analysis today but if his concerns be extended to a consideration of standardisation as a process - whereby what begins as alien and other becomes normalised - then the relevance of Adorno for theorising about post-rock is clearer. Opposing popular music, in Adorno's view, was serious avant-garde music such as Schoenberg, which differentiated itself by reflecting the alienation at the heart of capitalist production. However, certain forms of 'popular' music have displayed exactly the critical potential Adorno clearly cherishes, and indeed regards as the hallmark of 'great art'. Paddison has argued that 'radical' popular music, which has, in Adorno's terms, attempted to resist its fate as a commodity, has itself inevitably confronted "the alienation faced by all avant-garde music" (1982, p.218). In certain respects, post-rock presents a case to be classified as much in the 'serious' as the 'popular' camp in Adorno's schema; in terms of its attempted refusal to be used as a commodity (most of the bands), its use of atonal and avant-garde techniques often borrowed from 'serious' modern composers (many of the bands), and its extreme dislike of being defined (beyond even the Romantic clichés of rock generally).

This last point, the aspect of refusing definition, is particularly significant. If at first this appears as merely an adjunct of the 'bourgeois ideology' - the Romanticism of consumer culture (Campbell {1987}; Featherstone {1991}; Stratton {1982 and 1983(2)}) which hides the 'real' status of objects as commodities - there is, in fact, far more to the matter. We have already seen how the poststructuralist thinkers viewed exceeding ordinary language as the path to revolutionary potential, but their concerns about the difficulties of establishing criteria of 'truth' and of the near impossibility of escaping the language-games or discourses of one's own culture to locate a point from which genuine resistance is possible are rooted precisely in the work of earlier Marxist scholars such as Adorno. Thus "Adorno could write clear, conventional prose when he chose to, but mostly he did not, believing that simple, straightforward messages formulated for the needs of a wide readership would end up only by affirming the validity of the established discourse which it was his purpose to negate" (Martin, 1995, p.87, who also wryly notes that one collection of Adorno's essays in English carries a preface titled "Translating the untranslatable"). It could be an author operating in the field of the sociology of scientific knowledge such as Mulkay utilising new forms of writing, or a post-structuralist philosopher such as Cixous or Derrida, or even a member of the post-rock collective Godspeed you Black Emperor!
(who refuse interviews by professional journalists as well as conventional titling in an attempt not merely to avoid misrepresentation but as a deliberately conceived effort at resistance), but it is actually Adorno who declares “Defiance of society includes defiance of its language” (1967, p.225). 4

Part of the reason for Adorno’s relative unpopularity in sociology, musicology and cultural studies may not then be that his work is considered anachronistic, because he was unable to see the diversity and potential for resistance in entire forms of twentieth century music, but because his writing is every bit as difficult and ambiguous as that of the far ‘trendier’ (in academic circles, at least) poststructuralists/postmodernists, Wittgenstein and Nietzsche. Indeed, as has already been indicated, this was, as for the other now more respected thinkers, a quite conscious strategy. As Witkin suggests,

...it is perhaps profitable to see Adorno’s writing strategies as integral to his project. A philosophy whose central purpose was to profess the truth of a fragmented and transcendentally homeless subjectivity could not slyly seek to provide shelter and consolation for it in the architectures of traditional linguistic and conceptual structures.

... ‘Taking the strain’ of modernity meant realising in the very construction of utterance the broken fragmented condition of the language through which the subject must express itself in late capitalist society. (1998, p. 10)

Adorno also had a keen interest in what he perceived as the antagonism between art and language in capitalist society. Thus, for him (relating to Mahler in this instance), “this antagonism between art and its language reflects the rift within society, the transcendental homelessness of a subject who can no longer find any reconciliation or harmonisation of the spiritual and material life, of the inner and the outer realm of existence... The ‘outer’, in this case, might be thought of as society and the ‘inner’ the sensuous life of the individual subject” (ibid., p.116). Relating to Mahler, but with resonance for his views on all music in capitalist society, “Adorno

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4 I have already indicated towards the end of the introduction how Adorno’s belief that art could provide a route to utopia by negating bourgeois ideology can be seen as mirroring poststructuralist faith in jouissance, namely precisely by being free from the restrictions of language-games.
invokes the opposition he repeatedly draws between the mimetic or spontaneous and expressive moment in music and the constructive or rational moment through which the musical material is controlled" (ibid.). Adorno’s interest in the category of the ‘spontaneous’ parallels that of the poststructuralists, especially their concern with jouissance as a means of accessing utopia, the only means because all rational ones are to them contaminated with the discourses of contemporary, decidedly non-utopian, society.

This impression is confirmed when Witkin observes that “The banal is a key category in Adorno’s discussion of modernist music and modernity.” (ibid., p.58), for:

> When conventions become ‘mere conventions’ and are emptied of any kind of living expression - mere form - they can be subsumed within the category of *the banal* [author’s italics]. As natural language, musical language or the language of painting, etc., grows more mechanical more clichéd, more incapable of expressing, its conventions and forms take on the character of the banal. (ibid., p. 58).

Adorno’s interest in language again carries echoes of that of the poststructuralists, for it is his belief that “Language, whether natural or musical, can only be a vehicle for truth if the sociation congealed in its forms can answer to the social relations that bind the members of the community in the present. Where the congealed sociality of language is no longer capable of any true correspondence to social relations and conditions in the present, then it becomes worn out and clichéd.” (ibid., p. 65).

The concern with avoidance of cliché will be seen in the analytic chapters of the thesis as critical to those constructing post-rock through their writing (and is integral to most of those making the music itself), as well as to Adorno in his search for music as a route to truth/ utopia, and for Barthes and company in music as a route to jouissance. At the same time, the emergence of particular conventional methods of description over time elides the need for establishing so-called ‘true correspondence’ to the music, and tracing this hardening or solidifying of discourses (Witkin uses the evocative image of things *congealing*) will be demonstrated as a fundamental process worthy of some serious reflection. The theme of (and occasional desire for) the (attempted?) evasion of standardisation and the banal is fundamental to music
practitioners and music journalists, at least with regard to post-rock. In this sense, Adorno's concerns are far from being over-intellectualised 'aristocratic' notions with little to say today, but rather their very centrality - in some areas of popular music anyway - suggests that Adorno is guilty not so much of anachronism and haughty disdain but rather that his primary mistake is simply one of over-generalisation.

Thus it can clearly be seen that the writings of Adorno have much to recommend them in providing an in-depth understanding of the condition of music even in what is now twenty-first century society. His concerns are of profound relevance even to a study which takes its theoretical foundations (which is not to say it in any sense agrees with that base of theorising) the poststructuralist focus on language and the 'non-rational' as they relate to music: the importance of spontaneity and the key role of language in resistance for Adorno should by now be apparent. Yet the work of Adorno, like that of Barthes, and even that of Shepherd (who is more inclined to argue for what he thinks should be done, and to provide an admittedly impressive theoretical rationale for his approach than to conduct sufficient research projects of his own), does suffer from a fatal flaw which has already been implied. The very richness and depth of the theories these figures invoke suffuses their empirical investigations to such an extent that generalisation is rife, and an inescapable feeling arises that these are thinkers who have moulded the evidence to fit their theories (witness Adorno's disparaging of popular music, and his continued vitriol against jazz - at least he does seem to have recanted his earlier disdain for the genre - even as he lived until the 1960s and the rise of modern jazz).

It is now necessary to look in more detail at strands of musical sociology which are more rooted in empirical research programmes, and not so reliant on an over-arching omnipotent explanatory system (though this has certainly remained a severe problem, as will be commented upon shortly) as the approaches of Barthes, Shepherd and Adorno. For the rest of this section, I will consider, then, a quite distinct approach in the sociologies of popular music. The school of subculture-based analyses will be reviewed, as it is dependent on the ethnographic methodology which this research also utilises (but with a definite flavour of its own, as will be shown in the next chapter), and the critique of the subcultural tradition by more recent approaches in what Redhead (1997) terms 'popular cultural studies' will additionally be discussed, before a concluding statement of the position of this research within this
field is made.

The concept of 'youth culture' initially developed in the 1950s, and has been progressively refined ever since. The idea behind this concept was that all teenagers shared similar leisure interests and pursuits, and were involved in some form of revolt against their elders, or at least constituted a 'small society' of their own. The distinctiveness of the culture of youth was linked to their growing autonomy, rooted in their increasing financial independence. In retrospect, youth culture may have been better recognised as a consequence of the accelerating heterogeneity of society accompanying rapid social change (promoting a 'generation gap'), a realisation that would have more easily led on to an appreciation of the diversity of the category of youth, and indeed an understanding of the lack of homogeneity even within a specified movement, or what became known as a 'subculture'.

While sociology then began to demonstrate considerable interest in the category of youth, it was at this stage less concerned to explore the relationship between rock and pop music and its (young) audience(s). Nevertheless, the continuing centrality of popular music in youth culture since that period has been at the root of much of the debate about how sociologists should approach the study of popular music. The initial focus could have been that of Adorno, as its primary themes were of homogenisation and massification. Youth were thus pictured as a relatively passive consumer group. Hall and Whannel echoed the disdain of the European "man of culture" (the gendered terminology is deliberate) for American populism that recurs through Adorno, as they reflected British anxiety about the effects of a teenage culture predominantly imported from America: "Teenage culture is a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured: it is an area of self-expression for the young and a lush grazing ground for the commercial providers" (Hall and Whannell, 1964).

By the 1970s, with the failings of the counter-culture movements of the late 1960s apparent (infected with commercialism and identified with specifically middle-class youth), the view of a homogenous youth culture, whether as passive consumers or even, latterly, as radical agents of resistance, was untenable. Rather than being part of a coherent youth culture, it became established that youth consisted of a 'mainstream' majority, and minority subcultures whose distinctiveness, it was maintained, was shaped largely by the social class and ethnic origins of its members.

Sociological interest, especially in the very influential Birmingham Centre for
Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), concentrated on these subcultures. The subculture members were seen to rely on leisure and style as a means of winning their own cultural space, and thus represented cultural oppositional politics at the symbolic level.

The relationship between popular music and youth subcultures was thoroughly explored in a number of studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The conventional wisdom of these studies was that youth subcultures appropriate and innovate musical forms and styles as a basis for their identity and, in so doing, assert a counter-cultural politics. Some key authors and their works in affirming this perspective were Hall and Jefferson (1976), Willis (1978) and Hebdige (1979), all from the CCCS. For the writers associated with this school of thought, subcultures were regarded as "meaning systems, modes of expression or life styles developed by groups in subordinate structural positions in response to dominant meaning systems, and which reflect their attempt to solve structural contradictions rising from the wider societal context" (Brake, 1985, p.8). They contended that there was a 'fit', a homology between certain styles and fashions, cultural values and group identities. One of the most influential accounts of a subculture was Hebdige's study of punks. He argued

The subculture was nothing if not consistent. There was a homological relation between the trashy cut-up clothes and spiky hair, the pogo and the amphetamines, the spitting, the vomiting, the format of the fanzines, the insurrectionary poses and the 'soulless', frantically driven music. The punks wore clothes which were the sartorial equivalent of swear words, and they swore as they dressed - with calculated effect, lacing obscenities into record notes and publicity releases, interviews and love songs. Clothed in chaos, they produced Noise in the calmly orchestrated crisis of everyday life in the late 1970s - a noise which made (no)sense in exactly the same way and to exactly the same extent as a piece of avant-garde music (Hebdige, 1979, p.114-5, author's emphases).

As previously indicated, the approach of the CCCS should certainly not be immune to critique. While the convergence between music and cultural group values is still believed to be evident in some contemporary youth subcultures, such as heavy
metal (Weinstein, 1991), subsequent theoretical discussions and case studies suggest that the degree of homology between music and subcultures has been overstated, and the very value of 'subcultures' as a concept, in particular its conflation with oppositional cultural politics, has been questioned and frequently rejected outright (some of the key texts here are Middleton [1990, especially p.156-64], Grossberg [1987], Redhead [1990]). A decade on, even Hebdige had had a change of heart. He later concluded "theoretical models are as tied to their own times as the human bodies that produce them. The idea of subculture-as-negation grew up alongside punk, remained inextricably linked to it and died when it died" (Hebdige, 1988, p.8).

A more considered account of punk is that of Laing (1985). Most significantly, Laing observed the plurality of meanings that can be read into punk and the significance of the rôle played by the media. He appreciated the naivety of the class-based interpretations of musical taste posited by subcultural theorists, that the relationship between culture and social structure is a far more complex one. Laing recognises this applied as much to the subculture of punk, generally conceived by inattentive sociologists as the most monolithic, homogeneous youth music movement of all, as to other music-based movements. This is why punk has been perceived as being particularly suitable as an object of study within a subcultural framework, which Hebdige's 1988 remark also attests to: he seems to think, wrongly in my view and Laing's, that subculture is no longer a useful concept because 'reality' itself has changed, but it could be contested that it is only our perception of it which has, and that theories of 'subculture' were never appropriate. In other words, it can be reasonably argued that the relationship between social background of audience, music, style and dress, usage of drugs etc. have never been inalienably linked to one another in the sense of Hebdige's idea of a homology. Musical identities which are understood as being inherently diverse, such as the one I am considering, post-rock (indeed its inherent heterogeneity, and lack of any clear relationship to a particular social stratum, is a fundamental part of the reason why "post-rock" was given such an undescriptive name in the first place, as will be discussed in more detail in the analytic chapters) actually may reflect what happened at the beginning of punk (and indeed of psychedelia, 'indie' and industrial music, as was noted in the introduction), as the processes of homogenisation, which seem to be what the subcultural theorists, in their own way as much so as Adorno, assume from the start, only truly set in (the process of
solidifying or congealing) later, as an initial explosion of difference settled into more definable patterns.

Bennett (2000, p.49) expands upon Laing, speculating “Indeed, even within the more immediate punk movement, it is arguable that a number of different sensibilities were patched together by the media to suggest a coherent ‘subcultural’ affiliation.” A major concern of Bennett is to emphasise the importance of locality in the reception of music, against the generalisations of Adorno and the CCCS. He continues to discuss an article by Szemere (1992), who notes how Hungarian punks in their own national punk scene brought into their reworking of the punk idea “a particular view and experience of history” (Szemere, 1992, p. 95). Bennett himself provides an excellent example of the importance of local scenes in his approach to considering hip hop culture as a “local construct” in two European cities, Newcastle and Frankfurt (Bennett, 2000, p.133-65; a development of Bennett, 1995). For some of Newcastle’s hip hop enthusiasts, the music’s “use as an authentic mode of expression” centres around “the form of felt association with the African-American experience” (which owes much to the beliefs of one man who runs an independent record shop, Groove, specialising in such music), but for others “the essence of hip hop culture relates to its ready translation into a medium that directly bespeaks the white British working-class experience” (ibid., p.158-9). Bennett detects a similar instance of “scenes within scenes” (ibid., p. 145) in Frankfurt. He discusses (p. 140-5), on the one hand, German-language rap which is used by some groups composed of members of ethnic minorities to chronicle their struggle to be accepted as German and not be discriminated against and, on the other, Turkish rap styles, which fuse traditional Turkish musical styles with African-American rap styles. The former has come to signify the desire to integrate with German society, the latter translating as a defiant message of pride in an ethnic group’s cultural heritage or ‘roots’. The two versions of hip hop he discusses (though he mentions that he actually identified a third hip hop sensibility) “illustrate how, even within the same city or region, hip hop scenes can be crossed by competing knowledges and sensibilities which, although working out of the same nexus of local experience, generate a multiplicity of musicalised and stylised solutions to the often problematic issue of place and identity” (ibid., p.145).

The most influential figure in challenging the preoccupation with subcultures
has been Steve Redhead, and what he describes as "the vehicle for promoting 'popular cultural studies' in the early to mid-1990s" (Redhead, 1997, p.1), the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture. His detailed reading of post-punk events in Britain questioned the very notion of 'subculture' and with it the emphasis on this concept as part of a tradition of rock 'authenticity' and opposition at the level of cultural politics. I would entirely agree with his argument that "Such notions are not capable of capturing the changes in youth culture and rock culture from at least the 1970s onwards. They are, moreover, unsatisfactory as accounts of pop history and youth culture in general" (Redhead, 1990, p.41-2). Redhead extends his argument to suggest "'Authentic' subcultures were produced by subcultural theories, not the other way round" (ibid., p.25). What is especially useful in Redhead's work has been his concern, with that of others (such as Sarah Thornton and Lawrence Grossberg: see in particular the Redhead co-edited [with Wynne and O'Connor] book, The Clubcultures Reader, 19975, which Redhead describes as being "self-consciously modelled on the CCCS book [i.e., Hall and Jefferson, 1976], from the 1970s" [Redhead, 1997, p.2]) to consolidate the important ethnographic work associated with contemporary cultural studies traditions of youth and popular culture research (notably the CCCS), but extend it and apply it to the different (or perhaps not so different, if one considers Laing's approach to punk) youth environment of today, in all its heterogeneous glory. Redhead explicitly states "As far as the specific focus of this book is concerned - its work on sub/club cultures - the collective research project was originally set up to continue the ethnographic traditions of the 1960s and 1970s CCCS, but in the very different theoretical and political environment of the 1990s" (ibid., p.2).

To my way of thinking, and in terms of its congruence with the aims and theoretical underpinnings of this research, the key article in The Clubcultures Reader is that by Muggleton, entitled "The Post-subculturalist". He argues for the importance of what he terms "the implications of the postmodern for 'spectacular' subcultural style" and for recognition of what he describes as "postmodern subcultures" (ibid., p.185). He continues to quote Campbell (he later utilises Featherstone and Lash too)

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5 The Clubcultures Reader is a volume which even includes a chapter by Simon Reynolds on rave music. Reynolds is the pivotal figure in the defining of post-rock, as will be shown more fully later. The inclusion of an extract from Reynolds the professional music journalist (if also devotee of poststructuralist theory) seems somewhat ironic considering Frith and Savage's admirable essay fronting The Clubcultures Reader, which rails precisely against the eclipse of academics by journalists.
as saying the cultural logic of modernity is as much 'romantic-hedonism' as 'puritan-rationalism' (ibid., p.186), a perspective I have aimed to stress in previous sections. He emphasises in particular the privileging of "ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity and the chaotic" (quoting Harvey [1991]) in postmodernism. Again, the relevance of Muggleton's analysis for the theoretical underpinnings of this study are most apparent. He admits his approach remains just at the theoretical level at the moment, but asserts he aims to do empirical work too (and the importance of doing such work).

Muggleton quotes Beezer to support his view that "there never was a privileged moment of 'authentic' subcultural inception untainted by media, commercial and entrepreneurial influences, in the manner that modernist theory suggested" (ibid., p.196):

> Media representations provide the ideological framework within which subcultures can represent themselves, shaping as well as limiting what they can say... Hebdige claims that the punks did not so much express the alienation they felt from mainstream society as dramatise contemporary media and political discourse about Britain's decline (Beezer, 1992).

The use of Hebdige confirms that even at the time *Subculture* was written and initially published, there was an awareness of the significance of the media in the construction of subcultures. The importance of the media in this respect is more clearly recognised in the work of Sarah Thornton (1995, esp. pp.116-62) on club cultures. Thornton's statement, that "When they [CCCS] come to define 'subculture', they position the media and its associated processes outside, in opposition to and after the fact of subculture" (ibid., p. 119) may be supported by the quotation she uses from the Introduction to *Resistance through Rituals* that the analysis of the CCCS will "penetrate beneath [the] popular constructions' of the mass media" (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p.9), but in reality certain members of the CCCS do seem to have appreciated that the media 'shapes' as well as 'limits', as Beezer's discussion of Hebdige shows.

Even if the CCCS acknowledge the rôle of media to some extent, Thornton is as part of what they describe, following McGuigan, 'cultural populism' (p. 7-17, see especially p.10).
correct to argue they underestimate its importance. I would entirely agree with her contention that

Niche media like the music press construct subcultures as much as they document them. National mass media, such as the tabloids, develop youth movements as much as they distort them. Contrary to youth subcultural ideologies, ‘subcultures’ do not germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into mysterious ‘movements’ only to be belatedly digested by the media. Rather, media and other culture industries are there and effective right from the start. They are central to the process of subcultural formation, integral to the way we “create groups with words” (Bourdieu 1990: 139) (ibid., p.117).

Thornton’s own approach, then, was to view club cultures as ‘taste cultures’ brought together by micro-media (in other words, fliers and listings), which then become transformed into self-conscious ‘subcultures’ by the music and style press (“niche media”). These subcultures in certain instances formed ‘movements’, with the assistance of mass media such as tabloid newspapers. Her recognition that the words of the media are what constructs a subculture is an insight germane to this research, and reflects a broad similarity in approach, methodologically and theoretically.

Muggleton argues that “it is only by the provision of evidence based on the values, meanings and motives of the subculturalists themselves that we can progress beyond the sterility of previous approaches and add to our knowledge of this phenomenon” (ibid., p.185). Such a perspective must necessarily follow on from his previously stated awareness of the fragmented nature of what had been interpreted as a coherent ‘subculture’ by earlier theorists: if it is not possible to provide an ‘expert’ interpretation from ‘above’, then all the sociologist can hope to do is analyse how the participants themselves construct their world(s) linguistically. An appreciation of the importance both of considering both the role of the media and of analysing the meanings of the subculturalists themselves suggests the need to attend to the fanzines, media written by the subculturalists themselves. As Thornton (op. cit., p.138-41) observes, fanzines should not be conceived as the ‘authentic’ voice of a subculture. They have less frequent publication dates than the mass media, and hence tend to
write about cultural matters that are often already some way in the past, and take at least as much from professional publications, in terms of what they think is worth writing about, as the professionals do from them (but the exact nature of this symbiotic relationship varies enormously in individual fanzines). Nonetheless, they too serve to construct a scene linguistically.

This section has shown how theories of the relationship between music and social formations have increasingly acknowledged the importance of recognising the fragmented, ambivalent nature of 'subcultures', and the constitutive rôle of the media, and hence the critical significance of language in constructing the subculture, or in "creating groups with words", to use Thornton's quotation from Bourdieu. Whether this is an entirely new theoretical development (considering that at times such much criticised figures as Adorno and Hebdige seem to have been aware of the importance of language and the media, respectively) or even whether this reflects a new social reality which is genuinely different from what happened before is ultimately not the point, though certainly of more than academic importance. That subcultures in general are linguistically constructed appears to be appreciated by contemporary sociologists of popular music, and in conjunction with a phenomenon as fragmented and inherently discursive (that is, rooted in discourse, as opposed to social class, ethnicity or even related to a sense of identity for its audience) as post-rock (in the manner I have previously indicated in some depth in a previous chapter), only a theoretical and methodological approach which privileges language can be seen as useful. I have earlier suggested that post-rock is particularly suitable for such an approach, and though the investigations of indie and especially club cultures by such as Redhead and Thornton may cast some doubt on this claim, it is still a perspective I uphold, even though it is one which I cannot hope to illuminate with my own work (only some kind of comparative research could hope to achieve that). Some musics retain their importance as a source of identity for their listeners, such as hip-hop, and even if they do mean quite different things to different people depending on local circumstances, the fact that they mean something as opposed to anything, or even nothing, prevents a lapse into a kind of postmodern free-for-all. Emphasising the importance of the 'local', as Bennett does, immediately allows a way back in for the realm of the social which is uncontroversial. However, one could argue that when Bennett writes
Arguably, however, language in popular music cannot be assessed merely in terms of the themes and issues that it conveys [the classic concentration on song lyrics in much of the older sociology of popular music] or in relation to the sound or 'grain' of the voice (Barthes: 1977). Rather, the simple fact of language itself can also play a crucial role in informing the cultural sensibilities that become inscribed within conventions of musical taste (2000, p.140).

It may represent something of a lost opportunity. For it is possible, and I would contend desirable, to utilise a far more radical notion of the importance of language than the simple awareness of the significance of whether the German or the Turkish language is used by local rap groups in Frankfurt, which is what Bennett is referring to here. Bennett, Redhead and Thornton, and for that matter Adorno, all understand that language is important, but none outline the view held in ethnomethodology that language is a form of social action and thus constructs reality. Such an ethnomethodological approach is utilised in Widdicombe and Wooffitt’s work, The Language of Youth Subcultures (1995), though their analysis does not focus on the specifically musical aspects of subcultures. At least as far as post-rock is concerned, I am prepared to take the stronger position that how it is constituted linguistically in the media is its entire existence, a view which surely few have suggested (or would want to suggest) should be extended to all of hip-hop or punk, even if the media and language are appreciated as fundamental in those ‘subcultures’.

Thus a distinct methodological approach is required, and it is the method of an ‘ethnography of discourses’, a variety of ethnomethodological ethnography which can be seen as a development of the work of the CCCS and of Redhead’s popular cultural studies from the MIPC (Manchester Institute for Popular Culture), which I shall now continue to outline in the following chapter.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between music and language. The research methodology is a discourse analysis of textual materials (the discourses being identified in reviews and features in professional music magazines and in fanzines, and song and album titles) that construct, the musical genre of post-rock. It has already been argued in a previous section why the area of music selected for the research, what has been conceptualised as 'post-rock', is particularly suitable. It remains for this chapter to provide a theoretical rationale for the methodological approach adopted for the research - namely what can be described as an 'ethnography of discourses' - and to discuss the specifics of the selected methodology in more detail.

Justification of methodological approach

The central methodological approach adopted in this research is the analysis of texts. The precise details of which texts were selected for analysis, and why, will be related shortly, but first it is necessary to provide a justification for the chosen research methodology at a more general level. As Silverman has argued, there has been a history of resistance to such a choice of methodology, for

British and American social scientists have never been entirely confident about analysing texts. Perhaps, in (what the French call) the Anglo-Saxon cultures, words seem too ephemeral and insubstantial to be the subject of scientific analysis (1993, p.59).

In fact, as will be explored more thoroughly later, the very ephemeral and insubstantial nature of words is part of their specific attraction for a topic of study such as this - the belief that there is a definite entity, something more substantial which the words merely refer to, is an unwarranted assumption.

It is generally considered essential in researching documents, such as the magazines and fanzines that provide the core data for this research, to use a
triangulation of research strategies. With documentary work, unlike survey research for example, validity and reliability cannot be secured within the method itself: the data source may be biased, and vital elements of context may be overlooked which could be integral in determining the nature of the object under investigation. Hence it may be considered useful to utilise alternative methodologies, such as interviews, to ensure the adequacy of one's data. The problematic isolation of the text from its social context, and the contention that for a text to be meaningful there needs to be a socially situated author and audience has been highlighted by Scott, who contends that “texts must be studied as socially situated products” (1990, p.34). The production of any medium of communication is undertaken with an audience in mind, and unless one knows how that audience 'reads' the content, it may be possible that the researcher will fail to grasp the message. Especially in the slang-filled language of the music publication, drenched in 'insider' references, so much depends upon the existence of a common frame of reference between writer and reader. It can be argued, then, that to truly understand the possible meanings of a text, one also needs to be familiar with the interpretations of the reader, almost to complement the documentary analysis of the magazines with a discourse analysis of the talk of the consumers.

Such a perspective suggests the necessity of providing an analysis of interviews with the consumers of post-rock. However, this approach has not been adopted here, and for good reason. This research does not aim to provide the objective truth about the post-rock subculture, but rather has as its focus the relationship between language and music (and how a consideration of this relationship might flesh out the concept of 'jouissance'), that is, it is interested in how post-rock is constructed. It aims to provide an analysis of the very social processes through which post-rock becomes defined. This research is a study of language use, not of some underlying phenomenon which can be summarised effectively with the title ‘post-rock’. Thus the documents considered in this study are utilised not as resources for the research, but as topics for investigation. The methodology is one of discourse analysis of documents as opposed to documentary analysis per se.

The object of empirical study of the discourse analyst is to describe the way that texts are constructed, and to explore the functions served by specific constructions. Language usage has functional, dynamic properties: rather than being a logical system of symbols which merely describe an entity independent of the
concepts of it, it is understood that language use is a form of social action. The philosopher Wittgenstein (1953) was particularly influential in the growing realisation that language is a central feature of its social and cultural setting, and that “meaning is use”, as he famously proposed. The unit of study for this research is the discourse, or ‘linguistic repertoire’ - a set of descriptive and referential terms which portray beliefs, actions and events in a specific way. The repertoire is “constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions. Often a repertoire will be organised around specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes)” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.149). The assumption behind this approach is that the descriptive practices under investigation are not random or idiosyncratic events, but rather have systematic properties.

Such an interest in the systematic properties of language use was originally stimulated in sociology by ethnomethodology, pioneered by Garfinkel (1967). One of the most significant developments from ethnomethodology has been conversation analysis, which, following Sacks, has studied the structure of conversational organisation. However, even in Garfinkel’s original work, he highlighted the special importance of written texts. By discerning the common-sense practices involved in assembling and interpreting written records, Garfinkel (ibid.) made a major contribution to the sociological understanding of everyday bureaucratic procedures. Silverman (1993, p.60) notes that Dingwall (1981) has even coined the term *ethnomethodological ethnography* (my emphasis) to describe the analytic framework for the analysis of texts he utilises (I shall return to discuss Dingwall’s idea of ethnomethodological ethnography in more detail shortly).

Sociological interest in language use in texts also has a clear history in discourse analysis. Discourse analysis grew out of the sociological study of scientific knowledge (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984), but was developed especially in social psychology, notably by Potter and Wetherell (1987), briefly introduced previously. In theory, discourse analysts examine all forms of verbal and textual materials, from spoken and written accounts and scientific journals to bus tickets and club fliers. It has been noted that, in practice, discourse analysts concentrate on spoken language (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, p.61), but as Garfinkel’s own investigations suggest, there is no reason why the written text cannot be considered worthy of research attention.
Potter and Wetherell developed the foundation for their empirical programme from certain key points (the discussion of their programme is adapted from Wooffitt, 1992, p.55, and Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, p.57). Following Wittgenstein, they stressed that language has an action orientation, and that language is both constructed and constructive. They observed that any given state of affairs can be described in a number of ways, and that therefore there will be variability in accounts. As there could be no certain way to resolve this variation to enable one to claim one had found the ‘best’ or ‘most informative’ accounts, the purpose of analysis should be to study the ways that language is used flexibly and constructively.

Thus this research has a clear ancestry in sociological analysis in the shape of ethnomethodology and discourse analysis. As will be shown in the next section in this chapter, this study’s consideration of texts in general finds precedents in most of the notable figures from the discipline’s past, and its focus more specifically on the texts of popular culture is an echo of the previous investigations of McRobbie and Illouz: in this instance influenced by a different strand of discourse analysis, from the work of Foucault. The more theoretical (and historical) approach of Foucault provides an avenue to focus on texts as well as talk, and even if Foucault-inspired discourse analysts such as Ian Parker have in practice concentrated on material garnered from interviews, they have allowed the possibility of utilising a much wider range of suitable texts for research. The substantive focus of discourse analytic work has certainly expanded exponentially in what can be investigated since Potter and Wetherell scrutinised the verbal data used uncritically by experimental social psychologists.

However, one critical area of central methodological relevance remains which has yet to be more fully discussed and needs to be considered here, namely that of ethnography. It was stated at the beginning of the chapter that the primary methodological aim of this research was to provide an ethnography of the discourses that construct post-rock. It may be objected that the idea of an ethnomethodological ethnography, to use Dingwall’s phrase again, is something of a contradiction in terms. For if few could object to the aptness of ethnography for considering post-rock, if ethnography is particularly well suited to exploring “some hitherto obscure niche of social life” (Fielding, p.155, in Gilbert (ed.), 1993), then some of the aims of ethnography may seem inimical to a discourse-based perspective.
Dingwall (1981) discusses what he terms “the ethnomethodological critique” and “the rejection of ethnography (p. 124-32), before holding out the possibility of an “ethnomethodological ethnography” (p.132-8). He notes correctly that the well-known criticisms by ethnomethodology apply for the most part equally well to interpretivist or orthodox ethnographic sociologies (p. 124-5). Dingwall observes “there is, for instance, a strain in ethnography which holds that methodological procedures are available to improve on those of lay members”, and contends that Denzin’s (1970) proposals for triangulation to provide a means for sociologists to adjudicate between participants’ competing versions is “a good illustration of this” (p. 125); a procedure Dingwall recognises ethnomethodology would reject. Another difficulty is that “ethnographers do tend to see literal description as a practical rather than a philosophical problem” (ibid.), descriptions being constrained “by the economics of publishing” (forcing short-cuts and summarising tendencies) rather than the inherently “indefinite character of description”, or the fact that there can be no one ‘best’, ‘objectively true’ account.

However, Dingwall continues to argue for the existence of a specifically ethnomethodological variant on ethnography. According to Dingwall, such an approach has “much in common with conversational [sic] analysis. The ethnomethodological ethnographer starts from the question of how the participants in some event find its character and sustain it, or fail to, as a joint activity” (p.134). Crucially, Dingwall writes (after a lengthy half-page quotation of Goodenough’s account of the ‘new ethnography’ in anthropology, from a book published as long ago as 1964, which he declares “comes very close” [p. 134] to this, emphasising the echoes such an approach has in previous work in certain strands of the social sciences) that “It is this stress on actors’ models which distinguishes ethnomethodological ethnography from its predecessors” (p.135).

Dingwall continues to contend that “there is a movement towards a rather different epistemological foundation” (p. 136). This “different epistemological foundation” differentiates ethnomethodological ethnography not only from positivistic and interpretive approaches, but from conversation analytic work too. This paragraph is worth quoting in full from Dingwall:
In particular, there is a movement towards a rather different epistemological foundation. This seeks to present a more theoretical account of the woolly notion of ethnographic empathy as a warrant for an observer's knowledge. ...the observer sets himself [sic] up in a position of consciously interchanging cultural frames, now taking those of a member, now those of a stranger. This internal dialogue, as a reflexive creation, enhances his [sic] understanding beyond the unreflexive analysis of collectivity members, or aspirants. Through this acculturation experience, the ethnographer acquires knowledge of the traditions he [sic] is witnessing, the same knowledge of as members rather than knowledge about. Where conversational analysis remains at a distance from those studied through its emphasis on the study of reified and de-contextualised data, ethnomethodological ethnography seeks to handle its subject-matter through an explicit process of sharing and understanding experience which is subsequently formalised. (p. 136).

It is this combination of focusing on accounts in conjunction with an acculturation experience – an absolutely essential part of the process, because otherwise one could not understand what was an attempt to construct something as specifically 'post-rock' rather than another genre - which is what I have taken from ethnomethodological ethnography: in other words, an ethnography of discourses.

More recently, Denzin (originally an ethnographer whose work published in 1970 was highlighted as providing a good illustration of what ethnomethodologists would want to criticise in orthodox ethnography, according to Dingwall [1981, p.125]) has formulated what he calls “Interpretive Ethnography” as an attempted means of resolving and extending beyond ethnomethodological criticisms. Denzin (1997, p.xv) notes that there is “a traditional bias that argues that ethnographers study real people in the real world”, and continues to quote the injunctions of the founding father of the methodology, Malinowski, as further evidence of the particular importance of realism in ethnography, summarising this view as one that claims “Ethnographers connect meanings (culture) to observable action in the real world”. According to Denzin, such a perspective is “no longer workable”, as there is “no direct access to reality” (p.xvi).
Denzin's entire book, *Interpretive Ethnography* (subtitled "Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century"), is a thesis which suggests that ethnographers are now in a new stage in the development of their discipline, what he terms the 'sixth moment' of inquiry (p. xvii). His is a complex analysis, but it is worth emphasising particular features of his argument which are particularly germane to showing how my own approach can be seen to fit this new stage of ethnographic practice. Denzin stresses that

The writer can no longer presume to be able to present an objective, noncontested account of the other's experiences. Those we study have their own understandings of how they want to be represented (p. xiii).

Such a point reiterates the significance of attending to the texts produced by those who are being researched themselves.

Denzin suggests that for ethnographers this is a period of investigating 'messy texts', which he describes as "many sited, open ended, they refuse theoretical closure, and they do not indulge in abstract, analytic theorizing" (p. xvii). The critical point is, nevertheless, that these texts are not just subjective accounts of experience; they attempt to reflexively map multiple discourses that occur in a given social space. Hence, they are always multivoiced, and no given interpretation is privileged. They reject the principles of the realist ethnographic narrative that makes claims to textual autonomy and to offering authoritative accounts of the processes being examined (ibid.).

The impossibility of providing an authoritative account of a social phenomenon because of the incorrigibility of divergent accounts has an obvious parallel with the points made by Potter and Wetherell that were discussed above. The presumption of a stable, external social reality that can be recorded by a stable, objective, scientific observer becomes unsustainable. Thus, once more – and in recognising the parallels elsewhere, including in Dingwall’s discussion some 16 years previous to Denzin’s work (and Goodenough’s account of the ‘new ethnography’ preceded Denzin by more
than three decades), we can see that Denzin’s proposals are perhaps less radical and more in tune both with contemporary and earlier sociological research than he suggests - it can be contended that the way to resolve this methodological impasse is to attend precisely to the ways in which the language itself is utilised in the varying accounts of a given phenomenon.

It should by now be clear that I am not arguing that texts are a more solid, fixed source (more so than, for example, interviews) by which one can trace the ‘truth’ about the development of a musical form. Words of texts are ephemeral and insubstantial too, in Silverman’s phrase, though as will be shown in the analytic sections, often considered as too substantial and restrictive by those who seek to elude the specificities of their meaning. Nevertheless, it is possible to suggest other reasons for favouring the text-based approach over an interview-based methodology. Analysis of texts can reveal a much larger number of discourses then interviews, which is particularly fruitful for the essentially exploratory nature of this investigation into an unknown area (in terms certainly of the topic and arguably of the approach, rather than simply because what is something of a hidden subculture is being considered). In addition, it was advantageous to be able to consider change over time, to consider if the discourses stabilised as time progressed. It was anticipated this would provide some insight into the role of social factors in constructing the music, in analysing what has previously been conceptualised as an essentially private matter, how an individual responds to a given piece of music.

However, a still more critical rationale existed for the focus on the written word, which will be considered in further detail in a later section.

The Analysis of Discourses and Texts in Social Research

The relative neglect of textual sources within qualitative research (especially the British/ American tradition) has already been noted. Atkinson and Coffey (1997) criticise much contemporary social research for its failure to take seriously the extent to which many of the settings and cultures under study are “self-documenting”. They continue to contend that

It is necessary to redress the balance [to include documentary analysis] if only for the sake of completeness and fidelity to the settings of social research.
...many organizations and settings have ways of representing themselves collectively to themselves and to others. It is, therefore, imperative, that our understanding of contemporary society... incorporates those processes and products of self-description (1997, p.45).

As will be discussed more fully in the relevant analytic chapter, this is certainly true of fanzine subcultures, and to consider the evolution of a musical formation without identifying how the practitioners and supporters of that music 'represent themselves collectively to themselves and to others' in print format would be to unnecessarily sacrifice a particularly significant and available source of data.

Nonetheless, as MacDonald and Tipton (1993) observe, the founders of sociology - Marx, Weber and Durkheim - and the Chicago School, all utilised documentary analysis. The critical point is not the use of documents in social research per se, but rather the status the document assumes within an analytic tradition. Whilst positivist, quantitative content analysis - the view that documents could be treated as an objective means for making inferences about the realities they purport to represent, and a primary concern with the manifest and surface meaning of a document - dominated the field until the 1960s, this approach was critiqued by the interpretive tradition. Within the interpretive tradition, documents are more likely to be seen as significant social mechanisms analysable as realities in their own right rather than as windows on the reality they claim to represent. The argument can be extended to propose that the reality which the document is purporting to representing, is a reality which the document itself is constructing: that the language, or discourses, or language-games of the document create the reality, not represent it (an argument previously highlighted in earlier sections).

A particularly relevant example of previous research in this tradition is that by Illouz (1991), examining discourses of emotion in women's magazines. Criticising the "well established myth [which] views emotions, romantic love in particular, as irreducible to thought, language and culture" (ibid., p.231), Illouz utilises the work of the constructionist social psychologists (discussed in a previous chapter), cultural historians and cultural anthropologists (influenced by Geertz's hermeneutic view of social action), who have shown how seemingly universal emotions are informed by the meaning systems/ cultural texts/ language-games available to social actors. Most
of all, her research is informed by Foucault's theory of discourse and his perspective on language and emotions. As Illouz argues,

Foucault's theory of discourse can easily be extended to the domain of emotions. Discourse theory suggests that our emotions are shaped by the metaphors, the semantic categories and the explanatory rules which characterise a particular field of knowledge. This discursive activity shapes how we organize, communicate our emotions. For discourse theory, language does not 'reflect' or 'translate' an emotion with a distinct ontological status. In other words, discourse theory suggests that language produces rather than labels emotions. (ibid., p.233).

Illouz's methodology (ibid., p.233-4) was to consider all the articles pertaining to love and marriage in two women's magazines (plus the odd extra article from similar publications) through a six-month period, examining thirty-five articles in total. She then analysed three broad issues in each article - the main themes, the metaphors by which romantic love is constructed, and the normative logic underlying the romantic discourse. Illouz derives the theme, following van Dijk, from the macrostructure of the text - "the semantic information that provides... overall unity to the discourse" (van Dijk, 1985, p.116) - in other words, the summary or lead of an article. Utilising the work of, for example, Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Illouz also examined the dominant metaphorical field within which romantic love is conceptualised. Her analysis additionally considered (following Angenot, 1982) 'topoi' - "the set of assumptions, the normative logic underlying and at the same time exceeding statements about a particular object... the structured but implicit value-laden (axiological) dimension of discourses" (op. cit., p.234).

From her study of the magazines, Illouz identified three broad metaphorical fields - love as intense force, love as magic, and love as hard work (ibid., p.235-8). The first two fields can be seen as discourses of passion, with metaphorical sub-fields including references to love being a burning force, or causing sparks of electricity. Illouz also notes that "originality, spontaneity and creativity are promoted here, but these values are what sociologists call 'anti-institutional' definitions of the self" (p.236). She continues to remark that
In contemporary culture, the metaphors of intensity... reflect a combination of 'anti-modernism' and hedonism. Here anti-modernism is a complex of anti-institutional values such as spontaneity, quest of an authentic self, creativity and the unconstrained expression of one's emotions (ibid.).

However, Illouz focuses primarily on her third discourse - love as hard work - and relates the usage of this metaphorical field to the dominance of the values of "instrumental reason" (following Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972) she conceives as inherent in capitalism, and to the particular demands placed on women in romantic relationships. It is this which informs her conclusion that "the penetration of romantic discourse by the logic of instrumentality is liable to have negative consequences on the woman's subjectivity or 'lifeworld'" (op. cit., p.246), as women are then required to perform considerably more emotional labour than men, and, especially, her view that

By stressing the same values and forms of reasoning at work in the spheres of market exchanges and science, it [the encroachment of economic and contractual rationality upon the domain of love] may have contributed to extending their power in the communicative and intersubjective domains which, in order to remain meaningful, ought to retain their autonomy from these spheres (ibid.).

Whilst her former, feminist-informed, comment appears highly reasonable (as she found in other research she conducted that men made considerably fewer references to the 'love as hard work' discourse than women [Illouz, 1991(2)]), her latter comment seems very much a value-judgment. Moreover, she neglects to provide a more profound analysis of the discourses where love was constructed as an intense force and as magic, despite noting their prominence, apparently perceiving them as of relatively little theoretical interest (though she does refer to the work of Bell [1976] and Turner [1976], acknowledging a history [if a limited one] of sociological interest in these concerns).

The work of Illouz retains, nonetheless, a special resonance, as she was particularly interested in the relationship between discourse and that which has been
supposed to be beyond language, in this instance the emotion of romantic love. However, many other classic pieces of sociological research have proceeded on the same basis, analysing discourses from publications about popular culture as well as women's magazines, such as McRobbie's (1991) well known work on the publications 'Jackie' and 'Just Seventeen'. It is in this tradition that this particular research also falls.

The Significance of the Written Word

In the last two decades there has been an extraordinary proliferation of publications concerned with popular music, with almost every obscure sub-genre (with the notable exception of post-rock) seemingly gaining its own voice. As the number and variety of professional publications has expanded, though admittedly at the expense of circulation figures for individual magazines, so have the abundance and diversity of those written for non-commercial purposes by 'fans': the fanzines, or zines. The usefulness of the magazines in this capacity is in their role as "presenting appropriate articulations of the discourse [of popular music] in terms which are perceived as 'reasonable' to the paper's audience" (Stratton, 1982, p.283), and a consideration of the zines has the additional advantage of providing insight into how the discourse are articulated by the consumers of the music themselves (and indeed frequently the makers of the music too), rather than simply examining the words of the professional journalists. Thus the magazines provide an excellent source of instant access to the discourses around popular music currently in circulation. Indeed, by considering a wide variety of them, one can gain a knowledge of discourses around particular genres and in certain more hidden and obscure subcultures, which might easily be missed even in a quite extensive sample of interviews. Though clearly this provides a justification of the use of the magazines as a suitable topic for research, especially in the light of the relative paucity of sociological research which has been conducted on music magazines, in comparison to, for instance, women's magazines, it still does not suggest a reason to preferring textual analysis to using interview data, if the primary concern is simply to utilise what is "perceived as 'reasonable' to the [music's] audience".

The critical point is made by Stratton, in the solitary article to discuss solely the music press, for as he observes,
the very idea of operating at one remove, of writing *about* the record, would suggest that a degree of analysis is inevitable - even description requires the use of categories which are at the very least the product of some taken-for-granted analytical ordering of the world (ibid., p.270).

It is this taken-for-granted analytical ordering, the implicit concepts which constitute a discourse, whether consciously known or not, which is to be the central focus of this research. In other words, it is precisely because music papers have to use language to communicate the nature of the music they discuss, and thus must go beyond any initial resistance to rationalising the character and the appeal of particular pieces of music and cannot solely rely on personal opinion if they wish to sell their publication, that they are particularly interesting for this research. Similarly, the convention of using song and album titles is so normalised that it is almost (but not absolutely, as will be shown) impossible to evade. Without titles to demarcate releases it is difficult to treat the music as product and sell it to consumers. Finally, the writings about music in fanzines are interesting because though they are certainly personal and not required to appeal to, or even make sense to, a mass audience unlike the professional publications, they still have as their fundamental purpose the conscious urge to communicate something about the music. An examination of the use of the written word as it relates to music provides the perfect opportunity to consider what discourses surround and construct pop in general and post-rock in particular, and how those discourses attempt to convey what is often claimed to be the indescribable appeal of music, for "one of the fundamental premises of the discourse of popular music is that popular music itself defies analysis" (Stratton, 1983, p.297). Analysis of textual material is especially valuable therefore, because it overcomes the very real obstacle that may hamper interviews, namely that participants would contend that they were unable to put their feelings about and descriptions of music into words (this is not to assume a realist position, but simply a wish to garner more interesting data which retains a validity in its own right). A consideration of the discourses found in written texts by its nature triumphs over such a problem, but with the written discourses still being appropriate as representations of the music, as they are either 'reasonable' to the audience, and indeed influencing that audience (professional
writing), chosen by the bands themselves (song and album titles), or composed by the audience or music groups (fanzines).

The Details of the Methodology

Having argued in favour of the focus on the written word in general, in this section the precise textual material selected will be justified. The relevance of considering professional publications, titles of musical pieces, and fanzines for research purposes has already been highlighted to some extent, as each demonstrate what discourses are considered 'reasonable' by the various significant parties (the professional journalists who are influential taste-makers, the musicians themselves, and the 'fans' or audience for the music).

The magazines chosen as examples of the writings of professional journalists were New Musical Express and Melody Maker. These weekly publications were selected because they cover to some extent all the different strands in the diverse musical field identified as 'post-rock' (as opposed to dance music publications such as DJ and Mixmag, which concentrate, unsurprisingly, only on those bands whose music can be related to developments in club cultures), and because, though their circulation continues to decline gradually through the past two decades, they retain a mass audience and are widely available through most High Street newsagents. This is in contrast to The Wire, which covers a far wider amount of material relating to post-rock, but which is much less popular and less populist, and whose writing tends to assume a greater depth of musical knowledge (and, significantly in this context, a more substantial appreciation of the more obscure components of our contemporary musical heritage) than the weeklies. Melody Maker and New Musical Express were chosen precisely because of an interest in how mass publications would attempt to convey the appeal of a non-mass musical movement, the like of which much of the readership could be expected to be unfamiliar with, an effect liable to be exacerbated because of the wide coverage of many different types of musical genre (those with mass appeal as well as the more 'experimental') in the magazines. Additionally, these publications are particularly important to consider because of their influential role in taste formation, so their circulation figures of just under 100,000 represents a potentially highly significant market.
The titles used for songs and albums was also investigated, to consider if discursive patterns could be identified in their deployment. The central aspect of this particular music that makes such an analytic approach productive is the relative absence of lyrics. Obviously, if the titles of the various tracks merely reflected the content of the lyrics, then such an approach would tell one precious little about how the music itself is symbolically represented by its makers, as more often than not (though not always) song titles tend to be a word or series of words sung in the chorus of a song, or at least to provide some kind of overview of the contents of the lyrics. This provides a clear focal point as much for musicians, fans and critics, as it has done for previous researchers in the sociology of popular music, who have concentrated on this easier to describe aspect of the music at the expense of its other features. In post-rock related releases this is frequently not an option, and where the human voice is utilised it comes across frequently not as a means of communicating a message or even as a signifier of emotionality as such, but rather as another instrument. The merging of recognised words and nonsense language, often sung in an indistinct tone where precise phrases are difficult to identify, is a frequent method to elude clear meaning (which can be traced back at least as far as the ‘ethereal’ music of 4AD artists such as The Cocteau Twins). The fundamental problem to be solved, then, is how to provide titles to a music which may be wordless or where the lyrics are not the main focus of attention, and the significance of this dilemma for this research is whether any patterns in non-lyric based titling can be discerned in post-rock, and what do such patterns suggest about the relationship between music and language. It has an added significance in providing some insight into how the musicians themselves conceptualise their work without them being able to hide behind the usual cliché deployed in magazine interviews that their music cannot be classified or easily described, and in that, as will be demonstrated, the titles of the pieces (and of the groups themselves) have clearly coloured the way they are described in much of the writings of the professional journalists.

The period of analysis extended from the summer of 1993 to the summer of 1996. This period was to have been longer, but though the amount of music and groups which could be classified as post-rock subsequently created has expanded exponentially, there has been little change in the discourses surrounding the music, as these had established a much more settled form by 1996 (and the term post-rock itself
had increasingly fallen into disrepute). During this period, slightly more than 300 issues of New Musical Express and Melody Maker were published (51 per year of each over three years), of which more than half of each publication have been used for analysis. Due to the relatively small percentage of material devoted to the area of post-rock in any one issue, no procedure for sampling within an issue was implemented - all relevant material (including interviews, articles, single reviews, live reviews, and album reviews) was analysed. Issues were initially selected for relevance to the musical sphere of post-rock in its broadest possible definition, so comparatively little pertinent material should have evaded the analytic spotlight.

A similar approach to the organisation of the data was adopted for the fanzines. In total, nearly fifty different publications (with in some cases as many as five issues of each being considered, though some remained one-offs) were collected, and prepared for analysis. The length of the publications varied from two or three sheets to over a hundred pages, but an average length was approximately thirty pages. The data was collected using diverse methods, as none of these fanzines are available through mainstream newsagents. Some were purchased through going to gigs where the individuals who wrote and published the zines in question sell them during intervals between bands (this is how Drunk on the Pope’s Blood, Kill Everyone Now, and Cool your boots were obtained). The mini-booklet “What is this thing called Post-Rock?” was collected for free at one Mogwai gig situated on a boat on the Thames in December 1995, as rather unusually, a number of these booklets were situated at the entrance to the gig and available to all (a unique method of dissemination). Others were on sale at special fanzines stalls at post-rock ‘event’ gigs (for instance, the Select organised ‘Wow and Flutter’ post-rock mini-tour of Europe headlined by Tortoise at the end of 1996, or the Silver Apples© gig in September 1996, or specialist record label nights) - here were found Comes with a smile, Obsessive Eye, Hedonist, Easy Pieces, Velvet Sheep, Ptolemaic Terrascope, Monitor [from USA], Perfect and DDDD (a.k.a. Daffadowndilly). Editions of Lizard and Immerse were handed out free at certain gigs. Other fanzines were picked up at fanzine festivals (two were attended in

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6 Silver Apples are a very influential group from New York, consisting solely of drums and the ‘Simeon’ - a primitive synthesiser named after its maker - who originally released two albums in 1968 and 1969, and who languished in complete obscurity until the mid 1990s, when a reissue of the original albums and a tribute album made by various post-rock artists led to the band reforming, gigging in
Brighton) and at a Small Press Conference. It was possible to buy some fanzines at independent record shops such as Rough Trade and Selectadisc in London. Certain fanzines, especially the international ones, were garnered from mail order, whether from small record labels or specialist distribution networks such as The Empty Quarter and Fisheye. The first of these had its own publication (Music from the Empty Quarter) for a while, while the latter, in the author’s efforts to describe the music he is selling to an audience who most likely would not have had the opportunity to hear it for themselves before purchasing, publishes an immensely detailed and personal catalogue which could easily qualify for fanzine status in its own right. Che, a label and distribution network larger than Fisheye’s one man effort, publishes its own free fanzine, 64 Slices of American Cheese, with live and record reviews outside its own wares. Some zines were available on the Internet, the net zine Silencer7 having developed from the print zine Lizard. Finally, some fanzines were purchased by writing directly to their author(s) (for instance, a subscription to Ptolemaic Terrascope was taken out) which becomes increasingly possible the more one operates in the scene, as fanzines contain reviews (and addresses) of other fanzines. The more one participates, the larger the network becomes, but I feel I have been searching out fanzines for a sufficient period, and using a successful variety of means, to be confident that while the collection for analysis cannot be exhaustive (once a fanzine’s print run is exhausted, there is no alternative recourse available), it nonetheless represents all the major strands of the fanzine culture’s approaches to post-rock.

The Issue of ‘Relevance’

The categorisation of articles and reviews as ‘relevant’ is simply based on artists ever being described as, or associated with, ‘post-rock’ or compared to a band...
so described, either in the particular feature being examined or in any other features in alternative issues or publications. It has only been possible to work to this second goal because all the magazines and fanzines collected were initially read through, before actual analysis commenced. This primary stage of reading continued from the moment of collection of a particular copy of a publication until well into 1997 (when it was decided to end the collection stage). Completing research such as this is something that can only be achieved through thorough immersion in the material over a prolonged period (a sentiment that even a realist ethnographer could hardly begrudge): the “acculturation experience” of Dingwall (1981, p.136). Relevance cannot be ascribed on objective, universal grounds, but only with reference to others operating in the same field, using the same discourses, who are also engaged in the process of creating and constructing, and utilising and confirming, the language-game(s) of post-rock. Hence, on occasion some form of revision of previous ideas of relevance is necessary, where an artist’s work formerly not considered to be post-rock is suddenly thought to be exemplary of the genre, or described in ways which constitute key components of discourses surrounding post-rock. Nevertheless, it is to be expected that not all who might be included have been, as debate remains fierce about how to classify particular cases, and certain figures, who try to resist what is perceived as simplistic classification, react against the label ‘post-rock’ and become specifically seen as ‘not post-rock’ (despite this, this analysis retains coverage of such figures, as the policy has been to be as inclusive as possible - if there is doubt, the material has been included).

Ultimately, of course this difficulty in defining the object of study is not significant in posing problems of methodological approach, but rather in being precisely the central focus of analytic attention. That post-rock is so contested a concept, means it would be quite impossible to research a definite thing in the world - the signified - which is represented by this term. The only possible methodological approach can be to examine just how those who write about this music go about their task - to consider how exactly the music is constituted by those attempting to describe it. It is the attempt to answer this question that forms the bulk of this research, and which will be discussed at some length in the following analytic sections.

demonstrate the sounds in question in audio format would alter entirely the purpose and indeed the necessity of describing the music using language.
The Nature and Goals of the Analysis

The source material was read through as it was collected, so that the majority of the data from the period in question had been read before the actual analysis commenced, as previously stated. From this initial reading, certain ideas of common themes or metaphors used in the texts were noted (in a similar vein to Illouz). The publications were then dissected in more rigorous detail, by the researcher going through each issue of the publications in turn, investigating every relevant (as defined above) feature in every copy collected. Metaphors which writers used to describe the music were noted, on separate pieces of paper (no computing software package was used), many being listed on more than one sheet: a time-intensive, but necessary procedure. Some discursive categories required further division into subsets of the original metaphorical heading. The approach for the analysis of the fanzines was similar, but data for each zine was kept remote from others. A list of song titles by relevant artist was initially made, before the subdivision into discourses could be conducted in this instance.

The goal of the analysis was to provide as detailed as possible an account of the discourses utilised around, or (more properly) to construct, post-rock. In this sense, the purpose of the analysis was akin to producing the discourse analytic equivalent of the ‘thick description’ of the ethnographer, whereby analysis is grounded in the data collected. The ‘grounded theory’ approach of Glaser and Strauss was followed, and thus the analytic aim was

the development of a systematic understanding which is clearly recognizable and understandable to the members of the setting and which is done as much as possible in their own terms; yet it is more systematic, and necessarily more verbal, than they would generally be capable of expressing. It uses their words, ideas and methods of expression wherever possible, but cautiously goes beyond these (1967, p.124-5).

Thus whilst the metaphorical fields present in the publications were recorded, as they were by Illouz, what she terms the ‘topoi’ were not. It was not felt that an examination of sets of assumptions or the ‘normative logic’ underlying discourses could be warranted. As Illouz herself remarks, “this dimension of discourse is the most difficult
to formalize and operationalize because it pertains to tacit assumptions of discourse” (op. cit., p.234). Such an approach opens up the danger of reading too much into the text, a particular concern with documentary work (unlike conversation analysis, where one may consider if one’s reading of a situation is correct, by observing the ensuing reaction to a statement by other conversational participants - see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). For Illouz, that topoi are “the normative logic underlying and at the same time exceeding (my emphasis) statements about a particular object” (ibid.), is part of their attraction and special interest, but this very excess also constitutes their danger. A similar concern with overstretching the analysis, so that the meaning of the discursive material is compromised, is at the root of the relative lack of references to other empirical work within the analytic chapters themselves.

While it might appear an unusual aim to provide an ethnography of discourses, in this case it appears highly apposite. Post-rock is not a subculture of the type considered by, for example, Hebdige (1979), a subculture marked by codes of dress or behaviour, but more akin to Muggleton’s (1997) conception of the ‘post-subculture’. Rather, it exists possibly as a form of music, or perhaps a set of forms of musics (which may or may not have unique qualities distinct from the rock tradition), and definitely as discourse(s). (It should be reiterated here that post-rock may not in fact be so different to other musical forms or ‘scenes’ in this respect. The generalisations of Hebdige, his presumptions of a subculture where a homology exists between fashion, music, lifestyle and behaviour, have been criticised, as has previously been noted, by Laing (1985) in terms of their usefulness and accuracy as an account of punk, and Widdicombe and Wooffitt have noted in particular the absence of members’ own accounts [1995, p.22ff.] in his work and that of others at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, thus overlooking the diversity of voices involved in these movements and the fact that any one member of a subculture actually has many roles and to characterise them solely on the basis of their subcultural involvement is misleading).

It is the discourses of post-rock, then, into which the researcher (ethnographer) must immerse him/herself to discover the nature of what post-rock is. In the next four chapters, the discourses of post-rock will be examined in some depth, considering the approach from the perspective of professional writers, the musicians themselves (in their selection of titles), and fanzine enthusiasts. Finally, in the conclusion, this very
detailed account of the discourses of post-rock is related to the central foci of interest underlying the research, the relationships between language and music, and between language and that which is hypothesised as existing beyond language.
ANALYSIS OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS’ WRITING ABOUT ‘POST-ROCK’

Introduction

This chapter will concentrate on discussing the discourses surrounding the musical field previously identified as ‘post-rock’, as utilised in the mainstream music media, notably Melody Maker and New Musical Express, between 1993 and early 1997. Material utilised will include live reviews, album reviews, single reviews, interviews, commentaries and news items written by professional journalists employed (even if only on a freelance basis) by the publications in question.

Attempts to Classify - Genre, Place of Origin and Label

Perhaps the most useful theme with which to commence the analysis is that of genre, the attempt by someone writing about an individual piece of music to classify it within a particular wider typology, or musical framework. Clearly to be able to place a piece of music one is describing to someone who has most likely not heard it within the context of a framework of similar musical endeavour would be highly advantageous in attempting to communicate something of the nature of music in question. Reference to genre as a way of conveying an idea of the music being discussed is indeed a very common reviewing tool, and Frith (1996, p.75ff.) argues in a chapter entitled ‘Genre Rules’ that this “labeling [sic] lies, in practice, at the heart of pop value judgments.” He goes so far as to consider “the role of labels in popular music”, the “use of generic categories in the organization of popular culture”, as “seemingly inescapable” (ibid.). Hodgkinson (1995) also found generic reference to be one of the devices most frequently used by reviewers across a range of popular music publications, and indeed many of the more important themes utilised by reviewers he identifies in his research - reference to record labels, to the musical instruments used, comparisons to other groups, discussions of the cover of the releases, the origins of the group, the lyrics (if there are any), and the effect of the music on an audience (whether actual, as in a live review, or hypothetical) - are also to be found in deliberations about post-rock. In this sense, it may be argued, at least in so far as broad categories of predominantly objective (a band has either released a record
on the Kranky label or it has not, a guitar is either used or it is not, the musicians live in Chicago or they do not) features considered relevant to the music are concerned, that the way post-rock is commented upon differs relatively little from the way rock/pop/dance/hip-hop music is discussed. Certainly, one must acknowledge that there are similarities in how post-rock is discussed comparative to mainstream rock, and to be careful not to over-emphasise differences unduly.

Nevertheless, there are significant variations in the way discourses surrounding post-rock are utilised, as a closer examination of attempts to locate music within a genre or genres reveals. The vocabulary that constitutes discussion of genre with regard to this kind of music is far more diverse, common phrases apart from ‘post-rock’ including ‘bliss-rock’, ‘trance-rock’, ‘drift-rock’, and slightly later on, in reference to connections being made to seventies Kosmische music (which along with ‘motorik’ constitute Krautrock), ‘space rock’. ‘Amoeba-rock’ and ‘avant-pop’ (and latterly ‘avant-rock’, although this is a much older term which the classification of ‘post-rock’ was precisely set up by some in opposition to) have also been used, arguably in the case of the former phrase rather less successfully as an attempt at meaningful and evocative description. Moreover, it is not merely that genre titles are unsettled, but there can even be a complete failure to locate a music within a single unitary genre. Hence one encounters releases described as a “sheer 90s analogue dub-meets-easy listening-meets-Krautrock instrumental classic” or groups who are heralded as “the post-hardcore, post-ambient, post-Krautrock, avant-jazz-dub instrumental rock theorists it’s o.k. to like”. The suggested inappropriateness of categorisation for this music is strongly implied in the discussion around Run On, that “If you need a tag, bag it as perfect art-pop and watch it kick ‘n’ scream like a puppy on the way to the canal” (Melody Maker, February 15, 1997, p.13). Clearly, there is an element of humour to these descriptions, but what this humour implies is the inappropriateness of the conventional rock reviewing technique’s insistence on reference to genre, when simplistic generic classification is not always possible. In descriptions such as it’s “Krautrock goes pop”, there is a reference to what can be called ‘genre-surfing’: the music is suggested as being one genre sliding into another; the term “genre-surfing” is even explicitly used by the journalists themselves.

The inappropriateness of the conventional reviewing device of reference to generic classification confirms the impossibility of utilising the subcultural approach
in musical sociology. If even the musical genre of the phenomenon cannot be clearly identified then it is absurd to attempt to detect a homology between music, style, and social background of participants.

One final point that must be made concerning genre is that, with the passage of time, journalists have seemingly become more able to place the music into particular generic categories with ease, perhaps primarily because of the emerging dominance of ‘post-rock’ as the general term. The term remains a contested one, however, and its emergence as the pre-eminent generic description has seen it become the most resented and resisted one too. Many bands prefer to stress their love of rock history (mainstream as well as experimental groups) declaring themselves fans of rock pure and simple. Indeed, as continued experimentation is a key component of rock music anyway, all of a sudden labelling the stranger stuff ‘post-rock’ is something that requires much justification.

Attention to this problem is evident in the occasional attempts to suggest this music and the way it is performed is distinct from rock ‘n’ roll itself. Thus there are comments such as a live show by a particular group was “not a gig but...”, or it was “not then like a gig”, or even that a record is “serious art, not rock ‘n’ roll”. One reviewer begins “It looks like a gig, feels like a gig... until five minutes into MASS’ set, when the floor doesn’t even feel like the floor” (Melody Maker, October 19, 1996, p.43). Bearing in mind the avowed focus on rock in the two papers, such descriptions are often disapproving (though MASS are certainly not disliked, more considered beyond effective evaluation), or at least register a lack of certainty as to what exactly is taking place. In that sense, such descriptions can be read almost as seeming to suggest that the musical endeavours being discussed can be dismissed as irrelevant to the interests of their readers. However, this is only rarely the case, and tends to be reserved for events such as bands playing in ‘classical’ venues, such as the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room, in the South Bank, London, which insist audiences be seated (even this disdain is fading now, as the journalists grow accustomed to these venues, with The Labradford First Annual Festival of Drifting, hosted on the South Bank, September-October 1998 [the Second was held at the Union Chapel in Islington, another improbable rock venue], being far more warmly received in the weeklies than in The Wire, despite the latter’s regular focus on modern classical music). Other journalists (and it is important to appreciate there is no editorial stance
regarding approbation or disapproval of the music discussed, only the verdicts of individual contributors) stress that post-rock is not a distinct break with rock convention, but rather attempts to offer a possible way forward in a state of transition.

Alongside reference to genre can be posited the attempt to place the people involved in making the music within a type, such as 'indie left-fielders' or 'Chicago experimental lo-fi types'. The latter description highlights the continued importance of place of origin of musicians as a method of partially describing their sound. This identification of a particular school of post-rock with a specific American city, and equivalent attempts to link sub-genres with other particular towns and cities throughout Europe (especially Britain and Germany), New Zealand and Japan as well as the USA, suggests post-rock should not be simplistically linked with some nebulous idea of the postmodern, where identities are fragmented and blurred, and individuals lack any sense of belonging to a concrete locale. Articles have tried to identify specific local post-rock scenes, with their own musical approaches in Texas (with sub-scenes in Denton and Houston), New York, Chicago, Canada, France, the South Island of New Zealand, Glasgow, Birmingham, Bristol, and most recently, a small town in Germany named Wellheim. Place of origin is often supposed to be directly related to the type of music an artist makes, even if concrete proof to support this claim is scarce. Whilst Roy Montgomery has released an album entitled "Scenes from the South Island" to evoke the part of New Zealand he originates from, he is the exception not the rule. In an interview with Scenic, whose 'Incident at Cima' album was to some extent inspired by the Mojave desert, multi-instrumentalist Bruce Licher remarks

People have written to use [sic] from the green hills of Kentucky to Manhattan, all saying that we've managed to capture a sense of their surroundings. (Melody Maker, September 14, 1996, p.14).

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8 Montgomery has also released an album called "Temple IV" to evoke his time in Guatemala - an evocation of place, certainly, but not of his own homeland. The disparity that may exist between an artist's place of origin and their specific artistic concerns is highlighted in the case of Banco de Gaia's Toby Marks. Actually hailing from my own hometown of Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, his work relates his obsession with the culture of Tibet. When two other groups from the nearby area made similar-ish ethnic techno releases in 1993-4, one journalist was lead to proclaim the existence of the
This pleases him, and he is quoted as saying "the fact that people have reinterpreted it for themselves transcends what it's all about".

The place of origin of a group may be significant in appreciating what musical sounds they create, but for a wholly different reason to the idea that the environment an artist grows up in will impinge on her/his work. Non-mainstream music, including all that could be classified as post-rock, is frequently released on small-scale independent labels, run by one individual or a group of friends with a specific aim in mind, and often based in a restricted geographical area (due to financial constraints). Such labels frequently have a particular musical identity, and in such instances for a journalist to refer to the label of a particular release may be highly implicative of what the music being described will sound like. Labels which are concentrated in certain areas, run by friends whose own releases may in certain cases comprise the entire roster, give the lie to - whilst apparently supporting - the view that geography and musical sound are related. Some of the more significant locally based labels include Germany's Kitty Yo - Kollaps - Payola axis, New Zealand's Corpus Hermeticum (with its clearly defined 'free noise' philosophy), and Chicago's Thrill Jockey/ City Slang. As the labels become more financially viable, they are able to expand to include more overseas artistes, as has been done by the English based Earworm and Enraptured labels, the US label Kranky, and the band Stereolab's own Duophonic, which has released the latest album by Wellheim-based The Notwist. Just as certain labels are viewed as post-rock, others are perceived as primarily concerned with other varieties of music. An example of such a label is the 'intelligent techno' Sheffield label of Warp, which now plays host to Birmingham post-rockers Broadcast and Plone. These last two bands now find themselves increasingly reviewed in the 'dance' sections of the magazines, without a discernible change in their sound.

The significance of the local context confirms the findings of Bennett (1995, 2000) who found important diversity between hip-hop as constituted in different cities, but also within a given city; scenes within a scene, in a sense. Thus locality must be recognised as important, but a definite relationship between musical style and a given location certainly cannot be assumed.

new "Leamington scene", a bizarre instance where a particular sound intended to evoke another culture entirely comes to be identified, albeit temporarily, with a specific location.
A final possible approach to classifying these bands is perhaps the simplest, namely comparing them to groups who sound similar. Clearly, this is an option only available to the journalists with the development of a scene, featuring a number of bands (whether contemporary or historical antecedents, as the influence of and knowledge about Krautrock became better comprehended) who will themselves be known to a number of the readership. Such an approach is used far more towards the end of the analytic period, consequently, and gradually becomes established as the most effective way of conveying the music of a group. At this point, however, as points of comparison for the music become easier, the interest for this research fades, as the relationship between music and language is made (relatively) unproblematic.

These attempts at classification have in common that they seem to be unable to provide a connection between signified and signifier, between that which is being described and the method of description. Reference to genre, label, other bands and place of origin (as this usually, and possibly never, relates to a connection between a specific locale and a particular series of sounds) are all signifying systems where the link between signifier and signified is obviously arbitrary. That an album was released on the Kranky label by a band from New Zealand who sound like Tortoise - these are all meaningless reference point in themselves. It is not just that the universal problem of language as a signifying system is present herein, but that this is a set of discourses which remain incomprehensible even in the context of the overall linguistic framework without knowledge of what is being referred to (the Wellheim scene, the underlying musical ethos of Earworm). Some of the genre terms - drift-rock, trance-rock, bliss-rock, space-rock - which, if we accept what the signifiers ‘drift’, ‘bliss’, ‘trance’ and ‘space’ have come to represent in our language-game, seem to correspond to something in the music, and are very vague attempts either to describe the sounds or their effect upon a listener. However, none of these terms has gained much acceptance beyond the attempt to capture the sounds of one group by a particular journalist (except space-rock, which has a clear history as a title for a musical genre from the 1970s). Reference to these terms is not so much an attempt to call upon a set classification to aid understanding, but the use of a style of phrasing which merely implies generic referencability. That reference to genre, perhaps the central device in a music journalist’s canon in attempting to convey the sound of a particular piece of music, has been reduced to a mere stylistic device, suggests that classifying this music
by genre is as yet an impossibility. The one new term which has gained wide currency, namely post-rock, was originally coined as a term so vague it could adequately cover the wide range of sounds and methods of sound creation being utilised by those operating in this field. Whilst the term was coined, as its construction - post - suggests, to imply going beyond rock in general, as will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, all the term currently implies in itself is difference to rock. Thus how exactly ‘post-rock’ is different cannot be discerned from a consideration of the term itself.

Thus the only attempts at explicit classification, at being able to categorise the thing being described as one of a wider type, which have proven successful, and these only after a period of time in the history of this musical field had elapsed, are those where the link between the language being used to convey the sounds and the music itself is wholly arbitrary. The relationship between the signifier and signified, between language and music, between the writings of the professional journalists and ‘post-rock’, is to that extent one born of social convention only.

Attempts to Deny Classifiability - the Discourse of ‘Indescribability’

The lack of certainty as to what exactly post-rock is, as far as journalists are concerned, is most apparent of all in the discourse of ‘the indescribable’. Reviewers state that they “can’t describe it” and argue that “you’ve gotta feel it yerself” (review of Telstar Ponies, Melody Maker, February 24, 1996, p.17). They write of a music beyond articulation, they say they “can’t define it”. The reviewers comment that “it has a wobbliness which is difficult to pin down”, or that, “best of all, it has a shimmering, spooky quality that I can’t define” (review of Orang, Melody Maker, July 23, 1996, p.35). Reviewing M.A.S.S. (Main Active Sound System - the DJing and sound-mixing arm of Hampson of Main), the journalist comments “you only need glance at the audience to see the dilemma, that ever-widening discrepancy between the existing ways of dealing with music and the music itself”. His stated inability to classify the sound spectacle before him reaches its apotheosis as he claws at reference points he finds easier to relate to language,
In the absence of a whole new dictionary, I'll let the dazzling club visuals explain. Spinning spacemen. Data printouts. Neurofen ads. The heads of The Beatles, exploding. *(Melody Maker, October 19, 1996, p.43)*.

The almost poetic indeterminacy of phrase of these professional writers cannot hide the fact that to say something is indefinable, or beyond words, is itself to use a specific formulation of language. In suggesting *this* music is indescribable, these journalists are accessing a tradition of perceiving music in general as saying what words cannot, something powerful but imprecise. The idea that musical pleasures are essentially private is also alluded to, as “you’ve gotta feel it yerself”, and in the use of the first person pronoun (“I can’t define”). Even though the journalists are employed specifically to convert the musical experience into a linguistic one, even they cannot resist reverting to an allusion to the supposed impossibility of successfully writing about music. Yet, though the idea that music cannot be communicated about fully through mere words is a well-established argument, it is a perspective these writers do not mention throughout all their reviews. Rather than discuss how impossible it is to discuss, for example, the new Oasis album, they make these points only in relation to this newly developing form of music. That they deem such an approach acceptable for post-rock but not for Oasis can be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, what Oasis sound like is known to most of their readership, and therefore to attempt to convey their sound is not the principal point of an Oasis review. Secondly, and most significantly, a set of discourses is already clearly established to describe Oasis’ particular style of music: whether these discourses are adequate in overcoming the disjunction between language and music, as signifier and signified respectively, is not the issue here. No such pre-existing conventions are present with regard to post-rock. However, conventions *do* exist surrounding music in general, and it is one of these, the impossibility of describing music, which is referenced in the instances discussed above.

A particular linguistic device can be identified in many of the reviews to imply the difficulty of adequately summarising the qualities of the music being considered. The ‘one thing and its opposite’ device suggests that the reviewer cannot pinpoint the details of the sounds or his/ her responses to them, something which s/he attempts to convey by describing the music as being simultaneously a combination of utterly
contrasting and irreconcilable things. Thus, in a live review of Hood, “the brooding openings are fragile but threatening at the same time” (Melody Maker, October 19, 1996, p.42). Japanese noisemakers are described as performing “controlled anarchy” on the ‘Cosmic Kurushi Monsters’ album. Mogwai’s music is described as “like a dating agency for beauty and fury, pushing blasts of staggering violence and hearthrug warmth into a corner and forcing them to embrace: a grudge match made in heaven” (New Musical Express, December 21/28, 1996, p.52). The review of Fridge’s Ceefax album displays an awareness of the device, claiming theirs is a

mindset made of tricky little oxymorons like ‘restrained experimentation’, ‘neat and tidy chaos’ and ‘total freedom to jam, but within very tight parameters (New Musical Express, March 8, 1997, p.50).

The Theme of ‘Lack of Clarity’

The apparent impossibility of easy classification, and the discourse of indescribability considered above, can be related to one another as part of a wider theme of a lack of clarity as to what is actually occurring as far as this music is concerned, being discussed in reviews of post-rock. Continuing this theme of a lack of clarity, of not being sure what to make of this strange phenomenon, in the journalists’ responses to the music, references to ‘weirdness’ must be mentioned. The magazine writers comment on the “guitar freakiness”, and allude to music which is “surreal”, “illogical”, “obscure”, “psychotic”, “bloody weird”, and which “finally cracked”. There are references to “mushroom clouds and latent psychoses” supposedly being expressed through the sounds (a clear linking of the weirdness to the consumption of drugs, a topic to be returned to shortly), to an “all-American weirdness”, to musicians “creating crazy sound”, indulging in “we-are-weird tinkling”, and trying to “out-weird each other in a dubbed-up, spun-out drift-rock fashion”. Quickspace are praised in language adding both sexual and religious connotations to the weirdness, as they are “a wholly perverse, captivating pleasure, and not a bit of leather in sight”, whilst their “performance commands the type of terrifying power usually reserved for crazed cult leaders from the Deep South” (New Musical Express, November 23, 1996, p.40).

Though in the dominant rock discourse of irrationalism or “vulgar romanticism” (Pattison, 1987), identified as pre-eminent in these publications
(Stratton, 1982 and 1989; Hodgkinson, 1995), it is usually praiseworthy to be a musician who is so original, inspired and such a breaker of rules and taboos that s/he is considered so 'out there' and 'mad for it' as to be 'insane', the status of 'weird' music is less clearly positive. The phrase "we-are-weird tinkling" suggests a self-consciousness, a pretentiousness even, at odds with truly irrational behaviour and the choice of the word 'tinkling' implies a timidity, a lack of power in the resulting sounds. That certain post-rockers are held to be attempting to 'out-weird each other' is suggestive of a closed community which is deservedly alien to the mainstream audience because it is only occupied with its own concerns and not attempting to communicate anything other than that what is being done is different and strange. Such disapproval, albeit expressed humorously, is patently in opposition to the favourable reaction elicited in the usage of the discourse of indescribability. The use of the indefinable discourse is virtually invariably complementary, as music which cannot be reduced to mere words, or which has an effect on the listener which apparently entirely bypasses the rational processes, is always the most rapturously received in the irrationalist ideology of rock. Thus even a journalist who is only able to relate the strangeness of a music is still capable of expressing whether this quality of otherness is admirable or irksome, able to judge it, and indeed rank it (the New Musical Express gives albums marks out of ten, and Melody Maker is not shy of declaring a unambiguous opinion). This expression of approval or disapproval is not intrinsic to all music reviewing, as reviews in The Wire, possibly as a consequence of that paper's concentration on music outside the mainstream, frequently (though by no means always) proffer no clear judgment on the merit of a given work, often to the disappointment of the readership who inquire of previously discussed releases in letters printed in the magazine “But is it any good?” or “Did the reviewer like it?” to which the editor has replied on separate occasions “Does it matter?” Reviewers in The Wire might argue they are trying to be truer to the spirit of the music, engaging more in description (of albums unlikely to have been heard by more than an handful of even their music-loving readership) as opposed to simply stating a personal preference, but part of the appeal of New Musical Express and Melody Maker, judging from the regular controversies on the letters pages aroused by particularly scathing invective directed against certain releases by individual reviewers, would seem to lie in whether the papers' opinions will agree with one's own viewpoint (about bands and their
records which are much better known), rather than the paper being enjoyed only as a source of information about new music (which is not to contend this is not part of the appeal of the publications). The issue of the music's pleasurable or otherwise is not compromised by its inexplicability, then.

The Discourse of 'Insubstantiality'

The discourses previously discussed could just as easily have been employed to describe quite different sorts of music. Indeed, in the past decade alone, such (initial) difficulties in classification and the problem of beginning to effectively describe a music at all (and, for that matter, accusations of 'weirdness') have beset reviewers attempting to write about the various strands of techno and drum 'n' bass music as they have evolved. However, one facet of the wider 'lack of clarity' theme introduced above is (nearly) unique to post-rock - namely what can be termed the discourse of the 'insubstantial'. The one other variety of music which has received similar description is that the so-called 'ethereal' music made by early 1980s groups, especially those on the independent record label 4AD, of whom the Cocteau Twins are the best known. In fact, other ethereal bands, such as 4AD's Dif Juz and the Durutti Column, are frequently alluded to as reference points for a number of current post-rock acts, and the latter actually played a rare gig as headliners at the recent Labradford First Annual Festival of Drifting (whilst one of the Cocteaus is performing at the Second), so these musical movements, though separated by years, are clearly recognised as having common elements, by journalists and practitioners alike.

The discourse of insubstantiality is a summary term, comprising descriptions of the music as being "tense, fragile", "infuriatingly/blessedly intangible", "indistinct, ghostly, sometimes free-form", where its "vagueness" and "lack of coherent structure" is highlighted. So particular sounds are conveyed as "shimmering vapour trails", which appear to be "floating" and to have an "effortlessly airborne quality", and are compared to dreams. Mention of dreamscape, and music sounding dreamy is a particularly frequent reviewing discourse. The sound is described as "gaseous". Not exactly the same, but related to the insubstantial discourse, are descriptions which suggest the music is "mysterious"; but not only mysterious, but "secretive", "unfathomable", "shadowy" and "obscure" (this last word could be considered more positively in this context than in the 'weirdness' grouping). Perhaps the best summary
might be that here are “strange songs determined to wiggle its [sic] way out of classification and comprehension”.

Whilst it is not common for rock and dance music to be discussed as insubstantial, particularly considering their tangible effects on the body, such a discourse is far from unusual in the history of descriptions of music as a whole. Music has often been compared to dreams, in particular, for both are claimed to have their origins “within unconscious and pre-verbal processes” (Shepherd and Wicke, 1997, p.60). As music is created and listened to in general in a conscious, waking state, the analogy breaks down upon closer examination, as Shepherd and Wicke observe, but as the research interest in this instance is in what analogies are utilised, rather than whether they are effective or accurate, it is the fact these very general and established discourses are employed which is significant. Shepherd and Wicke continue to quote the argument of Tailor and Paperte (in an article published in 1958) who contend that

because of its abstract nature [music] detours the ego and intellectual controls and, contacting the lower centres directly, stirs up latent conflicts and emotions which may then be expressed and reenactivated through music. Music produces in us a state that operates somewhat like a dream in the psychoanalytic sense. (ibid., p.60).

This passage is revealing as it attributes the dreamlike qualities (and capacity to induce a dreamlike state in listeners) of music to its abstract nature. Music has an ‘abstract’ character because it does not signify in a clear manner, unlike language. Music is compared to dreams because it supposedly evades rational processes and because it is not clear what it is trying to say. For these very reasons - its abstract nature - it can be added that music is not amenable to simple description. It is the abstractness of music which makes it difficult to classify and describe. Thus post-rock has been described using terminology - the impossibility of classification, the indescribability of the sounds, and their dreamlike insubstantiality - which has been previously utilised as an attempt to capture the essence of all music. The difficulty of conveying the nature of a particular music (in this case, post-rock), when no clear descriptive convention around that music yet exists, can be partially resolved, it would appear, by using universal metaphors of musical description in such a way that
attempts to suggest their resonance with regard to the very specific system of sounds under the spotlight in that instance.

A closer look at the Discourses of Post-Rock: a Trip into Space

It has already been noted that the discourse of insubstantiality is one which is seen by professional journalists to be especially evocative as a way of describing post-rock, in that it used predominantly for post-rock but rarely for any other rock music. Three other discourses utilised particularly for post-rock are images of space, religion and nature.

References to outer space and aliens are used again primarily to imply strangeness (with another subtle change in emphasis), and frequently to inject a sense of humour into the review. Simple references to things sounding alien are expanded upon with mentions of Roswell9, and such bizarre commentaries as “sounds like a good week for tentacled aliens”, when faced with a couple of positively received post-rock releases. The music is variously said to convey images of “extended ellipses” and of the “lunar landing”, and even to sound like “astrodolphins in space”. A live review of Quickspace begins “The sky fills with fire, the alien craft glides to a halt overhead”, before concluding “Welcome to Quickspace; where extraterrestrials are taken on and beaten at their own game” (New Musical Express, November 23, 1996, p.40). A review of Fureasteen begins “Post-rock? One first-class stamp to Mars, please...” (Melody Maker, March 8, 1997, p.52). Such references can be seen as perhaps timely and highly fashionable, considering the present obsession with science fiction and the possibility of extra-terrestrial intelligence, but they also have a history rooted in the ‘space rock’ genre epitomised by 1970s groups such as Hawkwind and Tangerine Dream (and an association with pioneering, exploratory music through the work of, for instance, Sun Ra, he who declared “Space is the Place”). At the same time, the technophilia of many ‘intelligent techno’ bands (with members of groups such as Coldcut espousing a ‘post-human’ philosophy) has been rewarded with metaphors of outer space and alien life (the concept of advanced beings with superior technology) to describe their music, at least as an initial, and on occasion hostile, reaction in the guitar-based indie music which still predominates in New Musical Express and

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9 Roswell is the location in the United States where an alien spacecraft is claimed by some people to have landed in July 1947.
Melody Maker (the theme of technological metaphors will be returned to later). It is interesting that the metaphor of outer space is used to convey alienness, something unfamiliar and strange, at the same time as it links post-rock to an established, even perhaps rather old-fashioned, form of music.

'Space' implying vast open expanses is yet more recurrently used. The music is described as "open", "vast", "bigger and swellier", "open and spacier" and it is said to have a "vast remoteness", to be "cavernous-sounding" and even to be reminiscent of "Eternity". Particular musical features are portrayed in the same way, as there is a description of, for example, a "colossal locked-groove". However, other instances of the music can be considered as a "huge space, but enclosed".

Images of nature, as previously mentioned, are like those of space and insubstantiality in that they appear to be considered especially evocative as ways of describing post-rock (in terms of frequency of usage and in contrast to how other rock and dance musics in the 1990s are constructed in these particular magazines). Meteorological descriptions of the music are legion, as the sounds are like "5am thunderstorms", "passing typhoons", "sheets of warm rain", "fog" (insubstantiality implied again), a "blizzard" or simply "impressive meteorological phenomena". Similarly, metaphors based on landscape features abound. The music is like "ice floes", "glacial structures", and its power is suggested in that it can affect the most permanent aspects of nature, causing "seismic shifts", being "geiger-destroying", and evoking a "drone haze" across the "driving desert". Such references to the potency of a music to impact on immense natural processes have also been located in the discourses of music magazines about music in general (though particularly in Melody Maker and, to a slightly lesser extent, the New Musical Express - see Hodgkinson, op. cit.). Nevertheless, the manner in which post-rock is described as simultaneously vast and immovable, and yet strangely fragile and somehow not quite physically there is unique to it. Even when it affects nature, it can do so in an insubstantial way, leaving a drone haze. It is as if it were everywhere and nowhere at once.

Perhaps this is why religious imagery appears so often concerning this music, as there are numerous references to divinity, to the celestial, to the devout. Thus some of the music sounds like a "spooky, reverb-drenched hymn", it is said, it is "heavenly", "divinely elemental", "angelic", "celestial and dreamlike", it has an "ecclesiastical yearning", is made by "celestial songsmiths", and "heads straight for
the soul”. The frequent references to cathedrals, to infinity, and to God(s), provide a means to link the idea of vastness with something beyond the material realm. Of course, such use of religious imagery is again something which has been found in descriptions of much music prior to post-rock.

Another related discourse is that of solitude, an aloneness specifically associated with the remoteness of vast space. The music is declared to be a “private thing”. To speak of musical pleasures as essentially private and asocial is again another aspect of the way music in general has been conceptualised.

**Further Post-rock Discourses: For and Against Nature**

In the light of the findings of the previous section, the music’s relationship to the realm of nature and what is natural is clearly a significant theme, and it is one which is discussed in decidedly contrasting approaches. On the one hand, as previously noted, the music is considered “divinely elemental”, but also “primeval” and “instinctive”. So, “for all this talk of hybrids and perverse mongrelisation”, Telstar Ponies make music “as near as rock gets to a sort of naturalness” - the band’s music is said to be “as natural as the rustling of leaves or the eruptions of geysers” (*Melody Maker*, October 19, 1996, p.10-11). Additionally, there is said to be a “pastoral yearning” in some of the music, and the journalists’ frequent comments about the covers of the groups’ releases note they often feature images of idyllic nature. Indeed, at this juncture it is worth observing that the references and metaphors used to describe the music of a group who are not well known are on occasion coloured to an almost absurd extent by the name of the band, or of their single/album/individual track titles, or the imagery provided on the cover (something which applies to references to outer space and aliens, and vast natural landscapes in particular), but this is a central issue which will be the crux of the following chapter.

Another instance of allusion to the ‘naturalness’ of the music, can be found in the way some of post-rock has been described as “womb-like”, or as “sublime womb music”. The liquid nature of the womb’s interior is again relevant to the combination of something being all-encompassing yet insubstantial (not solid). Perhaps related to this are the plethora of references to the “ocean”, to the sounds being compared to “liquid”, “waves”, or being termed “ocean-deep”. There was, in fact, a mini-genre of music called ‘Oceanic Rock’ - exemplified best by A.R.Kane, a band with a particular
lyrical obsession with the mother-child relationship - which gained some prominence (amongst music critics at least) in the late 1980s, and which could be seen as a precursor to certain aspects of post-rock. The metaphor of the oceanic is another one commonly used through musical history, and has also established a place within psychoanalytic philosophy, as discussed in a book specifically examining the relationship between music and the mind:

Freud describes the oceanic feeling as 'a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole'. He compares this with the height of being in love, a state in which 'the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away'. Freud interprets this temporary adult abolition of boundary lines as a regression to the period of infancy when the infant at the breast has not yet differentiated itself from the external world. The oceanic experience, in Freud's view, represents a return to a total merger with the mother (Storr, 1992, p.95).

References to the womb-like and oceanic nature of the music may be revealing less about the specific sounds of post-rock, then, and more about the continued potency of prevailing mythologies surrounding all music and all experiences of 'jouissance'. For not only do the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist traditions both locate language and the dawning of the rational self as founded in the separation of a child from its mother (when a child realises its mother is a separate entity, where previously there was no distinction between ego and object, or self and other), but additionally, as previously observed, both music - whose abstraction makes it supposedly beyond language, and whose link to the body makes it supposedly beyond rationality - and jouissance, the pleasure which exceeds the social, are held to be 'beyond words', in popular discourse as much as in a fairly difficult and obscure intellectual canon.

The discourses considered above may give the impression that post-rock is conceptualised as being a form of music that is particularly close to nature. Nevertheless, if the implication is that post-rock is somehow connected to natural patterns, there are another set of discourses that propose precisely the opposite. The
music of Stereolab\textsuperscript{10} is thus described in one review as going against “natural instincts”, even being opposed to our “genetic constitution”. As previously explored, post-rock discourses also incorporate imagery of the alien and of outer space, which could be seen as comprising part of a meta-discourse of ‘against nature’, as indeed could the discourse of ‘the weird’. Another aspect of this meta-discourse is the use of scientific and technological imagery, so the music is described as perfect for a “motel in Cyberspace” (review of Foxa, Melody Maker, May 25, 1996, p.15), or for science-fiction soundtracks. The latter observation is also part of another much used discourse that exists by itself, the ‘filmic’ - so the music is, variously, similar to that used to accompany sci-fi, film noir, Twin Peaks, westerns, or even a new cinematic genre, “Western noir”. Alternatively, it is compared to a “curiously soothing soundtrack to a homemade film” (review of newly released singles by Movietone, Broadcast and Quickspace, Melody Maker, June 1, 1996, p.47) or the “soundtrack to a Bulgarian puppet animation on channel arse” (review of Ui, New Musical Express, March 23, 1996, p.47). The last, obviously very negative, description is part of the art versus entertainment discourse around which many (band members and reviewers alike) comment - such a piece of invective is meant to suggest the music in question is too much like (bad) high art, not sufficiently immediately entertaining (this theme will be expanded shortly). A broadly similar set of discourses to that of science fiction is that which originates from the tendency of many post-rockers to fetishize the use of ancient (in pop music terms) technology, especially old analogue synthesizers such as the Moog and the Farfisa organ. The music is said to evince a “nostalgia for the future” or the “1950s confidence in technology” (a period when many believed, at least more so than today, technology would provide the solution to many of society’s difficulties, and also the time when science fiction of a generally optimistic bent, in contrast to the dystopian variety more popular now, seemed to particularly boom). Arguably, the musical naivety, the simplicity of much post-rock, is what is being

\textsuperscript{10} Though Stereolab have acquired a special status of never being reduced to simplistic genre categories, probably because of their popularity and longevity (though they pre-date the time of the coinage of the term ‘post-rock’, this is not the only factor, as so do other less successful bands who are still classified in this way), they can perhaps be seen as the kings and queens of this music, as many post-rock bands who have emerged in the past two years are frequently described by unwary journalists, whose specialisms are usually elsewhere, as “Stereolab’s offspring”. Some groups are even condemned for lack of originality in terms of their overuse of the Stereolab setting on their keyboards, suggesting that what was once disrupting of rock’s tired formulae is itself viewed in some quarters as tired and formulaic.
highlighted here, for, in truth, the fetishisation of analogue synthesizers is almost as strong in techno music (but not in drum 'n' bass, as this requires digital technology for sampling and the consequent ability to employ timestretching techniques on certain sounds), and, in the past two years, electronic musical instrument companies have released a number of digital synthesizers which incorporate increasing numbers of analogue sounds and features. References to the 'future' are not merely nostalgic, however; the music can be described as a "futuristic jazz explosion" or a "phuturistic [sic] sprawl". The sounds may be described as the results of "laboratory experiments" of "mad scientists", or the result of "sound-lab boffins" conducting "spacey experiments" (it is worth noting the similarity of the description 'sound-lab boffins' to the name of prime movers in the scene, 'Stereolab'). One group is said to make "blissed-out Slowdive [an early 1990s band from the so-called 'shoegazing' scene] mangled up in a liquidizer experiments". In another case, a journalist suggests that a particular album is "for people who find the sound of robots being dragged across an abattoir floor enjoyable" (review of Third Eye Foundation, New Musical Express, June 22, 1996, p.40). Such a description directly divulges very little about the sound of a record, except that this reviewer finds it unpleasant (as very few of the readership would have actually heard a robot being dragged across an abattoir floor), but indirectly the comment is highly revealing. In the light of rock ideology affirming spontaneity, feeling and living for the moment, talk of ultra-rational purely technical inanimate beings amidst a place of death is severe condemnation indeed. More particularly, reference to robots is something that only indie-based reviewers would use to discuss post-rock or techno.

Post-rock and rave culture music (techno and drum 'n' bass) share descriptions of unnaturalness, including the discourses of outer space and alien life, and of science and technology, at least in what remain predominantly 'indie' music magazines such as New Musical Express and Melody Maker. In some of the very earliest magazines (ones dated summer 1993) consulted for this research, discourses such as those which describe the music as impossible to describe in sounds, were utilised around certain techno releases. This is perhaps not surprising, suggesting that it is the newness of the sounds rather than anything inherent in their nature which is the primary factor in the use of such language. Comments about the music such as it "reconditions your hearing system" may then be amongst the most fair and accurate.
In certain strands of rave culture, the question of the music being hypothesised as simultaneously 'for' and 'against' nature is evaded, as the concept of the fusion of the technological and the organic is posited. It is contended, notably by influential figures such as Fraser Clark and Terence McKenna, that rave culture represents a pathway to a communal and, above all, natural panacea, a return of ancient rites that held sway in a 'golden age' before the corrupting effects of the money system and patriarchy (see, for example, Reynolds & Press, 1995, p.174). These techno evangelists claim that masses of people dancing at 120 beats per minute to music, music made on computers and the latest innovations in instrument technology, provides a means of us all being together, our separate egos dissolved, in a large communal womb, as in ancient times. It has been argued in a previous section that such an account represents at best a very partial account of rave culture (and one which would make little sense to the way most of the participants would describe their experiences), but regardless of its accuracy, such a perspective - which incorporates the supposedly ego-dissolving qualities of music, its approximation to the oceanic state of the womb, and its physical effects (its danceability, for instance) in addition to accepting its technological foundation - is nonetheless part of a coherent philosophy, for which there is no obvious parallel concerning post-rock. There is no such fundamental theory which links the discourses of naturalness and unnaturalness surrounding post-rock, and so they remain distinct and unfocused.

Is it art or is it fun?

Whether post-rock is art or fun or both, and whether it is considered to be a positive attribute that it is art if it is, is a theme that often preoccupies not only the music journalists, but also the music-makers themselves. One negative comparison to an often attacked form of serious culture has already been highlighted in the example above (the East European animations - not cartoons - shown late at night on BBC2 and Channel 4 are a well-established straw person with which to beat the idea of subsidised art, and frequently are mocked by cultural critics). Again, Trans Am are critiqued with the comments "The lengths some people go to avoid categorisation", and that one "can’t have fun when you’re more underground than the accepted American underground" (Melody Maker, March 15, 1997, p.38). Those who wish to defend the music often make an express reference to its ability to entertain (a
discourse which would rarely appear in The Wire, for instance). Thus the reviewers comment “you can dance to it” (alternatively another writes of a different release “you can’t dance to it”), or suggest a band “produce bad-ass noises to keep us entertained”, or describe a piece of music as “popsensical”, or observe “this you can hum and the cover’s ace”. One writes that the music under review shows “it’s possible to be morbidly obsessed with 70s German rock music and still be fun” and that one can “get addicted to this stuff” (review of post-rock compilation ‘Monsters, Robots and Bugmen’, New Musical Express, May 25, 1996, p.54). Such a commentary allows the journalist, at the same time, to show his ‘rock’ credentials (upholding the ideology that fun is paramount), to demonstrate his knowledge of (fairly obscure, until recently at least) rock history, and to show appreciation of a music that might otherwise not be considered admissible to the rock canon. Similarly, a release referred to as “less art-wank” is good post-rock because it is fun, not art. However, it is the bands themselves who are most likely to emphasise that they are in the business of entertainment, for many are outraged, as previously noted, to be considered ‘not rock’ - the likes of Trans Am even going so far as to assert their love of ZZ Top (perhaps the epitome of plain, straightforward rocking), and many others stating in fanzine interviews their resentment of journalists such as the (to them) seemingly omnipresent Simon Reynolds who generalises so many to be part of a ‘post-rock’ trend which they profess to despising.

David Keenan, most outspoken member of Telstar Ponies and freelance journalist for Melody Maker and The Wire, demonstrates a remarkable inconsistency on the art/ fun dialectic, as he frequently expresses his love of experimental Japanese and New Zealand noise groups, condemns Stereolab for not being experimental enough, and affirms his band are about “entertainment alright”, virulently opposing anyone who thinks otherwise. He makes his position clearer in an interview in which he discusses Krautrock,

I mean, I was always attracted to the ethos behind Krautrock rather than any kind of Krautrock sound. Simply to reproduce that motorik beat from Neu! is against the whole notion of what Krautrock was about, which was always to be pushing out, going further and taking things beyond into unknown territory.

Which is why it’s pretty funny to me to call Stereolab a Krautrock band just
because they’ve taken a bit of the sound to signify Krautrock within a basic pop format and succeeded in selling records to people who think they’re listening to experimental music (Melody Maker, October 19, 1996, p.10-11).

Yet, in the interview, he is “anxious that Telstar Ponies aren’t perceived as avant-gardeners but as squarely within the rock/ pop tradition”. Keenan reconciles his arguments by contending

Rock music’s always been a bastard form, never pure, right from the beginnings of early rock ‘n’ roll, a hybrid. ...What’s exciting about rock music is that it’s the most democratic music in the world. It’s big enough to encompass experimentation and advances. I don’t see it as a form dictation whereby you end up with some Britpop formulism like Ocean Colour Scene or Kula Shaker. There ought to be anti-rock music in there, all manner of different forms. Whenever you start being reverent to the classic, traditional forms of rock music, you’re making a mockery of it. The way to be rock ‘n’ roll is to be unrock ‘n’ roll (ibid.).

In the case of Mogwai, journalists and band members seem to share the same philosophy in an interview in the new groups section, On (New Musical Express, November 23, 1996, p.10). Stuart Braithwaite, Mogwai’s guitarist, is quoted as saying both “We don’t try and make pop music” and

“I think a lot of people make art-rock but forget to actually rock,” rants Stuart, “they’re too busy arting. We’re a rock ‘n’ roll band that avoids clichés.”

The journalist agrees with the group’s self-perceptions, describing them as “experimental without the arsiness that often entails” and commenting (in a way that suggests he identifies post-rock with the realm of over-intellectualised science [and the science of space at that]),

Clearly, Mogwai differ substantially from the current crop of post-rocking types. For one thing, they’re ten or 15 years younger and don’t look like astro-
physicists. For another, they're brash, opinionated and would rather give good quote than be enigmatic.

Alongside the danceability of the music, the 'grooviness' or 'funkiness' of the music is commented upon. The music is “funky-sounding”, it can “funk like a bastard”, it has “grooviness”, and is “groovy electronic music you can dance to”. A group itself is hailed as an “almost funky groove collective”. “Simple glorious melodies” are praised. Rather atypically in music reviewing, post-rock music may often be described as “accessible”, implying that much of the genre is not, at least to that reviewer’s ears.

A contrast with the mainstream popular music is made most explicit in the review of TeleFunken’s remix of Flying Saucer Attack, where the reviewer alleges this is “music for people who really, really don’t like The Spice Girls”, this is “art”, as opposed to fun. The reviewer continues to quote the remark of Stravinsky that there is no progress in music, just the gradual acceptance of the human ear, before asserting proudly that his own ears have yet to acclimatise. He continues, pointedly saying he has no desire to explore his unconscious, that he would rather carry on playing Nintendo, and dismissing the bands as “almost certainly posh kids or on the dole”,

I have no vocabulary for this. I do not sit around at home alone taking drugs. I sit around at home alone reading magazines and listening to Capital Gold (Melody Maker, December 7, 1996, p.37).

The journalist is, in this instance, ‘doing being ordinary’, in other words, constructing their identity as an ordinary person who does everyday activities rather than participating in more unusual (weird?) acts, and making that identity available as an interactional resource, to suggest something both about the type of person who would make this kind of record and who would listen to it. Wooffitt (1992) has found this use of ‘doing being ordinary’ as a means to help bolster the person’s general claims to be a recurrent feature of language usage. The reviewer also builds a series of contrasts to further the sense of ‘either/or' - one can be ‘normal’ or enjoy post-rock, there is no happy medium - and emphasise the implied disparity between this kind of music and ‘ordinary people’ leading ‘ordinary lives’.
Sometimes, the very (suggested) artiness of some of the music is considered its particular aspect worth praising. It is described as a “sonic sculpture”, as “symphonic”, or, more neutrally, as “abstract”. The music may be explicitly called “art”, meaning it operates in a sphere above commercial considerations, in the sense of being indifferent to its popularity, or be said to be “undiluted by commercial concerns” (as to whether this actually is the intention of the music’s creators is usually not considered relevant to the reviewer). It is as if it were “hand-made, not mass produced”. One reviewer comments explicitly (and without malice) that it is “serious art, not rock ‘n’ roll”. The group ‘who are two-thirds Mormon’ (as their interviews are generally titled), Low, are almost universally praised in non-rock terms, one reviewer contending

Some of the most engaging (particularly American) music right now is born of an inversion of rock’s aesthetics: a refusal to kick ass and a tendency towards quietude rather than high volumes plus - superficially at least - an almost puritanical negation of rock’s mores (Melody Maker, November 16, 1996, p.33).

Post-rock is often described, unlike most rock and pop, as “beautiful”. The music is a “beautiful, blinding glitz”, “unbearably gorgeous”, or “simply luverly” [sic].

A contrasting approach to inverting rock’s aesthetics is highlighted in the review of the compilation of Japanese noise artists, ‘Cosmic Kurushi Monsters’. The reviewer comments that “hypnosis is the only response”, and whilst one could perceive it “as a load of self-indulgent guff” he does not, and finds its enduring effect is “to spring clean the soul”. He comments that “the immediate impression is of a new, sinister form of rock ‘n’ roll, totally drained of African American roots” (New Musical Express, 24 August, 1996, p.52), emphasising the “shock”, as he puts it, of his first listen, with the implication that this is something wholly divorced from the rock tradition.

The discourse of the ‘experimental’ is always a controversial one in rock, positive in that it implies something new and different, negative in that it may carry connotations of too much thought, not enough fun, or even of being unfinished. Positively, the music is “seizing the experimental imperative back from dance music”
and has a “questing spirit”, it is the “sound of a bold hunt for new and occasionally uncomfortable reference points”, and “it is fucked-up and fearlessly inventive”. Avoiding obvious judgment, it is “leftfield”, “free-form”, “exploratory”, “improvisational”, and one release has “a particular mix of aesthetics peculiar to them” (review of live gig by Stereolab and Tortoise, Melody Maker, March 16, 1996, p.17). Negatively, it is described as “atonal warblings”, “aimless wibbling”, “droney tuning-up noises” (unfinished), and the “songs stretch far beyond the horizon of your attention span” (a joke at the expense of ‘space rock’). A review of The Brood (a miscellaneous super-group of post-rockers, avant-garde composers and mainstream rock stars) condemned one part as being “as stilted as American football, when everyone lines up with complex diagrams in their heads before collapsing in a heap”, whilst praising another segment with the words “Why hark back to experimentalism when you’ve got something that works as instinctively as this. This is a resurrection in itself” (Melody Maker, November 23, 1996, p.35).

Discourses of the Head and of the Body: Mental and Physical Effects

Post-rock is sometimes described as “cerebral” - head, not body, music. One journalist remarks that the music he is reviewing may be described by the “term ‘Post-Rock’ in circles much smarter than ours” (review of Ui, New Musical Express, March 23, 1996, p.47). It is referred to as “head-scratching, chin-stroking” music, implying liked by those who love to over-analyse things, and even as the sound of “grown men cultivating goatees”. The music’s supposed intellectual qualities are also suggested, but approvingly, when it is described as “sensitive, insightful stuff”, which “deals in the big questions”. Run On’s music is described as “difficult, like climbing Everest backwards” (Melody Maker, February 10, 1996, p.6). In one particularly joky review, the reviewer of Komeda urges his readers to “throw your Advanced Chemistry diplomas in the air like you just don’t care, intellectuals” (New Musical Express, March 8, 1997, p.51). The band Fridge are “not, it’s reasonable to assume, even remotely interested in flinging the proverbial telly through rock ‘n’ roll’s window” (ibid., p.50), claims the reviewer of their debut album. One minor trend in American

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11 This is an instance of an attempt to suggest a community between the writer and the readership - a device used regularly in New Musical Express and Melody Maker, but never in, say, The Wire - and one which neatly overlooks the fact that the term ‘post-rock’ was most probably originated by a journalist (namely Reynolds, who at the very least popularised it and attempted to define it).
independent music that slightly predates post-rock, but has some musical similarities to the work of post-rock luminaries as Tortoise and Slint (Slint actually predate even this trend), was termed 'math rock' - represented by the 'difficult' guitar music of Rodan, Polvo and Thinking Fellers Local Union 287. The very name of this 'scene' implies cerebral aspects identified by journalists, if again, not necessarily the bands themselves.

Alternatively, some journalists reject precisely this discourse of cerebral and/or scientific associations. Thus, reviewing a live performance of Flying Saucer Attack, the journalist declares

there are scientists trying to claim this music as their own. They erect cages of solemn reason and do their best to trap the beast with categorisations like 'math rock' or 'post rock'. But cold logic doesn't belong here. (Melody Maker, September 21, 1996, p.42).

The same reviewer continues to discuss Tortoise (who were being supported by Flying Saucer Attack):

Tortoise are almost the antipathy of the intellectual avant-garde, musical nomads who use their instincts to creep through the bright-eyed outskirts of jazz and rock and anything else that takes their fancy. The aim is not experimentation but experience, the goal to construct the perfect stream of subconsciousness.

Even this clear-headed rationalisation is too close to the scientists' camp for comfort. Much better to let your mind disappear into the centre of the sound and touch the richness of melody and form. (ibid.).

The review concludes, "The opulence of your instincts. There is nothing else".

In contrast to the consideration of matters cerebral, one of the most significant discourses surrounding post-rock, just as it is in describing all rock and pop music in these two weeklies, is that the sounds are 'physically affecting', that is, they have a very real and tangible effect upon the listener. The music is described especially as "seductive" and "hypnotic", these being the most common descriptive terms of all.
There are "sensory-deprivations dronathons", the music is "mesmeric", it "dislocates your sense of gravity" and "probes under your skull". The effect upon one, it is claimed, is such that one feels as if one is "pinched, drugged and seduced at the same time" (Melody Maker, January 20, 1996, p.17), or one's ears feel as if they are "bathed in Technicolour", and the music can recondition one's hearing system, as registered before. Snowpony have a "unique ability to set your teeth pleurably on edge and make your heart go cold with anticipation" (Melody Maker, August 17, 1996, p.40). Some post-rock "has a "chunky boom-bap physicality", but mostly it is its effect upon the listener which is remarkable (and remarked upon). It is variously "totally transfixing", "sinuous", "so totally lacking in any time and sequence its forgetfulness becomes exhilarating". Individual pieces make "sadness and uncertainty so sumptuous they become physical pleasures", alternatively they provoke "physical response [that] doesn't feel inferior to understanding" (review of live gig by Stereolab and Tortoise, Melody Maker, March 16, 1996, p.17). The music "unsettle and disorientates", it is "unnerving", indeed "unnervingly surreal" (perhaps this is what one might expect from 'alien', 'weird' music). Some of the music is "intense", like an "acid-punch coma" (a drugs reference), it can "liquify [sic] your insides", and feel like a "slow-motion freefall". The sounds can hit one hard, then, but they can also be "senses lulling", a "hypno-groove". Either way, one loses one's sense of self. The effect is you "lose your self", for this is music "where we lose our selves", it is like "surrendering to the primal urge" (totally instinctive), and it is suggested that one needs "to be willing to surrender", and then one can experience "glorious submission". Mogwai, meanwhile, "actually want to slice your head off with rapid bursts of noise pandemonium" (New Musical Express, September 21, 1996, p.41). The music "takes over", it is "head-searing" and "room-swamping". The sounds are "physically affecting", but also head "straight for the soul", and the music "drains the tap root of human emotion". In sum, the music is affecting physically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. The review of Stereolab's "You used to call me sadness" single consists primarily of an extremely lengthy anecdote about the reviewer catching the wrong train and becoming increasingly emotional about the experience, before commenting that by the time he does arrive home,
I'm all anxious and agitated and relieved and f***ed off and happy and confused and exhausted and exhilarated. And that's how the Stereolab single made me feel. And that's why it's Single Of The Week - no contest (Melody Maker, October 19, 1996, p.59).

The review is noteworthy firstly because its very personal nature is more typical of the writing in fanzines, as will be discussed in a later chapter, and secondly as it suggests the appeal of Stereolab is that the music is emotionally ambiguous - it is difficult to define its emotional affect precisely - whilst still retaining a potent effect.

The influence of the writing of Reynolds is evident in the description of the effect of the music as inducing bliss, making one “blissed out” (Reynolds wrote a book subtitled 'the raptures of rock' called Blissed Out, published in 1990). Another journalist makes an explicit reference to “1996’s rock journalist’s lexicon” and comments that “words like ‘bliss’ and ‘rapture’ aren’t in it, but it’s the only way to describe” the post-rock music he is reviewing. Such an observation perhaps suggests an awareness of how trends in language use by cultural commentators can affect the way they describe the objects under their critical scrutiny, though what the journalist may be working to achieve is to attempt to suggest the difficulty of describing the music at all and, more especially, to propose that he is immune to the pressures of fashionability in word-use.

Reference to other journalists in a personal way is an extremely unusual device, suggesting a community of listeners, and perhaps a group of friends hanging out together. However, Taylor Parkes does exactly this when writing, with regard to Third Eye Foundation’s debut album,

Simon Reynolds types, whose equilibrium is so enviable they can take this kind of uneasy listening for hours without feeling vaguely damaged, and Neil Kulkarni-style sick f**ks who find some negative serenity in existential unrest will find ‘Semtex’ rewarding, uncompromising, compelling. I love it too, I’m just not sure (and this is possibly the highest compliment) quite how wise it is to spend too long listening, inadvertently invoking exactly the destructive and destabilising feelings one would usually try so hard to disregard (Melody Maker, February 10, 1996, p.36).
The use of such an unusual device further underlines the unusual nature of the particularly potent effect of this intense music on the reviewer.

Related linguistic themes to the 'physically affecting' discourse are that the music "bypasses meaning" (praiseworthy, in rock ideology), and post-rock is described as having a particular effect in other ways. The music is "disturbed", "confused" (in context, having respectively a disturbing or confusing impact), "occasionally uncomfortable" and "frazzled". It is like "bouts of controlled [sic], violent sex". Whatever the effect, it is hard to ignore - the sounds are "compelling" and "insidious, insistent".

The discourse of the 'accidental' can be seen to relate to an avoidance of the intellect (and hence of social convention), and to that most favoured in rock discourse - spontaneity. The music is described as "instinctive", "illogical", and as having "raw spontaneity". It is "unpredictable", to the point of appearing "unplanned". However, it is less positive (except to those who continue to uphold the indie chic ethos of the so-called 'shambling' bands of the C86 scene) to speak of the "ramshackle idiosyncrasy" of the music.

It is not only the qualities of the sound themselves which are discussed, even in reviews. The effect on the listener, as demonstrated earlier, is often related to the physical effect that the music possesses, but sometimes the audience is mentioned more specifically. The claim that the music will "daze and confuse the audience" is one instance not much different to the 'physically affecting' discourse, but sometimes a journalist will suggest the audience needs to take a more active role with regard to post-rock comparative to the majority of rock music. One writer contends that it "requires a lively mind to engage with most post-rock", another that the listener will "bring their own experiences" to how they are affected by and listen to post-rock. "It's more up to you", one journalist declares. Such arguments can be seen as related to the music's claimed inscrutability - its indescribability, on the one hand, and its difficulty on the other, the idea being almost that one needs to work at enjoying it, like serious art.

The description of post-rock music as having such an effect on the listener that it hypnotises and causes one to lose oneself clearly relates to the idea of music as being ego-dissolving, and the feelings of jouissance it can invoke. Yet if this music appeals to the rational centres as much as the irrational ones, perhaps it would be...
advisable to exercise caution before allowing too premature a separation between mind and body, or between ego and id. If it can be appreciated as art as well as intensely pleasurable, then obviously the music is not operating solely on an instinctive level. The belief of Shepherd that “avant-garde jazz and progressive rock [have a potential to] collapse the literate and oral worlds, to collapse intellect and emotion, thought and action, into one another” (1991, p.149) finds a parallel here with the remarks of the journalists who contended that individual pieces make “sadness and uncertainty so sumptuous they become physical pleasures”, or provoke “physical response [that] doesn’t feel inferior to understanding” (and some critics have argued that much post-rock shares common features with avant jazz and art rock). The key may lie in the music’s abstract character. It is the abstractness of music in general, and of post-rock in particular, which allows it to evade the signifying system of language and grant it a special status in terms of supposed access to the unconscious and pleasures that exceed the social/linguistic/rational sphere, and it is the abstractness of music in general, and of post-rock in particular, which links it to discourses in our society which surround high art, and to that which is construed as the beautiful, the sublime.

The Perfect Prescription12: the Discourse of Drugs

The discourse of drugs is common to reviews of all types of music, but even more so where post-rock is concerned. Drugs references occur for a variety of reasons - they suggest the physical impact of the sounds, which leave you “drugged and delirious”, or “drug-burned”. The effect is “narcotic”, a very common description. Probably the reason for the plenitude of drug-based imagery is the perception that some post-rockers are renowned for their drug consumption - especially the ‘space rock’ contingent (a term which has connotations of being ‘spaced out’ and travelling ‘out there’). A group is labelled “Spacemen 3 smack-rockers”. One journalist complains that he must have been on the wrong sort of drugs to appreciate the music, whilst another describes his review object as “space music for people who don’t smoke bongs”, suggesting that normally space rock is only listened to by such an

12 This is the title of an influential Spaceman 3 album. Spacemen 3 were a very influential mid to late 1980s band from Rugby, subsequently splitting into Sonic Boom (aka Pete Kember) and Jason Pierce, who formed Spiritualised. The significance of this group can be seen in that a number of disparate post-rockers came together to release a tribute album of covers of Spacemen 3 material in 1998.
audience. The link between space and drugs is maintained in the description of Glide as “acid-fried trippers heading for Pluto” (New Musical Express, June 29, 1996, p.64). Rather like the back-handed compliment, “less art-wank”, is the description “less dope-headed”, again reflecting the view the music is usually too drug-addled. In fact, the vast majority of the types of rock music can be said to have some link to a certain drug (mod and punk - speed; psychedelia - cannabis and acid; techno - ecstasy [and drum ‘n’ bass to the drugs that have been replacing E]; heroin to many different types of music; alcohol to just about all), but it is doubtful if any can be reduced to simply being a direct result of suitability to the physiological effect of a specific drug. Clearly suggesting that the music functions only as a mirror to certain drug states is simply one way of insulting it (consider how many who dislike techno express that dislike in terms of its supposed dependence on ecstasy culture - they certainly have a relationship, but one cannot be reduced to the other), just as saying it has a drug-like effect is testament to its incredible potency, or perhaps its alien strangeness. Once more, the appropriateness of drug-based imagery can be located in the ability of drugs to bypass the rational side of the brain, and (arguably) to connect to the unconscious.

Not so much ‘It really moves me’ as It really moves: the Discourse of Movement

A discourse that appears again and again, and is more or less unique to post-rock (only isolated releases in other fields of popular music would be described in this way), is that of ‘movement’. The music is said to have a “momentum”, a “flowing movement”. In particular, it is “always on the move”: like an “endless, floodlit autobahn” (most probably a reference to Krautrock, and particularly Kraftwerk), it is “perpetual motion”. Though it is on a “road to nowhere”, “going somewhere and not arriving”, “searching, [but] not getting there”, this is not to be regretted, but is in part a tribute to its unstoppability when in “full flight”, and a testament to its fundamentally “nomadic” (another popular word) nature. Only a “beautifully aimless glide” would be unruffled about the lack of destination, like being on a pleasure drive, observing the “passing scenery”, as one travels through the desert (a particularly common image). Thus even if the musicians all have a distinct place of origin, which is said to colour the music they make, the music itself is fundamentally homeless. The music is able, it is claimed, to recreate a place in one’s mind’s eye. Most bizarrely, this can be when it evokes “the sound of Baudrillard’s America blurring past the car
window on a heat-warped day in summertime on a dusty freeway” (review of Cul de Sac, Melody Maker, June 8, 1996, p.49). Much of this can be traced back to the type of music known revealingly as ‘motorik’, pioneered predominantly by German 1970s band Neu! (who anticipated punk in some ways, and who are now influential in a different style, on Stereolab and many of the post-rock brigade).

If the metaphor of movement is but uncommonly utilised in describing rock, it has a long history of association with music more generally. The composer Roger Session claims that,

> The basic ingredient of music is not so much sound as movement... I would even go a step farther, and say that music is significant for us as human beings principally because it embodies movement of a specifically human type that goes to the roots of our being and takes shape in the inner gestures which embody our deepest and most intimate responses. (quoted in Storr, op. cit., p.184).

Shepherd and Wicke (op. cit., p.123) argue that the tactile character of sound’s materiality “renders it in a certain sense similar to the existence of material bodies in time and space”. They continue their analogy:

> The sounds of music are revealed in time and space, auditory time and space. Their syntactical relatedness gives rise to a sense of time through rhythm and a sense of space through pitch. As Bierwisch observes, ‘movement of pitch presents... something like an abstract “space in motion”’. Pitch and rhythm together thus also give rise to a sense of movement, of motion. The revelation of sounds in auditory time and space seems to be motivated by a desire to articulate movement, to be in a constant state of motion. Music and stasis seem, in principle, irreconcilable. (ibid., p.123-4).

**Concluding Comments**

The ideas in the passages quoted above are intended to be appropriate and relevant for all music. It is noteworthy that this use of the discourse of movement by the rock journalists is yet another example of them utilising the way music is
conceived in general for their own purposes of trying to describe a very particular and novel form of music. Left without their own familiar points of reference, and no established 'rock journalist's lexicon' for the new sounds, the descriptions appear to be stranded at a very general level. This has already been commented upon with regard to the discourses of indescribability, of the oceanic, of physical effect, and of dreamlike insubstantiality.

It has also been said, by those constructing the discourses of post-rock, that this is music which cannot be analysed sociologically. This music, which is predominantly, though by no means exclusively, instrumental, provides no lyrics to analyse, and, in addition, few notorious characters well-known enough to psychoanalyse. The reference to sociology, made by Reynolds amongst others, is partially a comment directed at mainstream U.S. rock criticism which ignores instrumental bands because trends in U.S. journalism, it is contended, emphasise the easier to discuss aspects of a song, such as its lyrics, as opposed to the power of the sounds. The difficulty of describing sounds, especially new sounds, has been shown to some extent in this piece. In addition, it is hoped that the difference in analytic approach, distinct from the subcultural approach of the C.C.C.S. or Adorno's attempts to relate musical works to social structure, has been able to show the continued relevance of sociology even in such an area. Regardless, it is interesting that a discourse of the 'not sociologically possible to analyse' is present and used by journalists in describing the sounds, and this can again be related to the wider 'lack of clarity' theme.

The lack of clarity of post-rock, the difficulty of describing it in any meaningful way at all, has to be seen as integrally connected to its abstract qualities as music which lacks conventional sociological reference points. Music's relationship to language is necessarily an incomplete and inexact one, as both are distinct signifying systems. Where particular forms of music have not had built up around them a set of discourses that can allow them to be related to the social-language-rational sphere, then it would appear, at least in the case of post-rock, that they are prone to being described as music in general would be. The abstract character of the phenomena condemns it to lose its particular elements, and only its more universal ingredients to receive adequate explication. Its abstractness is also what permits it to be perceived as everything from high art to a means to intense jouissance. This can be related to the
poststructuralist argument that non-representative art is best equipped to provide an entrance to the unconscious, and hence to be more truly revolutionary. Shepherd's argument that the ambiguity of (particularly some forms of) music gives it a necessary position of resisting orthodoxies also mirrors this position. The lack of clarity of post-rock music - indescribable and insubstantial as it is constituted as being - is the basis of its abstractness, and the abstractness of music is the foundation of its not being amenable to clear rational exposition. It is not so much that it is irrational, as that it is not rational; it can only be defined, it would seem, by the failure of the attempts to define it.
ANALYSIS OF POST-ROCK DISCOURSES IN SONG TITLES

Introduction

In this chapter, the relationship between the music released by those in the post-rock scene and how they attempt to represent that music in a public and tangible manner, will be discussed and analysed. To achieve this aim, patterns in the titles of pieces of music surrounding particular releases will be suggested. The relationship between these discourses and the descriptions of the music made by professional music journalists will be commented upon, and in addition the relationship to the song titles and art used in certain previous musical scenes, notably the Krautrock and space rock of the 1970s, contemporary electronica (the avant-techno, ambient and drum 'n bass scenes), and, where possible, earlier experimental electronica (e.g. Silver Apples, Sun Ra), as well as those groups immediately preceding and influential on the formation of post-rock (My Bloody Valentine, Spacemen 3, Loop), will be discussed.

The central aspect of this particular music that makes such an analytic approach productive is the relative absence of lyrics. Obviously, if the titles of the various tracks merely reflected the content of the lyrics, then such an approach would tell one precious little about how the music itself is symbolically represented by its makers, as more often than not (though not always) song titles tend to be a word or series of words sung in the chorus of a song, or at least to provide some kind of overview of the contents of the lyrics. This provides a clear focal point as much for musicians, fans and critics, as it has done for previous researchers in the sociology of popular music, who have concentrated on this easier to describe aspect of the music at the expense of its other features. In post-rock related releases this is frequently not an option, and where the human voice is utilised it comes across frequently not as a means of communicating a message or even as a signifier of emotionality as such, but rather as another instrument. The merging of recognised words and nonsense language, often sung in an indistinct tone where precise phrases are difficult to identify, is a frequent method to elude clear meaning (which can be traced back at least as far as the 'ethereal' music of 4AD artists such as The Cocteau Twins, who also shared, as previously observed, the discourse of 'insubstantiality' in journalistic
description). The fundamental problem to be solved, then, is how to provide titles to a music which may be wordless or where the lyrics are not the main focus of attention, and the significance of this dilemma for this research is whether any patterns in non-lyric based titling can be discerned in post-rock, and what do such patterns suggest about the relationship between music and language. It has an added significance in providing some insight into how the musicians themselves conceptualise their work without them being able to hide behind the usual cliché deployed in magazine interviews that their music cannot be classified or easily described, and in that, as will be demonstrated, the titles of the pieces (and of the groups themselves) have clearly coloured the way they are described in much of the writings of the professional journalists. The precise nature of these discursive patterns will now be discussed at length.

Musical references

One obvious way to evade the difficulty of how to provide titles to music devoid of lyrics is to concentrate on the music itself. Musical references in track titles are legion in post-rock. Thus Sonic Boom's Spectrum have released tracks called “Feedback”, “Octaves” and “Tremeloes”, The Azusa Plane have “The miracle of the octave” on an album labouring under the extraordinary weight of the title “Tycho Magnetic Anomaly and the full consciousness of Hidden Harmony”. This is not entirely sheer pretension, but rather contains a strong element of surreal humour, as do many of the titles of Azusa Plane tracks, which are wholly lyric-free and hence free to be indulged with titles like “A minimalist plot to destroy modern rockism” and “Calvin Johnson has saved rock for an entire generation”. Such self-referential titles are rare only in their extremity. E.A.R. (short for Experimental Audio Research) that Sonic Boom uses precisely for experimental collaborations with others, as opposed to the more song-based Spectrum, had tracks such as “DMT Symphony (overture to an inhabited zone)” and “Guitar feedback manipulation” - the one using the terminology of classical music, such as symphony and overture, the other which could hardly be a more straightforward description of its contents and method of creation - on their first album, which is itself described on the sleeve as part of a “series of experimental mood music” made by “non-resident ‘sound-makers’”. The follow-up, meanwhile, carries on in a similar vein, with “Space Themes Part 1 and 2 (Tribute to John Cage in
C, A, G, E)” and “Ring Modulator”, again, respectively, using classical music terms to praise a (post)modern composer (and the common metaphor of space, a theme which will be returned to later), and giving a track a title which reveals starkly its main sound-source ingredient. Similarly, Crescent have a track simply called “Philicorda loops” (a philicorda is a type of lo-tech keyboard) on their album “Electronic Sound Constructions”. Labradford also refer to their equipment in titles such as “Experience the gated oscillator”, and use a brand of muso-speak for “Phantom Channel Crossing” and “Midrange”\textsuperscript{13}. Using more well-known musical sources, Ui play “The Piano”, whilst the Olivia Tremor Control provide a “Theme for a very delicious grand piano” and 46,000 Fibres prefer to occupy themselves “Throwing pianos overboard”. Meanwhile, apart from Spiritualized’s “Symphony Space”, Furry Things are releasing “Piece no. 3 in C”, Rachel’s perform “Music for Egon Schiele”, and Earth unleash “Coda Maestoso in F (flat) Minor”.

Simple references to sound, as straightforward as such and such a track being a song, abound in the titles. Moonshake provide “The sound your eyes can follow”, Bowery Electric “Sounds in motion”, while Earth go for the ultra-minimalist approach with titles such as “Song 4”, “Song 6” and “Lullaby” on their second album (but even Blur released, with some success, a track called “Song 2”). Stars of the Lid similarly try to avoid description in calling one track on their debut album “(Live) Lid”, presumably because it was recorded live. They are more forthcoming, though still obsessed with musical processes, on “Swellsong” (a song which has a swelling effect) and “Tape hiss makes me happy”. One also finds “The Church Song” (Labradford), “Exotic siren song” (Moonshake), “The slide song” (Spiritualized), “Tapir song” (Bardo Pond), “Plainsong” (Seefeel), “Feedback song” and “Whole Day Song” (both Flying Saucer Attack), and “Marimba song” (Laika).

StereoLab’s influence is perhaps most significant in this reference to musical features in titles. They frequently invent non-existent genre names and use them as

\textsuperscript{13} It is very noticeable that on the inner sleeves/card inlays of many post-rock releases, the catalogue of instruments used in making the record is often extremely detailed. The precise make of analogue synthesizers utilised is usually stated, as opposed to the more usual and casual description, that so and so played ‘keyboards’. Even effects devices used to process guitar sounds are frequently listed, so that an individual may have three or four lines of instrument makes listed after their name to show what precisely they played. This is partly fetishisation of technology, and partly harks back to the desire to demystify music-making and enable others to take up their Farfisa organs and actively participate themselves, a continuation of the wish to remove barriers between musicians and audience born from the first fruition of independent labels in the era of punk.
titles - for example "Avant-garde M.O.R.", "French Disco" and "John Cage Bubblegum" (they also have a mini-album entitled "Space Age Batchelor (sic) Pad Music", the title in inverted commas) - as if to suggest conventional description could not do justice to their music or at least to imply they are combining musical traditions in ways not previously done. They also refer to their instruments in titles such as "Mellotron", "Harmonium", "Moogie wonderland", "Lo boob oscillator" and "Farfisa", use wider musical terminology for "The groop (sic) play chord X", "Ronco symphony", "Analogue rock", "Lock-groove lullaby", "Tone burst", "Low-fi", "Three-dee melodie" (sic), "Wow and Flutter", "Miss Modular", and "Melochord seventy-five", and refer to sound and playing more generally on "Les yper-sound", "The noise of carpet" and "How to play your internal organs overnight". Considering the vast majority of Stereolab's songs have lyrics and that many even contain a strong political message, this emphasis on musical references is fairly remarkable and almost certainly an influence on later, more instrumental groups (though it is worth remarking far from unique to them, as Silver Apples, a late 1960s duo who invented their own proto-synthesiser, the Simeon, and who reformed recently after a tribute album of covers of their old songs made by post-rock bands ["Electronic Evocations"], titled the first track on their debut album "Oscillations"). It has even been remarked in the music press that one major reason for the band's lack of wider success could be their undeniably overinvolved titles, which may be difficult for people to relate to. They still have not learnt their lesson, as 1999's "Cobra and Phases Group Play Voltage in the Milky Night" boasts a more cumbersome title even than "Transient Random Noise Bursts with Announcements", from 1993. However, all this is to ignore the basic level of humour in the choice of titles.14

14 The cover art of Stereolab and Spectrum/ EAR is revealing in this light. The "Space Age Batchelor..." album features an extended passage on the sleeve, written in the style of fidelity-testing records from the 1950s, "about this stereophonic recording", with accompanying mock sonic graphs. Similar language crops up on their sleeves for the next couple of years, as do huge close-up pictures of modular analogue synthesisers. Analogue synth pictures become ever more prominent on each successive Spectrum releases to the extent that by last year's "Forever alien", all there are are several such photos, close-ups, in their entirety, and diagrams detailing all their features. Sonic Boom appears in only one photo, fittingly surrounded by an entourage of analogue synths all around him. Previously his covers had been primarily "psychedelic" in nature, with a kaleidoscope of bright, swirly colours and shapes merging into one another. The one exception to this pattern of psychedelic effects and/or analogue synth cover stars is his second EAR album, which shows a scene from the pop-art picture "The Transaction", of a cartoon cat giving another a blow-job for money (but even this is very bright and there is a photograph of a VCS3 [one of Sonic's favourite synths] inside as if to compensate).
So far it has been shown that one way of describing music without reference to lyrics, is by making explicitly musical references. These can be by almost avoiding any kind of meaningful description beyond observing that it is musical activity one is engaged in (Song 4), by using the rather arty, fanciful phrasing of more ‘serious’ music (symphony, overture) or of music in general (octaves), by referring to the instruments and effects devices used in the creation of the piece, both in terms of actual makes of technology (Farfisa, Philicorda loops) and more generally (Guitar feedback manipulation), and even by making some perhaps half-serious, perhaps mostly whimsical reference to one’s place in the history of the various musical movements that constitute pop and rock music (against modern rockism, John Cage Bubblegum, Electroscope’s tribute to Joe Meek, “Joe heard a new world”). The use of titles to avoid meaningful description, to suggest artiness/seriousness, to refer to technological matters, and to suggest fun/irony/wackiness, however, extends far beyond language which stresses expressly musical concerns, and can clearly be related to some of the discourses identified in the writings of the professional journalists (difficulties in description, art versus fun, and technophilia). All these themes will be returned to in time, particularly the first one, but will now focus on the technological and scientific references featured in the titles and cover art of post-rock releases.

Technological and Scientific References

One of the most frequent words in titles of this kind of music is some variation on ‘electricity’ or ‘electric’. These include Jessamine’s “(I’m not afraid of) Electricity”, Stereolab’s “Super Electric”, Windsor for the Derby’s “The electric co.”, Turn On practising the “Electrocation (sic) of fire ants”, Spiritualized’s “Electricity”, “Electric phase” and “Electric mainline”, and the groups Electroscope and Bowery Electric (who enjoy an “Electro sleep”), whilst 8 Frozen Modules have released an album called “The Confused Electrician”. Pram, who print all their lyrics on their releases, use electricity in a more metaphorical way, on “Earthing and Protection”, whilst Stereolab play with their “Spark plug”. Radios and satellites are equally popular. Dadamah have “Radio brain” and Dissolve “Rogue Satellite”, there is the group Six Finger Satellite, Rome have “Radiolucence”, Jessamine suggest that “The long arm of coincidence makes my radio connections”, Laika perform “The sounds of
the satellites”, Pram encounter a “Radio freak in a storm”, while Spectrum and Jessamine collaborate both on “Satellite” and “Radiophonic (Musique Concrete)”. Scientific and mock academic terminology is utilised habitually as well. The Azusa Plane, previously mentioned, interrogate “Temporal continuum” and “Implications of holomovement”, with texts accompanying each piece taken from “The Third Ear” by J.-E. Berendt, apparently a book about philosophical aspects of music. Hovercraft’s album “Akathisia” features a number of extracts of (pseudo-) scientific writings on everything from sound and sonatas and oscillating systems to schizophrenia and stability and electro-convulsive therapy, as well as a series of black and white photographs of scientists at work and of technological objects and of various people dealing with them, a close-up of a brain in someone’s hands and of an eye and an ear, and the cover shows a girl, apparently unconscious, with a series of sensors on her forehead. The band’s main interest seems to be in the possibilities of the extreme effects of sound to unsettle the psyche, they give themselves a range of strange names like Sadie 2600, as if to suggest they might be half-machine, and titles of their tracks include “Haloparidol”, “Vagus nerve” and “De-orbit burn”. These titles combine both an element of the scientific and of non-words, of nonsensical phrases, that is, they sound as if they should be genuine scientific words, but are in fact completely meaningless.

Rome have a track entitled “Deepest laws” and one called “Intermodal”. German group Kreidler have “Schrodigers Katze (mono)”, and also - technological if hardly academic science - a “Polaroid” and a “Telefon”. Trans Am play in a “Technology Corridor”, and Disco Inferno hope to be in “Technicolour”. Mouse on Mars, also from Germany, emphasise the playful side of technology instead, with “Tamegnocchi” and “Dark-fx”, the latter seeming like a play on the names given to presets by digital synthesiser manufacturers. Fridge’s entire debut album is more or less devoted to technological gadgetry. Entitled “Ceefax”, it features “EDM” (parts 1, 2 & 3), “Tricity” (these sound rather like makes of domestic technology), “Oracle” (as in ITV’s version of Ceefax), “Robots in disguise”, “Helicopter”, “More EH4-800” and “Zed Ex Ay-Ti-Wan” (or ZX81). Nevertheless, this appears to be only a passing fad for them - other singles do not show the same inclination, and the titles along with the details of track production etc., are featured only on the side of the disc box in very small print, so the cover appears immaculately white and is in wrap. Whether this is to
heighten the feel of pristine domestic technology, or to suggest the relative unimportance of the titles is open to conjecture. A band who Fridge have shared a split single with operate under perhaps the most mathematical of monikers, namely Add N to (X). Their debut album features on the cover the two male members extracting, whilst dressed as surgeons, a sizeable analogue synth from the belly of their prostrate female accomplice. Home take the award for most academic song title with “Atomique (Journale d’Physique vol. 1.1)”. Cul de Sac encounter a “Graveyard for robots” and find “This is the metal that do not bum” on their second album. Pram have a track called “Silver Nitrate”, but as this has a lyric about the problems facing a woman scientist it is something of a special case. Spectrum conduct a “Sine study”, Brise Glace are “One syntactical unit”, and a band takes the name Flowchart, while Juicy Eureka take on “Drift cycles” and “Echo orbit”. Stereolab examine “Refractions in the Plastic pulse” and contemplate a “New orthophony”, while their offshoot band Turn On consider “Plasmids”. Fuxa produce a “Main sequence diffusion” to accompany the “Photon” on their first album collection, to be left facing “Unexplained transmission repair” and a “Unified frequency”. Tortoise formed an offshoot group named Isotope 217 who released the album “The unstable molecule”. Salaryman face “Voids and Superclusters”, Sabalon Glitz a “Super chiasmic nucleus”, and Gravity Wax a “Low energy particulate” on their compilation album.

However, Techno Animal are more endangered by “The mighty atom smasher” and the new breed of “Mastodon Americanus”, while God is concerned with “The Anatomy of Addiction”. Techno Animal, Ice, God and The Sidewinder all feature as a main member Kevin Martin, and certain concerns operate across all these groups. The use of pictures of microbes, viruses, close-ups of the heads of insects accompanied by their (mock?) scientific names features in the cover art of the first three. His most recent new side project, The Sidewinder, the first rooted exclusively in computer-based music, features the zenith of his scientific concerns thus far. Here “Homosapien meets the microbe”, in a state of “Zero gravity” to test the “Big bang theory” with a “Ballistic loop” and a “Photic driver” in an “Infrasonic version”, fearing a “Silicon based predator” whose “Destination DNA” may mean “Cryonic suspension”.

Excluding their earlier releases, virtually everything named by one of the originals in post-rock, Main, is of a scientific bent. Apart from the three Firmament
releases, which avoid titles altogether, this becomes noticeable from the second album proper "Motion Pool" onwards. Tracks are titled geologically, like "Core" and "Crater Scar", or more vaguely, such as "Heat realm" and "Liquid reflective", with still others called "Spectra decay" and "Rotary eclipse". The remix album "Ligature" begins the trend for non-words that sound scientific, like "Pentode" and "Hyaline", alongside "Short wave", "Organic" and "Cloudscape". This trend reaches its apex on the double HZ collection, with six series of tracks respectively designated "Corona", "Terminus", "Kaon", "Haloform", "Muser" and "Neper". Main have continued their science fixation with their last album, the live "Deliquescence", whose titles refer to particle suspension and valency waves, and on a recent remix of a Bowery Electric track subsequently labelled "Elementary particles".

The scientifically rooted titles listed above may seem to operate at some remove from conventional pop and rock culture, by promoting the rational at the expense of the emotional, the consciously planned instead of the spontaneous, but this need not be so. It is noticeable that this discourse of the scientific is far more prominent in the titles and names of the post-rock artists than in the analyses of the professional journalists. This implies that it may only be the writers of the New Musical Express and Melody Maker who particularly object to the idea of 'sound boffins' performing experiments in their stereo-laboratories, as they are required to praise "pure pop" (i.e., in practice, that which is commercially successful) and many of them subscribe to central tenets of post-structuralist thought; so if they like a piece of post-rock, they are significantly less likely to describe it in a scientific discourse. Yet to draw such an inference may be inaccurate for many post-rockers are even more persuaded of the importance of spontaneity in music than those in mainstream pop and rock.

This ostensible paradox can nevertheless be reconciled, as Pattison (1987, p.125-30) argues that this seeming conflict in rock and in Romanticism more generally, between the pastoral and the primitive on the one hand and the technological sphere on the other, is more apparent than real. In the vulgar pantheism underlying rock, where utopia is the place where the feeling self of the individual becomes identical with the universe, becomes god, any method of achieving this aim is acceptable. So both natural drugs like marijuana and alcohol and synthetically produced drugs like amphetamines, ecstasy and acid can be used in the pursuit of this
goal, and similarly any and every technological advance is a new possibility of attaining this dream. As Pattison declares, "Only the man (sic) of refined taste and transcendent discrimination troubles over a paradox. The pantheist is happy to include empirical science in his universe as a powerful expression of self, a brilliant game to be used even as its premises are discarded" (p.129). The early Romantics comprehended the potency of technology, and that scientific invention was one route to infinity as much as through the primitive past of Romantic mythology. It is worth quoting one passage from Pattison's work, regarding electricity, in full:

From the time of Ben Franklin and the Shelleys, electricity has attracted the Romantic imagination because, as Mary Shelley said, it seems to embody "the principle of life". Electricity is another name for the ubiquitous energy that is the self, and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster is the emblem of how man might harness this energy for the replication of his selfhood. Dr. Frankenstein uses electricity to animate the dead limbs which become his monstrous double, and like him, the rocker is what Marc Bolan called an "electric warrior". Rock's electrical obsessions do not contradict its longing for the primitive. They are meant to fulfil it. (p.128)

In this light, the post-rock obsession with electricity is nothing new, with not only arch-rockers Bolan and Hendrix ("Electric Ladyland"), but the early Romantics sharing their enthusiasm. The use of the discourse of feeling "electrified" was also found by Illouz as a subset of her metaphorical field of 'love as intense force' (1991, p.236).

When compared to some of the developments currently taking shape in the drum n bass scene, post-rock still seems rooted, scientifically speaking, in the era of witches and leeches. Techno sprung from groups with names such as Cybertron and the genre was given its name by the track "Techno City", evolving in turn from early 1970s synth outfits like Tonto's Expanding Headband who recorded "Cybernaut". The latest trends in Jungle, attacked and labelled as "neurofunk" by Simon Reynolds (The Wire, 166, Dec. 1997, p.26-30), deploy "scientific imagery... more redolent of Techno than Jungle: artist names like Genotype, Isotope, Cyborgz, Cybernet Vs Genetix; titles like 'Telemetry', 'DNA', 'Genetic Manipulation'...". The label No U Turn has just
released “Cells”/ “Copies”, and their engineer/ producer describes imminent releases as “research”. Reynolds quotes Phil Aslet (half of Source Direct) who comments that “such dry, dispassionate imagery reflects the fact that “We’re technical people... Our music isn’t an in-your-face thing that’s going to sell millions of copies, it’s more of a creation that you have to read, like a book” (words in italics are Aslet’s). Reynolds compares neurofunk producers to “lab researchers working on nuclear missiles, or gene-splicers designing viral pathogens for biological warfare”, adding that “military research, after all, is the avant garde of science”. Such military, warmongering imagery does not appear to be actually rooted in the language of the ‘neurofunkers’ themselves, and seems designed to emphasise the worst elements of science to the detriment of those choosing to ally themselves with the scientific realm. More interestingly, Reynolds goes on to speculate that the “scientific imagery also seems to reflect the modus operandi (as Photek titled his debut album - pure neuro!), the weeks of incredibly intensive and fastidious labour that go into the average drum n bass track. Listening, you can hear the conditions under which the music came into being: bodies rigid with tension as they click the mouse; eyes fucked by the red-eye effects of ganja and staring at a computer screen all day”. He also observes that “some of the new breed of neurofunksters are actual scientists: Grooverider protégé John B is a 19 year old student of genetics and cell biology” (John B in a recent interview has said that at least his studies provide him with some “cool titles”).

Reynolds is at best ambivalent and at times almost hostile to these developments, declaring neurofunk “alienated and obsessive ‘dance’ music”, which seems to be “wilfully excising all the things that made Jungle so exciting in the first place”. For him, the scientific imagery represents not another attempt to energize the self, but is rather suggestive of a trainspottery methodology that is too planned and lacking in “explosive joy”. The quotation from Aslet suggests, for him at least, the use of scientific imagery is not wholly concerned with the end of attaining godhead, nirvana, utopia, jouissance, but is more connected with the means of production and reception, and in particular that, for both producers and consumers, this is music that one has to think about.15

15 In a recent interview, Jason Pierce of Spiritualized is recorded as saying “I’m empirical. Some people think that music is mystical, that you’re just the conduit for this gift. But I think writing a song is more about science”. He later remarks “I read a lot about science, evolution and the mind when we’re on tour.
At this stage one may tentatively speculate that the ideology born from vulgar Romanticism and poststructuralism, from where the preference for irrationality and jouissance originates, found in the writings of the professional journalists, such as the influential Reynolds, is of less significance for other key players, practitioners of neurofunk and post-rock alike, in the music scene.

Discourses of the Mythical and the Natural

Having stressed the scientific way to pantheistic utopia, it is necessary to balance the report, and consider the nature-loving, pseudo-mythological elements to be found in post-rock titles, for these, as it not the case for a sub-genre such as neurofunk, are nearly as common as the scientific-technological discourses. Perhaps the most straightforward instance of this is that found on the inner sleeve of Amp's second album “Astralmoonbeamprojections”, which contains a photograph of a 'Standing Stone' at Avebury, 3.20 a.m. with a strange light emerging from it. Bardo Pond use a figure that resembles a fertility symbol or icon of some ancient deity on the cover of their “Amanita” album (a word which may not exist, but has a mystical ring to it, much as other bands use non-words that sound scientific). O'Rang deploy a great amount of ethnic art and landscape photographs in their booklet also full of pro-environment sloganeering to accompany their “Herd Of Instinct” album. This, and titles such as “Nahoojek” (again constructed to sound like a genuine ethnic language word, whether it actually is or not), “An ocean ahead” and “Across the oceans” (natural, in particular, oceanic - relating to oceanic rock? - imagery), suggest pantheistic, primitivist elements, but in this instance founded on and related to firm political (environmentalist) beliefs. Novak have a song called “Rapunzel”, a title originating in the mythological tradition of fairy stories. Telstar Ponies released a single “Brewery of Eggshells”, based on a mythical tale about a recipe to keep evil from your door. Sabalon Glitz tell of the “Hammer of the witches”, the “Dance of the firewalker” and the “Forge of Vulcan”. The last is a cover of Hawkwind, and a reminder that much of this particular discursive strand is a continuation of the naming of songs and bands from the days of Space Rock in the 1970s and of the 'Kosmische' strain of Krautrock - bands like Popul Vuh, Amon Duul and Ash Ra Tempel. The

- Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins - not to impress anyone, just out of personal curiosity”. Interest in science from music-makers is far from restricted to university students, then.
influence of the first of these is especially telling on Flying Saucer Attack who call three of their songs, respectively, “Popul Vuh 1”, “Popul Vuh 2” and “Popul Vuh 3”, and single out their second album “In den Garten Pharaos” (In the Garden of the Pharaoh) as particularly praiseworthy. One of the originators of the Detroit Space Rock scene in the early 1990s, Asha Vida, call their first track on their comeback EP “Lacedaemon” (band and song designated in a pseudo-mythical fashion). Windy and Carl wonder about going “Through the Portal”, Flies inside the Sun consider “Icarus”, 46,000 Fibres record “Beorth” and “Behemoth”, Spectrum are in “The new Atlantis”, Flying Saucer Attack dream of the “Land beyond the sun”, God are fittingly “Driving the demons out”, Earth initially ponder that “Teeth of lions rule the divine” and later record “ Thrones and Dominions” (which has a somewhat mystical, or at least ancient - read antediluvian, primitive - resonance), the Azusa Plane perform “Armonia Aphanos Phaneros Kreisson”, Fuxa participate in a “Tokearian parade”, and Keiji Haino (from Japan) faces “The curse that accepted affirmation”. Illouz’s identification of the usage of the metaphor of love as magic (1991, p.236) has some resonance in these references to mythology, connected as they are by a shared belief in the potency of the irrational, especially that rooted in folk traditions.

Natural imagery is featured prominently too, aside from some of the scientific descriptions of natural phenomena already discussed (particles, molecules etc.). The ocean, the moon, the countryside and even stone formations are alluded to (all of which would be objects of awe and reverence in pantheistic thought). Pram face “Sea swells and distant squalls” and “Eels” in their “Sargasso sea” album, as Tortoise move “Along the banks of rivers”. Laika are in a “Red river”, Bardo Pond in a “Capillary river”. Disco Inferno feel that “Even the sea sides against us” as they find themselves “In sharky water”. Jessamine are in the “Polish Countryside”, while Main, away from the crater scar, are “Pulled from the water” to a “Dry stone feed”. Scenic occupy “Deserted shores”. Amp speak of a “Soft stone soul” - perhaps the one at Avebury? Magnog are “Borne upon waves”, and A.R.Kane “Sea like a child” and are as “Cool as moons”. Moonshake (actually named after a song by the Krautrock band Can) call their first album “Eva Luna”. Telstar Ponies plead “Moon, don’t come up tonight” but later maintain “The moon is not a puzzle”. Rachel’s third album “The sea and the bells” is awash with maritime imagery (“Rhine and Courtesan”, “Voyage of Camille”, “The Sirens”, “Night at Sea”). Piano Magic have made an entire album called “Trick
of the sea” for the ‘Bliss Out’ series of releases by the label Darla, suggesting an explicit parallel between the ambient drone pieces featured in that series and the continuous ebbing and flowing of the sea. “The still pool reflects a clear moon”, suggest Sufi, whilst watching a “Desert flower”. Home face a “Raising Tide”, Movietone are in a “Coastal Lagoon”. Cul de Sac affirm that “The moon scolds the morning star”. Sabalon Glitz are in a “Forest”, Total specifically in “Srebenica forest glade”, and unsurprisingly, then, Olivia Tremor Control say “I can smell the leaves”. Flying Saucer Attack, who subtitled their first eponymous album “Rural psychedelia”, appear to be the biggest nature-lovers. The cover of the first album depicts a very early sunrise, and it’s first three tracks are “My dreaming hill”, “A silent tide” and “Moonset”. On “Distance”, the cover is of a cloud formation, and songs included are “Oceans”, “Standing stone”, “Crystal shade” (crystals have long, like certain stones, been held to have mystical properties) and “Oceans 2”. Later songs by the band incorporate “To the shore”, “Three seas”, “The sea” and “Beach red lullaby”.

Thus just as the use of technological and scientific discourses in the reviews of journalists are mirrored in post-rock song titles, so the natural and mythical discourses the professional music writers employ are reflected in the titles of individual tracks.

Discourses of Outer Space

Nevertheless, the aspect of nature, and of science for that matter, that fascinates these groups the most is outer space. To some extent, this has already been perceived in relation to where this discourse overlaps with others. So Juicy Eureka are interested in echo orbit, but they also have tracks entitled “Buzz Aldrin” and “Fantastic planet”. Stars of the Lid include a picture of a boy with a mock space helmet on holding a space rocket (in a distinctively 1950s style) on the back cover of their debut album. Their next record was called “Gravitational Pull vs. Desire for Aqueous life”, showing an interest in the stellar and the oceanic. Pram’s first album was “The stars are so big, the earth is so small... stay as you are”, they have since recorded “Gravity” and claimed to be the “Legendary band of Venus”, whilst “Dancing on a star”. Jessamine breathe “Air from another world”, state the “Moon is made of cheese”, and feel “It’s cold in space”. Electroscope engage in “Space travel” and play “The trumpet from outer space”. Fuxa wish you “Pleasant orbitings” but fear
“First abductions”. Disco Inferno are “Starbound - all burnt out and nowhere to go”; perhaps then, like Moonshake, they end up remaining on “Spaceship Earth”, alongside Techno Animal, once they complete “Re-Entry” back to “Cape Canaveral”. Laika are named after the first dog in space, and their album titles “Silver apples of the moon” and “Sounds of the satellites” seem to reflect this interest, but are more derivative of influential musical recordings (the former is also the title of a famous work of electronic music by Morton Subotnik from the 1960s). However, even if they are “Lower than the stars”, they can still drink “Martinis on the moon”. Third Eye Foundation contend “The star’s gone out” and Union Wireless perform “Saturn ascension experiments”. Pell Mell recorded “Constellation” and “Saucer”. Gravity Wax could be useful on the “Surface of the moon”. Long Fin Killie have a “Rockethead on mandatory surveillance”, although this does not prevent them “Yawning at comets” along with “1000 wounded astronauts”. Glide indulge in a “Space Age Freak Out”, taken through the “Cosmos” by a “Wormhole” in their “Space Van”. They also have “Wise Baby Dreams”, a UFO related phenomenon (where those who believe themselves to be abducted by aliens dream they have been impregnated with embryos which will develop into ‘wise babies’). Telstar Ponies, prepared with “Maps and Starcharts”, are “Not even starcrossed”. Macrococsmica, on their album “Ad astra”, have “Orbit 48” and declare “I am the spaceship digitalis”. Sabalon Glitz are simply “Ufonic”. Stereolab face a “Super falling star” but still declare “The stars our destination” in a “Space Moment”, though they may finish a “Prisoner of Mars”. Spectrum are “Forever alien”, indeed “To the moon and back”, in the “Spacestation” of EAR. Seely are “Exploring the planets” amidst a “Meteor shower”, while Olivia Tremor Control ride a “Gravity Car”. Flying Saucer Attack offer up no songs about imminent alien invasion, but their name alone suffices, and they do at least have little cartoon UFOs on some of their sleeves. Windy and Carl have a “Gravital loft” and perform an “Ode to Spaceman”, but the latter is a dedication to Spacemen 3 (the first group of Jason Pierce of Spiritualized and of Sonic Boom of Spectrum and EAR). Spiritualized themselves admit that “Ladies and gentlemen, we are floating in space”. Rome are “Lunar white”, while Seefeel find it “More like space” in the “Minky starshine”. Crescent enjoy the “Sun”, and in the “Superconstellation”, the “New sun”, and their Bristol compatriots Amp have “Stellata”. Pell Mell have a track called “Star City” and Labradford one named “Star
City, Russia”; the latter in particular conjures up images of a city of scientists working to win the space race.

Previous references to Space Rock, along with the mention made of experimental electronic composers like Subotnik, and the highly influential Spacemen 3, reveals that the discourse of outer space is hardly unique to post-rock. The use of space as a metaphor has also been used frequently by critics and by the musicians themselves to describe the electronic explorations of certain black groups (Funkadelic, Parliament) and notably the space jazz of Sun Ra, he who declared that “Space is the place” and himself to be an alien (as did Lee Perry). In addition, it is still employed in certain subgenres of techno music. Originally, one can understand how the strange, some might say otherworldly, timbres of analogue synthesizers and instruments such as the theremin may have been perceived as alien, metaphorically if usually not literally. However, their use in 1950s science fiction movies to represent unearthly forces at work, has somewhat conventionalised this (even if those who provide film soundtracks do not always appear to have realised), and the space metaphor is generally utilised more in a light-hearted way, as many of the examples above testify. Using the space discourse is now seldom an attempt to signify that one is doing something so new it requires the suggestion that it is ‘out of this world’. Nevertheless, it remains a popular discourse for post-rock groups, significantly more so then for mainstream rock and pop culture, and is far from restricted to those operating more at the space rock end of the scene.

The Discourse of Insubstantiality

The major theme identified in the writings of the professional journalists was that of ‘lack of clarity’, incorporating in particular the ‘indescribable’ and the ‘insubstantial’ discourses. These are also markedly present in the way the music-makers themselves present and designate their works. The theme of insubstantiality - of something being not quite solid - appears in a variety of ways, many recognisable from the writings of the professional journalists. The unusual metaphor of the music as being gaseous again features, as Stars of the Lid call their debut long-player “Music for Nitrous Oxide”, and Pram their second album proper “Helium”. More prosaically, the imagery of plain air is utilised, as Jessamine take in “Air from another world” (as we have seen) and Tortoise breathe “Night air”. Labradford on the “Ambient:
Isolationism" compilation are engaged in an “Air free lubricated transfer”, while Total prefer “Silver air”. Pell Mell are in the “Ether”. One might conclude, with the group Rachel’s, that post-rock is “With more air than words”.

If the post-rockers cannot be gaseous, then to avoid being solid they can at least resort to the other state of matter, namely liquid. Main are “Liquid reflective” and Spectrum have “Liquid intentions”. Roy Montgomery and Chris Heaphy’s band ‘Dissolve’ have a moniker implying solid becoming liquid. Seely are in a “Bubble bath”, so perhaps they can have the best of both worlds, gassy bubbles atop of relaxing waters. The band name ‘Transient Waves’ suggests even the fluid ocean is not insubstantial enough for some, but the waves must be ephemeral too. Their tracks have titles like “Murk” and “Melted”, which again threaten solid states. Finally Crescent, after witnessing the insubstantiality of a “Heat haze”, affirm simply that “There is no matter”.

However, there are many other ways of using language to suggest a lack of stable, solid foundations to be found in the titles of post-rock releases. There is the ghostly metaphor deployed in Broadcast’s “Phantom”, Techno Animal’s “Ghosts”, Third Eye Foundation’s “Ghost”, and the “Ghost Channels” of Telstar Ponies. Total encounter a “Phantom bombing shroud”; in this instance, the insubstantial is hiding something all too substantial and real. Shadows are a common way of suggesting something not quite solid, and this is true in post-rock too, as Pram’s “Shadows”, Amp’s “Shadowfall”, and Moonshake’s “Shadows of tall buildings” testify. The idea of fragility is conjured up by Pram’s “Eggshells” (there are very few other references to eggshells in popular song titles, one example, apart from Telstar Ponies’ “Brewery of Eggshells”, being a Cocteau Twins track [“Eggs and their shells”] - another link to the pioneers of ethereal indie). The first track on the My Bloody Valentine debut album “Isn’t Anything” (itself a denial of solidity) is the extremely evocative “Soft as snow (but warm inside)”. Meteorology reappears discursively, as Disco Inferno are “Lost in fog” and Magnog encounter “Mist waves riding the hills” (their new compilation is entitled “More weather”). Union Wireless are “Breathing, Space” - linking the themes of air and space. It is worth observing at this point that the imagery of space is often used itself to suggest a lack of solid foundations - a lack of gravity, the sheer vast empty nothingness of stretches of the universe. Similarly, some of the scientific discourse has this aspect to it - notice Isotope 217 are interested in “The
Unstable Molecule" (my italics), a reminder that the very building blocks of our universe are inherently unstable and prone to flux.16

Techno Animal are engaged in the "Flight of the hermaphrodite", and as a being half-man, half-woman, they are neither one thing nor the other, and as such a threat to the stability of clear gender identities. It can be argued that part of the enormous recent academic and journalistic interest in gender and sex, including in music magazines, is that as people attempt to locate stable foundations in a rapidly changing world, they take the view that biology is the key to who we really are (witness the current obsession with genetics), and therefore that sex and sexuality are perhaps the fundamental aspects of our being - in this light, the metaphor of the hermaphrodite is a potent antidote to stability indeed. Similarly, the very name 'Techno Animal' is suggestive of a cyborg, as biological laws are overcome when organism and machine merge (and what could be more antithetical to a sure sense of self than the concept of the post-human?). Recordings such as "Cyborg dread invokes the phantom priest" provide a double dose of insubstantiality, and their alter-ego The Sidewinder show a venomous streak as their "Destination DNA" results in a "Total destruction of mind and body". Techno Animal's last album to date is called "Techno Animal Vs. Reality". Stereolab, on the other hand, have released a mini-album titled "Music for the amorphous body study center" (sic), a collaboration with artist Charles Long that includes a mini-manifesto pleading on behalf of physical collectivity against the power of the word and the image. Even their desire for real physical foundations, nonetheless, is connected to a vision of an amorphous body.

The imagery of sleep and of dreams recurs frequently, dreamlike imagery suggesting perhaps intangible and visionary aspects, whilst sleep implies a distinction from the forceful active self of hard rock and a possible entry into trance-like states.

16 The new sciences of quantum physics and chaos theory are more about fluidity and indeterminacy than order, and some have argued that "Space-time is really timeless; all events are interconnected but not causally, and can be interpreted as part of a process of cause and effect only when they are read in a single direction. Thus the world of subatomic phenomena, that which underlies everything in the universe, is 'feminine' - nonhierarchical, fluid, transient, many-sided, and eternal" (French, 1985, p.499) and "That everything is energy, that everything moves, that everything is somehow discrete or separate, and interrelated or interconnected... Furthermore, as Arthur Koestler wrote, 'The nineteenth-century model of the universe as a mechanical clockwork is a shambles and since the concept of matter itself has been dematerialized, materialism can no longer claim to be a scientific philosophy'" (Morgan, 1982, p.291). This is a science without matter, inherently transient, endlessly moving - a science, in short, which could not be more appropriate for application to the discourses describing and constructing post-rock.
Jessamine have “Ordinary sleep”, while Laika have to plead “Let me sleep” on their first album before they are “Almost sleeping” on the follow-up. Third Eye Foundation have “Dreams on his fingers” and “Sleep”, but in the case of the latter this is definitely ironic as the track is an astonishing marriage of violently uncontrollable breakbeats and intense guitar feedback, and truly a nightmare for insomniacs. Union Wireless declare “I never dream”, in contrast to Teenagers in Trouble who say “I had a dream”, whilst Techno Animal claim to be “The dream forger”. Bright observe “You need some sleep”, which is scarcely surprising in the time of the “Nationwide sleep disorder” of Flowchart. Spectrum maintain “Close your eyes and you’ll see”: truth is to be found away from the material, conscious world. Olivia Tremor Control wish to “Define a transparent dream”, while Flying Saucer Attack plead “Make me dream” and “Come and close my eyes”. Windy and Carl have “A dream of blue” (Windy, Carl and the two members of Fuxa originally recorded an EP together under the moniker ‘Once Dreamt’). After “Nico’s dream”, Cul de Sac protest “I don’t want to go to bed” (complete with picture of wailing toddler on front cover). Dadamah proclaim that “This is not a dream”. Seefeel have a “Blue easy sleep”, and Pram declare “In dreams you too can fly”. Post-rock predecessors My Bloody Valentine suggest “(When you wake) You’re still in a dream” and Loop have “16 dreams”. In general, about as many of the bands seem to be experiencing sleep disturbances as are enjoying blissful rest and pleasant and/or psychedelically vivid dreams, and, likely as not, at the root of both may well be the consumption of drugs.

The language of drifting is on occasion quite prominent, a testament to a music which has been termed by some “Drift rock”. So Spectrum confesses “Then I just drifted away” and “Feels like I’m slipping away”. Bowery Electric advise us to “Drift away”, and Pell Mell experience “Drift”, perhaps owing to the “Butterfly effect”. Spiritualized are still “...floating in space”.

17 The cover art of the post-rock bands reveals perhaps more than anything else the predilection for insubstantiality. The assortment of blurred and fuzzy images makes it difficult to see exactly what is out of focus in the photograph in many cases: sometimes it is band members whose portraits are blurred, occasionally into one another (the overall number of pictures of the bands’ members is unquestionably relatively small in comparison to that found in other genres), other times natural phenomena, on others one is unable to tell. Sharp shards of light often emit from unlocatable sources in these pictures, a photographic effect using time-lapse. This is like those little after-effects of light that a person can sometimes see after moving their hand, especially after drug consumption. It is this effect in miniature which is part of why some drug advocates claim it is a way to see a new reality, or aspects of the world anew (the physical aspect, rather than the metaphysical claims). Alternatively, many of the photographs are blurred because they are taken from a moving vehicle (or are made to appear that way), again
The role of the unpredictable remains paramount, for all the scientific pretensions of some of the bands. Amp declare "Onehopesinuncertainty" (rendered as one word deliberately as are all the titles on "Astralmoonbeamprojections" - this could be considered an attempt to evade conventional meaning, the way words are usually divided, so emphasising connectivity, or perhaps it is simply stylistic). Broadcast produce "Accidentals", working "According to no plan", and the predominantly female Movietone assert that "Chance is her opera".

The theme of the loss of solidity is again present in titles such as Jessamine's "It shouldn't take so long for a man to drown", Ganger's "Jellyneck", Juicy Eureka's album "Thinking up things and then forgetting them", Dylan Group's "Decay", Labradford's "Disremembering", Pram's "Loose threads", Jessamine's "You may have forgotten", My Bloody Valentine's "I can see it (but I can't feel it)", Pell Mell's "Floating gate" and "Nothing lies still long", Gastr del Sol's "The sea incertain", Telstar Ponies' "A feather on the breath", A.R.Kane's "Tiny little drop of perfumed time" and "Deep blue breath", Roy Montgomery's "Departing the body" and Dissolve's "That that is... is (not)[n.b. this is the full title]. Magnog's debut album features titles so incorporeal and ethereal one wonders how they are not completely absent - "Lost landing", "Instant forgetfulness", "Shapeshifter", "A moments seam" and "Loom". Stereolab bring a sense of humour to these gossamer meditations with album titles "Transient random noise-bursts with announcements" and "Refried ectoplasm".

Imagery of endings, whereby something substantial is threatened terminally, occurs especially in the songs of Loop - so their albums have titles like "Heaven's End" and "Fade Out", and individual tracks include "This is where you end", "Black sun" (Bowery Electric later have a "Black light" and Third Eye Foundation claim "I've seen the light and it's dark"), "Burning world", "Got to get it over", "Fix to fall", "Torched", "Burning prisma", "Spinning" and "Spinning spunout". Main, who grew from Loop, then wish to "Feed the collapse" on their first album "Hydra-Calm". Disco Inferno undergo "A crash at every speed" and are "Starbound - all burnt out and nowhere to go", whilst Crescent look for "Exit" (Exit is also the name of an unrelated

suggesting impermanence (which can be related to the discourse of movement, which will be discussed later). Other covers seem to depict close-ups of rock formations (geological rock, that is), that have rather a similar effect to the blurred portraits in that one cannot really make out what they are.
post-rock group). Ice speak of "The flood" and "Implosion", Techno Animal of "Burn", and The Sidewinder, as previously seen, of the "Total destruction of mind and body". Clearly, this can be related to the discourse of the mental and physical effects of the music utilised by the music journalists.

The insubstantiality discourse perhaps reaches its apex in the claim that this is a music without reference, gone as soon as one hears it, unable to be pinned down and related to anything else. At this juncture, it is appropriate to quote in full a passage from the end of a review article on Kranky label artists (everything on the American independent label Kranky can be fairly labelled post-rock) by Canadian Donald Anderson in his Space Age Bachelor fanzine:

The best guide to an aesthetic for Chicago’s Kranky label is the titles. Jessamine’s You may have forgotten, Magnog’s Learning Forgetfulness; Labradford album title A Stable Reference, Octal’s Falling without reference; Jessamine’s It’s cold in space, Bowery Electric’s Black light; Labradford’s Lake speed, where water moves everywhere but goes nowhere; Octal’s River sailing through arches or The farthest shore or Spring’s Promise beyond the snows; Octal’s The way is broken, Jessamine’s The long arm of coincidence makes my radio connections, Amp’s Onehopesinuncertainty - where words cannot even separate themselves; Labradford’s Scenic recovery - because what else is this music but scenic recovery, the already forgotten glimpses of fleeting beauty and forlorn immensities. This is a music of space, of chill, of oceans. This is a music tied up in the wilderness, where instruments only serve to gain access to, to imitate the vast ocean of already present sound. A music without references. A music of accidents and coincidences. A music where ideally the sun will find itself in the middle of the sea, where all will become mist, where symbiosis is the rule (Space Age Bachelor, 10, 1997).

Anderson confirms much of the previous argument, and now both a professional journalist and a fanzine writer have been shown to be engaged in fundamentally the same activity as this research - in other words, examining titles of tracks in order to better understand a genre - showing this approach is not simply some academically removed peculiarity. What is particularly interesting in this
context, though, are the references to references, to the revelation that the music-makers themselves are engaged self-reflexively in suggesting that their music is beyond linguistic convention.

Avoiding Description

The manner in which music groups use language to suggest insubstantiality has now been described in some depth, but a significant variation on this is where non-language is deliberately deployed as if the music concerned is so ephemeral it is literally beyond words. As a variation on this, foreign language phrases are utilised as suggestive of that beyond rationality (a parallel can be found in the work of Hesmondhalgh, 1995, who berates bands on Nation records, such as Loop Guru and Trans-Global Underground, for use of ethnic phrasing to convey the exotic and the non-rational. O'Rang are perhaps the closest post-rock gets to this, as discussed earlier). Sometimes the effect is onomatopoeic. In the case of Main's "Deliquescence", I believed this word to be an invented one designed to suggest the insubstantiality of the music, but it is actually a genuine French word (the album is a live recording from a concert in Paris). On other occasions, it seems the intended effect is deliberately to evade sense, as with the titling on Hair and Skin Trading Company's third album "Psychedelique Musique" (the titles are, in order "Ichneumen fly"; "*"; "Kinetic"; "S"; "MIGJGI. DXFVAZLK, HG. AWSEL*AS" [all one title]; "TOR"; "ZZZ"; "Consciousucons...?*u12"; "Knife fright"; untitled; "DDD"; untitled; untitled; "ESQ"). Labradford's titling history is interesting in this respect, as they progress from song titles referring to music technology (e.g., first - "Experience the gated oscillator" - and third album - "Midrange"), references to listening ("Listening in depth" and "New listening" - both first album) and movement (more on this to come) through four tracks with foreign sounding titles ("Mas", "El lago", "Banco" and "Eero" - all on the second album, "A Stable Reference") to a fourth album entitled "Mi Media Naranja" (a Spanish phrase which translates as "The other side of the orange") in which English language and indeed non-English phrases are replaced by (mostly) single letters. The titles of tracks, in full, for their fourth album release are "S", "WR", "G", "C", "V", "I" and "P", though it is unclear which letter corresponds to which track. Their most recent album, "E Luxo So" (another non-English title), continues the trend to its extreme, as it features no track titles at all.
To give a few examples of this use of non-language, one finds Jessamine's "Schisandra", My Bloody Valentine's "Sueisfine" (the band are actually singing 'suicide' on a track whose title can be separated out to form the ironic words 'Sue is fine' - a mixture of messages and meanings that denies one clear reading). Turn On have "Glangorous" which seems oddly evocative of the sounds on the track and "Jumbleo palipsest" (sic) which doesn't. Juicy Eureka have "Banam banam", "Mbira", and "Hoodoo". Quickspace (or Quickspace Supersport, as they had been before) seem to specialise in nonsense phrases constructed from English words - "Exemplary swishy", "Unique slippy" and "Quasi-pfaff". One of their best known tracks, "Superplus" has a number of variations: "Proplus", "Scubaplus" and "Extraplus". They also have an album called "Supo spot", and on their last EP a song called "You used my death as a pretext to go running", which features that lyric (and only that lyric throughout) sung as a perfect accompaniment to the music, as if the words had only evolved in absolute subservience to fit the already established pattern of sounds. Windsor for the Derby (actually from Texas) have a recent mini-album "Minnie Greutzfeldt" with individual titles printed in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish where one title begins and another ends (either way, the phrases still make little obvious sense - if "When I see scissors" is a genuine title, it is unclear what it means). After indulging early tendencies to synaesthesia in their name 'Seefeel' which suggests that the automatically separating sense of vision has become one with the uniting sense of touch, and onomatopoeia in their debut album "Quique" (complete with suitably blurry and amorphous blobby shape on the cover), Seefeel avoid the infecting power of words still further on the "Succour" album. The cover of this album depicts in three neat rows on an otherwise plain brown sleeve a legend which shows the first two letters of each song followed by its track number (e.g., 01) in small type, making it look like a code for a chemical element taken from the periodic table. Inside, the full titles appear in very small print (perhaps to suggest their unimportance), and they are "Meol; Extract; When face was face; Fracture; Gatha; RubyHa; Rupt; Vex; Cut; Utreat" and an untitled track at the end. Mogwai have the track "Ithica 27 Φ 9". This is all in addition to the seeming scientific phrases discussed previously, alongside the technological non-English of, especially, Fridge's titles, and also such as Labradford's "SEDR 77" and Stereolab's "OLV 26".
Occasionally the non-words are constructed as if they were places. Fuxa have “Pangaea” and “Lajolla”, Crescent “Ocaola”, and Flowchart “Tenjira”. Much of Thomas Koner's work bears titles constructed in this manner - ‘Teimo’ has the titles “Ilira; Andenes; Teimo; Nieve Penitentes [divided into three parts]; Teimo Schluss; Ruske” and Permafrost, composed to conjure up the vast wastes of the Antarctic, has six tracks: “Nival; Serac; Firn; Permafrost; Meta Incognita; ...” [full titles]. Rather similarly, Flowchart have “El glacier-o”, and Windy and Carl have recorded a whole album under the more straightforward moniker “Antarctica”. Scenic use almost exclusively the names of imaginary places, as evidenced on their “Acquatica” album, which opens with “The tones of Peloponnesus” and continues with “Ionia; Parisia; The isle of Caldra; Improvia; Angelica; Dronia; The Ionic curve; Aiga Aludoma; Sideral hands at the temple of Omphalos”.

Concerning foreign language usage, one must remember that many of the bands in this scene do not have English as a first language and thus are not just using these phrases to attempt to convey a sense of otherness, as Hesmondhalgh found his ‘Global Techno’ groups to be doing. Stereolab’s lead vocalist is French, so unsurprisingly many of her lyrics are in that language and are not intended to convey a sultry sexiness or great passion (as might fit the usual Anglocentric cliché about French singers). Mouse on Mars, To Rococo Rot and Kreidler are German, ergo their songs frequently have German titles (of course many non-English bands feel obliged to sing and/or have titles in English; that post-rockers resist this may indicate their desire to rebel against cultural imperialism, or simply that they do not think that words matter - To Rococo Rot’s track titles on their album are quite difficult to locate, implying for them the titles are not what matters). 46,000 Fibres include the tracks “Beorth” and “Behemoth” on their “Diaphanous” album, names suggestive of mythologies taken from ancient English. Amp are “Perdu” (lost). Of course, using foreign phrases to suggest something that cannot be put into words is a pop standard (The Beatles’ “Michelle” is a notable example). However, English groups using Germanic phrasing is very much rarer and implies an eagerness to be linked with Krautrock - Telstar Ponies have “Lugengeschichte” and “Innerhalb weniger minuten”.

Some groups appear to fit in with no linguistic pattern whatsoever, but on closer reflection, it is precisely the themelessness of the titles for instrumental music which is its very underlying pattern. So Bright on “The Albatross Guest House” have
a vast array of titles to represent their tracks - these are, in order, “You need some sleep; Tonal; Titan; On life after death; The glowing pickpocket; Forever more or less; Quaker; Takoma; Teo; I’ve stopped breathing; O!; Last great patron; Transmissions; Stringing up lights; Language of the house; From tree to tree; Seventy-four; Somewhere away from the city; Albatross; Attractor”. Hood on “Structured disasters”, meanwhile, have “Swan finer; Sirens; Your sixth sense; Silo crash; A dead day; I didn’t think you were going to hit me in the face; Toel bow: Choosing a grimace; My last August; Experimental filmmaking; Experiments in silence; Fears grow; Dismissed army brought us knives; One way negative friend utilisation; I said yes unwise once again; 70s manual worker; Doubts slowly fade; How bad can it be?”. Tortoise’s debut consists of the tracks “Magnet pulls through; Night air; Ry Cooder; Onions wrapped in rubber; Tin cans and twine; Spiderwebbed; His second story island; On Noble; Flyrod; Corporate brunch”. This trend by instrumental bands (though some Hood songs have lyrics) to use apparently ridiculous, non-representative language (it may mean something to the musicians themselves, but if so this is not in any way clear to the listener not in on any private jokes, or indeed private language) to label their output dates at least back to post-rock pioneers Slint, whose 1991 ‘Spiderland’ album, widely regarded as a classic, is replete with six tracks respectively titled “Breadcrumb trail; Nosferatu man; Dan, aman [sic]; Washer; For dinner...; Good morning, Captain”. Other bands have similarly arbitrary titles - Salaryman with “Inca picnic”, “I need a monkey” and “Hummous”. Here the intended effect of this combination of absurdity and capricious diversity is surely comedic. It is difficult to see any other reason for a group providing a track listing which goes “James Coburn; Virgin among cannibals; ...he lost his teeth in the mattress...; Hemispheric events command; The fourth eye; The colomer” (all full titles) as the end of Cul de Sac’s “China Gate” album does. The titles of the remixes of The Sea and Cake’s ‘Two Gentlemen’ EP are amongst the most absurd - witness “The cheech wizard meets baby ultraman in the cool blue cave (short stories about birds, trees and the sports life wherever you are)”, “rinky-dink o.s. type rip”, and “‘I took the opportunity to antique my end table’”. The most bizarre image conjured is surely “Maggots hell wigs” from Mouse on Mars (though not as unpleasant an image as Teenagers in Trouble’s “How come you don’t shit on me no more?”). This last group have also recorded a track named “X-files”; indicating a mini-trend of using popular culture references (their own “Tamegnocchi”
and "James Coburn" above, and Laika’s "Itchy and scratchy"), which exists in all pop, but especially nowadays, where the trend is dissected as being indicative of growing 'postmodernism', or eschewing meaning in favour of self-referential fun. The requirement upon journalists to make a modicum of sense in their descriptions of music in order to communicate to readers simply is not essential for the musicians themselves, who are liberated from the confines of meaning, and seem to profess a love for surrealist manifestos (which is nothing new, as psychedelic music from the late sixties shows), suggesting that an escape from meaning is precisely to get back in touch with reality (c.f. "Surrealchemist" by Stereolab and "United states of surrealism" by Turn On). In a sense, indeed, this purposive use of real words to make no sense at all is rather reminiscent of the whole project of Surrealism (the casual reader of the surrealist Andre Breton’s "A soluble fish" would probably soon appreciate the true frustration of utter senselessness), which used language in this wholly arbitrary way precisely to circumvent the restrictions of discourse altogether with the putative aim of penetrating to the 'real essence' below.

Some bands opt to omit titling altogether. So E.A.R. leave all ten of their 'pieces' untitled on "The Koner Experiment" (so named simply because musician Thomas Koner joins them for it). Tracks with titles like "Song 4" have already been mentioned; a variation on this is Asha Vida’s "Improvisations (4 & 5)", as they choose in this instance only to label fully their planned work. More commonly, individual tracks are left untitled for no obvious reason, examples of which have been discussed above.

These trends to nonsense, meaningless diversity, and use of non-words in titles extends to those other pioneers in the field of experimental instrumental music, namely those working on the outer fringes (often referred to as 'leftfield' or 'downbeat') of techno. Thus the track listing for U-Ziq’s "In Pine Effect" runs "Roy Castle; Within a sound; The wailing song; Old fun #1; Dauphine; Funky pipecleaner; Iced jem; Phiescope; Mr. Angry; Melancho; Pine effect; Problematic; Green crumble", a fine melange of references. Autechre opt for a series of non-words suggestive of a private language, implying perhaps the impossibility of communication, on tracks like "Cipater", "Rettic 9C", "Teure", "Cichlishub", and "Calbruic" - that is, if these are the actual titles, as it is again like some cases mentioned above rather difficult to discern where one word begins and another ends

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on the sleeve. It is no wonder that Autchre, along with Aphex Twin, post-rockers Techno Animal, Ice, Keiji Haino (as Nijumu), Labradford and (atypically) Disco Inferno appeared together on a compilation of ambient music entitled “Isolationism”. Aphex Twin specialises in ludicrous titles like “Donkey Rhubarb”, but disavows language altogether on ‘Selected Ambient Works Vol. 2’, where titles are replaced with sets of circles with three triangles in them. Different colours and different patterns of the triangles in each circle come to distinguish the twenty tracks.

Obviously, such methods of track designation reveal a desire to evade the convention of having to provide song titles at all, just as they demonstrate the impossibility of such an escape, at least in the medium of popular music as it presently exists. All products must be named, because otherwise they cannot be differentiated and then sold.\textsuperscript{18} It is not so much what an item is called that is important, but rather that it has a name which serves to mark its difference to other items, consonant with de Saussure’s theory that things are named for what they are not, rather than their particular sobriquet reflecting something of the essence of the item in question. This is in itself a stark reminder of how rarely music is communicated in contemporary society devoid of processes of representation.

Discourses of Movement

An important theme which again carries over from the analysis of the descriptions of the professional journalists is that of discursive references to movement, possibly the most frequent single image of all. Bowery Electric are “Coming down”, “Without stopping” but have a “Fear of flying”. On a previous album, they performed “Sounds in motion”, and went a “Long way down” “Another road”. Labradford on their debut album are “Accelerating on a smoother road” and are also “Skyward with motion”, though they may have to make a “Splash down” and “Soft return”. Fuxa are on an “Outer drive”, and record “Latitude/ longitude” so as to experience “Pleasant orbitings” and a “Dreamlanding”. For Disco Inferno, “Things move fast”. Moonshakc have “Wanderlust” and maintain a “Right to fly”. Motorik-

\textsuperscript{18} The case of Peter Gabriel is revealing in this context. He attempted to name all of his albums “Peter Gabriel”, but after succeeding in this aim for four albums, his record company finally blanched at his fifth eponymous effort, and he was forced to change the title to “So”. Potential record buyers could not differentiate between his albums apparently, despite the very different track listing on each one. Now his first four albums are known simply as 1, 2, 3 and 4.
influenced bands Union Wireless are on “Ten miles of bad road” and Appliance are “Pleasure driving”, while “Nothing lies still long” for Pell Mell on their “Interstate” album. Sabalon Glitz claim to be a “Time traveller”. Flowchart are “Soaring somewhat high like the retroman”, whilst Stereolab ride the “Motoroller Scalatron”. After “Exploring the planets”, Seely move “Past sap pass street and so on”. Olivia Tremor Control opt instead for “The language of stationary travellers”, using the “Optical atlas”, suggesting a preference for exploring the mind, and one can surmise this is not entirely unrelated to drugs. Home are on “Freedohm Rd.” (sic), Bardo Pond “On a side street”, and Kreidler are moving the “Traffic way”. Rome are “Leaving perdition”, but Ui “Drive towards the smoke”. Run On suggest we “Go there” with an “A to Z”. Flying Saucer Attack prefer “Psychic Driving”, while Transient Waves are pursuing “Slightly more than flight” on their “Ride home”. Before “Travelling” to Antarctica, Windy and Carl used to “Approach/ Descend” and engaged in “Exploration” and “Departure”.

Evocations of time and place

Many titles are evocative of a specific time and/ or place, as has already been noted in the case of the several musical tributes to Antarctica. Stars of the Lid evoke feelings associated with “Central Texas” (its vast deserted spaces) and being “Fucked up (3.57am)” (the unreality of that time of day). Pram attempt to evoke “Cape St. Vincent” and the mysteries of the “Sargasso sea”. Jessamine play in the “Polish countryside”, and extending their usual tours, Stereolab play “Ulan Bator”. Spectrum perform a “California lullaby”, and E.A.R. encounter “California nocturne”. After performing a “Mood for a summer sundown”, “As the night starts closing in” on their second album, E.A.R. find themselves “In the cold light of day” before “Dusk” on the follow-up. Flying Saucer Attack have evoked “Moonset”, “November mist”, “Light in the evening”, the “Second hour”, played “In the light of time” for “She is the daylight”, performed the “Past” and the “Present”, and before “Night falls” practised the “Whole day song” on “February 8th”. Windy and Carl have visited “Venice” as well as Antarctica, where they found a “Sunrise”. Rex are “Morning” people, whilst Flies Inside the Sun play “The afternoon blind”. Windsor for the Derby are “Moving Florida” on their ‘Metropolitan then Poland’ EP, but Furry Things are “Still California”. Roy Montgomery performs an entire album’s worth of “Scenes from the
South Island” to evoke the landscape of the part of New Zealand he originates from. After travelling around the world, he records his experiences on “Temple IV” in Guatemala, and finally returns home to play “Winter songs”. More recently, the Azusa Plane (from the USA) have recorded “Two views of the NZ landscape”, one half of which sounds remarkably like Montgomery’s style, suggesting just how rapidly an attempt to convey a link between a given musical motif and something external which that pattern of sounds is supposed to represent, hardens into a clear and cohesive form. The desert is a frequent reference point, with Crescent recording “House in the desert”, “Desert rose” and “Heat haze (modern man is growing rich in the desert)”. Movietone evoke the feeling of “3AM walking smoking talking” and “Late July”, and also such diverse places as “Mono valley”, a “Coastal lagoon” and a “Heatwave pavement”. Amp settle for “November”, but Mogwai prefer “Summer”, and seek “A place for parks”, as Ui play the “August song”. Lull face a “Cold summer”.

References to Drugs

Several references to drugs were found when examining the reviews of the journalists, but these seem less frequent, or at least more opaque, in the titles of the songs themselves. However, as there exists already a vast way of suggesting narcotic aspects without doing so explicitly (travelling ‘out there’, going into ‘space’ etc.) which it may seem cooler (more subtle) to use, this is not surprising. As one cannot really attempt to second guess motives in using precise phrases as to whether a drug connotation was intended or not (though indications of how this might be done have been given previously), it is necessary to restrict these comments to explicit references. Bardo Pond are most brazen here, as they call their first album proper “Bufo Alvarius”, which is the name of a toad which gives off secretions with hallucinatory properties, and formed a one-off collaboration named “Hash Jar Tempo” with Roy Montgomery. Stars of the Lid have “Sun drugs”. Earth take “Quaaludes”. Ice are actually named after a particularly unpleasant and potent drug from Japan, apparently originally taken by kamikaze pilots.

Filmic Imagery

Another popular image used by journalists to describe some of the music was that it was ‘filmic’. More recently, this has spread to the bands themselves, as
Quickspace call a track off their last EP "Ennio’s blues" and Pram’s last EP bore the title "Music for your movies". A particularly popular reference point in visual culture for some of the bands (especially Labradford and Stars of the Lid) has been the accompanying music to Twin Peaks. Thus, in an interesting reversal of the usual process whereby journalists often describe the music in terms borrowed from the various titles of particular tracks, Stars of the Lid employ a favourite journalistic point of comparison for music on their first album as track titles on their second full-length English release with "Music for Twin Peaks Episode 30 Part I" and "Part II" (there were only 29 episodes made).

Theme of the ‘New’ and of Fashionability

The theme of newness emerges at times, as bands perhaps emphasise the originality of their work, but within the constraints of normal language. Thus Labradford hope for "New listening", and Disco Inferno are wearing "New clothes for the new world", and looking forward to "Next year", when they will have "A whole wide world ahead". "Joe heard a new world", according to Electroscope.

Sometimes groups use references to the process of rapid changes in fashionable taste in music, as either (originally) an antidote to their obscurity or later to the sudden leap in critical interest in their endeavours. So Jessamine predict from the margins "Soon the world of fashion will take an interest in these proceedings", and they are eventually proved correct. Meanwhile Spiny Anteaters are "Scening", which could be seen as an acknowledgement of (and humorous reflection on) the journalistic need to classify. There are a few general references to leisure and entertainment, as if bands are commenting on their position in the music industry (either enjoying being entertainers or despising the shallowness and wanting to be taken as artists), though this is something with a history going back through most of rock and pop culture, and is far from unique to post-rock.

19 Overall, examining the covers of the releases of post-rock bands as well as their song titles provides convincing evidence of the existence of a definite ‘scene’, even if those involved continue to deny it. Apart from the many shared gigs, the bands share labels (e.g. Wurlitzer Jukebox, Enraptured and Earworm, Kranky, Too Pure, Duophonic, Thrill Jockey / City Slang - all these labels are predominantly post-rock), and collaborate on records together. The Bristol contingent of Flying Saucer Attack, Amp, Crescent, Movietone and Third Eye Foundation have shared personnel, and Roy Montgomery in particular has been remarkably active in his joint efforts, being part of Dissolve and Dadamah in his native New Zealand (and other non-post-rock groups pre-1990s) as well as recording solo, and on his world travels collaborating with Flying Saucer Attack and Bardo Pond, the latter from the USA.
Language of Politics

Occasionally the language of politics is utilized. Stereolab have a number of fiercely political lyrics, deriding youthful apathy in particular. Their titles reflect an interest in the language of resistance, as they are part of the “Nihilist assault group” and the “Metronomic underground”. “The stars our destination” was even the slogan of a revolutionary movement. The language of resistance, of providing something alternative to the mainstream, the classic indie ethic, reappears in the title of Electroscope’s album “Homemade”.

The Exceptions

It is important to consider those groups conventionally labelled ‘post-rock’ whose use of language as evinced in their titles, does not seem to fit in with the patterns of discourse identified above. These groups consist of two separate sub-types, in my opinion. The first is that of groups who seem to identify with other pre-existing genre formations, the clearest examples of which are Godflesh and Scorn. Godflesh, Scorn and the whole Techno Animal/ Ice / God/ The Sidewinder pack all have their origins in the frenzied metal of Napalm Death (Nick Bullen, Justin Broadrick and M.J. Harris were all previously members of that band in the 1980s). The violent, corporeal imagery used by the latter pack is something earlier discussed in ways that have related it to other trends in post-rock discourse, but it also clearly bears much in common with the language of metal. Broadrick’s Godflesh use typically metal titles almost to the point of cliché on their “Songs of love and hate” album, which comes complete with a recommended sticker from Metal Hammer magazine, and the cover showing Christ on a cross in front of graveyard with a factory burning in the background is typically metal-derived. Titles of songs are “Wake; Sterile prophet; Circle of shit; Hunter; Gift from heaven; Amoral; Angel domain; Kingdom come; Time, death and wastefulness; Frail; Almost heaven”, the classic imagery of religion, death, failure and weakness, and general depravity is pure metal. Indeed, the music has a metallic edge, though with an additional willingness to experiment with dub and digital technology that marks it out from more straightforward expositions of that genre. It is post-rock in so far as post-rock means an experimental extension of rock, as opposed to a given genre formation with a particular sound of its own. Scorn’s debut similarly features a crucifixion on its inner sleeve and titles like “Heavy blood”,

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"Lick forever dog", "Scum after death", "Fleshpile" and "Orgy of holiness". Of course, it has been seen before how groups have adopted the imagery of Krautrock, of psychedelia, and even of modern experimental 'art' music, but somehow metal's catchphrases do not sit so easily with the other discourses surrounding post-rock.

The second major category of post-rock bands who do not use post-rock titles, at least as these have been identified above, are those who came into existence before any linguistic pattern had formed (indeed before the term 'post-rock' existed) - groups such as Bark Psychosis, Insides, The Dead C, Ramleh, Skullflower, and Hair and Skin Trading Co. (on their first two albums, before the one which tried to avoid linguistic sense altogether, discussed above). There are a few exceptions to this among the later bands, such as Long Fin Killie and also the groups (notably Rex and Smog) allied with the genre of 'new country' music, who choose their titles more on the grounds of their lyrical content - that they are, in this instance, the exception to the rule illustrates the extent of the difference in rationale for titling between post-rock groups and their counterparts in the rest of rock and pop culture. Of course, some of the pioneer bands fit the profile very well, on the other hand, and Stereolab and the Rugby pack of Spacemen 3, Spiritualized and Spectrum would seem to have actively gone on to influence the choice of imagery used by later post-rockers. This is suggestive of a lack of coherence at the beginning, of a lack of a scene which has subsequently come into being. To show what is meant by the claim that these bands do not have post-rock titles, when the apparently catch-all syndrome of absolute diversity in titles has previously been included as exemplary of post-rock titling, the case of Bark Psychosis will briefly be discussed. The titles of their songs are as follows: "I know; Nothing feels; All different things; By blow; Manman; Blood rush; Tooled up; Scum; The loom; A street scene; Absent friend; Big shot; Fingerspit; Eyes and smiles; Pendulum man; Reverse shot gunman". The point is that the majority of these titles seem to mean something, to be about something, as opposed to the seemingly random choices of titles of the likes of Bright, Hood, Tortoise and U-Ziq. That is to say, one gets the impression that the relationship between signifier and signified has not been severed in the case of Bark Psychosis, the titles are not chosen entirely out of capriciousness, nor simply because the group believe they suit the music (the argument is not that this latter quality is inherently central to post-rock, simply that it is itself a particular discourse which exists around the genre in addition to, but separate from [otherwise
the titles would not be random], those others such as the scientific and space imagery and musical references that have been identified). Bark Psychosis (1989-94) and Insides (1993/4) still derive the majority of their titles from their lyrics - lyrics which are not simply responses to the feelings evoked in the music - as the convention to do otherwise has not yet arisen.

Concluding Comments

It is the use of non-language and random titling, and its relationship to the formation of generic discourses, that will now be returned to before concluding this chapter. Clearly such titling is in part an attempt to keep it spontaneous, to evade the restrictiveness of being easily located within a coherent scheme, a given genre, a specific language game, though even in the attempt to elude meaning, as previously seen, it can be interpreted as simply forming into a new discourse (the discourse of the 'indescribable', that putatively beyond language). Yet such a desire to escape cliché is very different from the use of language by groups who embrace the discourse of the 'insubstantial', who are deliberately using a particular formation of words with which to pin down their work, even if that is by describing it as, say, gaseous, and these two discourses should not be confused.

The point can perhaps best be illuminated with reference to the ideas of Jim O'Rourke, an individual with over a hundred releases to his name (though he is only 28) including work with post-rock groups like Gastr del Sol, Brise Glace and Smog, and remixes of Tortoise and The Sea and Cake. It is worth quoting at length from the first three paragraphs of the article written about him after an interview by Christoph Cox (another musician-theorist with influence over the Mille Plateaux label, so named after a work by Gilles Deleuze) in The Wire, as this will also serve to illustrate how music can be very differently discussed in certain publications outside the New Musical Express and Melody Maker.

"Truths", Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "are illusions about which we have forgotten that this is what they are, metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power, coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins". According to omni-musician Jim O'Rourke, the same idea can be applied to music...
As an example, O’Rourke cites film music. “It is sort of common denominator music, heavily lifted from Stravinsky and Shostakovich”, he says. “Now they establish certain gestures to mean, you know: there’s-a-guy-coming-with-a-knife. That gets soaked into generations of film writers and, at each successive step, they’re continuing to saturate these ideas while losing touch with where they’re coming from, so that by the time of something like Nine Inch Nails, when a guy makes a ‘spooky’ sound, not only is the public thinking they’re hearing something indigenously spooky, but so does [Nine Inch Nails frontman] Trent Reznor. It’s a form of dumbing people down”.

Jim O’Rourke is a sonic semiotician, a musical materialist, a digital deconstructionist. He describes his work as a series of ‘research reports’ that investigate the socially fixed, yet ultimately arbitrary, nature of musical meaning, interrogating established relationships between sounds and their social value in order to produce new relationships and allow these sounds to be heard differently... (The Wire, Nov. 97, p.37).

O’Rourke’s agenda, to loosen the relationship between musical sounds and musical meanings (he also asserts the difference between the genre of improvised music and genuine improvisation), is obviously highly relevant to the question of the conjunction between musical sounds and discursive descriptions of sounds as applied to post-rock. One could argue that those using the discourse of insubstantiality were hardening the relationship, solidifying it even as they were using the language of liquids and gases. Those trying to suggest the indescribability of their work might be thought to be excused from this allegation, but even there a pattern, a discourse is clearly being formed.20

20 Yet this process seems inevitable, and it is not hard to find other examples. One such example comes from an overheard conversation when going to see the Industrial pioneers Einsturzende Neubauten in concert last year. The audience for this band is divided into those who wear exclusively black clothes, often tight-fitting leather, have a lot of body-piercing and punkish hairstyles, and those in very ordinary clothes who tend to be rather intellectual in what they discuss. One of the latter group turned to his friend in the queue in front of me, and discussing the hordes in black, said “Don’t you think they’re missing the point?”, meaning haven’t they fetishized a particular form of rebellion in such a way that it has itself become a straitjacket. His friend thought for a moment and replied, “Well, I don’t know, maybe it’s us who’ve missed the point”. Postscript: Neubauten have a song whose only lyric runs “Disobey - it’s the law”, which seems to perfectly sum up this quandary, as well as rather mocking much of their own fanbase. The irony increases in the light of behaviour at the Disobey Club, a small series of concerts of experimental (on occasion post-rock) music, where people were fetishizing disobedience to the extent of pilfering the drinks mats which bore the Disobey logo. The most notorious
In summary, in this section the patterns in language usage of post-rock groups in the descriptions of their own music have been revealed, as evidenced in their choice of song and album titles. The manner in which these trends became more concrete over time has been discussed, as earlier groups tended to conform less to these discourses, and in addition links, where present, in discourse use to disparate musical genres, both past and contemporary, have been indicated. Finally, the similarities and differences in language use between the professional journalists and the groups themselves have been explored. It has been ascertained that the discourses of insubstantiality, of the natural and the mythical, of the technological and scientific (though this is not used in exactly the same way by all the musicians, as some do not deliberately eschew rationality or view science simply as a means to attain infinity, as in pantheistic thought), of movement, and of outer space are equally prominent in track titles and the writings of the journalists, whilst the discourse of indescribability utilised by the journalists is matched by many of the musicians attempting to avoid description (which the use of the non-committal discourse of explicitly musical references can to some extent be viewed as a subset of). There are less unabashed drugs references in the song titles, which may suggest the drugs angle is one particularly beloved by journalists, and fewer categorical suggestions of mental and physical effects (but this is not unexpected, as titles are generally intended to describe the thing itself as opposed to the effect of that thing, though it may also relate to the music writers greater interest in the sphere of consumption rather than creation, and perhaps because such a concern coincides with the ideology of vulgar Romanticism - and of jouissance - favoured by many of their number). Whilst there is little reference to ‘art’ or ‘fun’ as such in the titles of the songs, the use of humour in many of them, as against the marked seriousness (the use of mock-classical and almost academic terminology) of others, indicates the continued relevance of this discourse in addition. In general, there would appear to be more agreement than disagreement between the journalists and the music-makers on how to represent the music, a consensus which becomes increasingly stabilised the more one progresses through the period. This example of this process is surely the story of punk. The Festival Hall has recently been hosting an exhibition of punk record sleeves as if they constituted part of an artistic movement, and the irony of this situation was emphasised in both a BBC news item (6/2/98) and a Guardian preview (31/1/98) which rather succinctly put it, that “what began as a statement became a style”, or, in the words of Melly, ‘Revolt into Style’.
trend towards a linguistic consensus is a topic which I shall return to discuss in greater depth in the final analytic chapter, reflecting on the meta-discourses of post-rock.
ANALYSIS OF WRITING IN FANZINES ABOUT 'POST-ROCK'

Introduction

This chapter will provide an analysis of the role of fanzines in the construction of post-rock. The tone and nature of this particular chapter will be noticeably different to the two previous analytic chapters, which attempted to demonstrate at length the discourses utilised to describe and indeed to create the phenomenon of post-rock music. A similar strategy has not been adopted here, because to do so would be to cover fundamentally the same ground once again. As this suggests, the fanzines have more which unites them with the mainstream press in the way they write about this music than that which differentiates them, and they employ fundamentally the same discourses. To illustrate this process more palpably, and to provide an effective summary of the substantive content of the discourses, the example of the many reviews of Labradford's first and second albums across a whole host of publications will be discussed in detail later in this section, Labradford being a particularly significant and influential group.

Rather, what has been found to be particularly interesting about the fanzines in considering the relationship between music and language as it relates to post-rock, are the attempts to develop alternative styles of writing, and in particular a considerably greater emphasis on the personal and the subjective aspects of responses to the music, in an effort to communicate the supposed essence of the sounds beyond the more straightforward prose of the professional publications. For if the titles selected to represent the music by its creators are potentially unlimited in how they relate to the sounds on offer, and the descriptions of the journalists of Melody Maker and New Musical Express necessarily more constrained to make conventional sense by the demands of editors and a mass audience, the descriptions of the non-professional fanzine writers may be seen as a significant point in between. The zine writer still wishes to communicate effectively, but can do so in a more personal manner, free of commercial constraints, allowing a potentially more idiosyncratic style and perspective. For the purposes of this research, this is not simply an interesting addendum to the core material, but of central significance. Musical pleasures have
often been held to be essentially private, and the nature of instrumental sounds at least to be fundamentally abstract and non-denotative, as was discussed previously. Hence to consider how those individuals who are essentially writing both for themselves, in the sense of being primarily motivated by the desire to have their voices heard, and to communicate to others for the sake of communicating, rather than just to further a journalistic career, try to describe this most abstract and 'insubstantial' of genres, is of fundamental importance.

Fanzine Culture

Before commencing a fuller analysis, it is important to initially discuss in brief the fanzine culture itself, to consider what exactly fanzines are and why they are significant in this context. Fanzines, or 'zines', are generally considered to provide an independent voice, distinct from the major publications on so-called 'alternative' popular and contemporary music such as Melody Maker and New Musical Express, which have been previously analysed. As they are often written either by fans or sometimes by the musicians themselves, they provide an excellent insight into how the music is written about, how it is constructed discursively, by leading players in the scene who are not professional journalists.

The diversity in design and subject-matter of zines is such it is difficult to make effective generalisations about the character of what Duncombe (an Assistant Professor of American Studies in New York, and a co-editor and publisher of a fanzine of his own) calls these "scruffy, homemade little pamphlets. Little publications filled with rantings of high weirdness and exploding with chaotic design" (1997, p.1). Indeed, after sixteen pages of attempting to describe and define them, he almost admits defeat, declaring "In dealing with such an idiosyncratic subject matter as zines, there exists a distinct temptation just to hand over a stack of them and let readers decide for themselves what they are" (ibid., p.16). However, a certain number of core features of zines can be identified which are particularly significant for this research. Duncombe suggests, "Against the studied hipness of music and style magazines, the pabulum of mass newsweeklies, and the posturing of academic journals, here [is] something completely different", and that "these little smudged pamphlets carr[y] within them... honesty, kindness, anger, [a] beautiful inarticulate articulateness" (ibid., p.1). Excusing Duncombe's overly romantic prose and his
tendency to generalise (some zines are so glossy in design they shame the style magazines, let alone Melody Maker and New Musical Express, the print of which used to blacken the fingertips of the reader until very recently), his description of zines’ hostility to “studied hipness” and their “inarticulate articulateness” highlights the necessity of their inclusion here, where the problematic nature of attempting to articulate what has been hypothesised as inarticulable is precisely the focus of interest.

Duncombe provides a fuller definition of zines as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish and distribute by themselves” (ibid., p.6). He describes the typical format of a zine to be “between a personal letter and a magazine” (ibid., p.10). The combination of economic independence and the norms of the fanzine culture which allow for the revelation of the intensely personal provide for reading matter decidedly contrary to that of the mainstream publications, even when the subject matter is ostensibly the same. As Duncombe suggests, “zine writers insert the personal into almost any topic” (ibid., p.26), and he contends that “viewing a topic through a highly subjective lens, then sharing those personal insights, experiences and feelings with others, making it clear that the teller is as important as what is being told” constitutes a “convention of zine writing” (ibid., p.27, my italics). With material as idiosyncratic as the zine, where any norm exists only insofar as a zine’s writer believes in it him/herself, to speak of a “convention” seems a trifle premature (many zine writers would be horrified to feel their words were regarded solely as the highly subjective product of the teller, when they might believe themselves to be the only ones relating the truths the wider society could not handle), but Duncombe is correct to observe that the continual return to personal references is a feature of fanzines that extends beyond the so-called ‘perzines’ (or personal zines - personal diaries open to the public, which honour the everyday thoughts and experiences of the writer).

Nevertheless, the emphasis placed on personal authenticity should not be interpreted as zine writers, or ‘zinesters’, “trying to resurrect some sort of pristine identity that only exists outside the web of social construction” (ibid., p.36), a prehistoric and pre-social self. Rather, when zinesters are demanding to be able to express what they really feel and who they really are, they are “engaged in the opposite - manufacturing themselves” (ibid.). Thus, authenticity is less a matter of being oneself, and more a case of having the opportunity to define oneself. Zinesters
frequently characterise themselves as "self-conscious losers": people who not only have been viewed as failures, as social misfits, by the wider society, but who are proud to proclaim themselves as "freaks, geeks, nerds, and losers" (ibid., p.17-21). They have little incentive to maintain the identity they were born into or the one which the rest of society has ascribed to them. So "through his zine a suburban middle-class kid becomes a gritty punk rocker, while a librarian recreates herself as a starship captain", a process which can be extended still further on the bulletin board systems of the internet, where one can change age, ethnicity and gender at will. Therefore, "zine writers use their zines as a means to assemble the different bits and pieces of their lives and interests into a formula that they believe represents who they really are" (ibid., p.37, author's italics). According to Duncombe,

For zine writers, the authentic self is not some primal, fixed identity that precedes them; it is something flexible and mutable that they fashion existentially: out of their experiences, out of subcultural values that they take as their own... What makes their identity authentic is that they are the ones defining it (ibid., p.39).

Such a stress on the personal, and on creating a cultural artefact oneself, rather than passively consuming the products of mainstream society, can be seen as an assertion of difference which is certainly a more fruitful place to locate dissent than in the alternative ‘readings’ of cultural texts provided by watchers of daytime television programmes and fans of Madonna. In the case of music zines, now the largest genre of zines,

the people who put out music zines are taking a product that is bought and sold as a commodity in the marketplace and forcing it into an intimate relationship. Instead of relying upon sanctioned authorities like Rolling Stone or Spin, they assert their own right to speak authoritatively about the music they love - making the culture theirs (ibid., p.108).

As Duncombe quotes the editor of Tales of the Sinister Harvey, “Why Publish? To cut through TV horseshit reality to something better - something more personal”, but
another quotation from the editor of Inside Joke, who states solipsistically that “in the end, the only Reality in which any of us can believe involves our own personal experiences” (ibid., p.32) demonstrates that this search for personal authenticity can close out the possibility of an interest in the outside world entirely. If one mistrusts the possibility of a world beyond one’s senses (religion), the possibility of accurate classification of the physical world by experts (science), and the possibility of organising society to improve people’s lives (politics), then indeed all that seems to remain is one’s own thoughts, emotions and sensations.

Yet this is to paint too solitary a picture, for a key element in fanzine culture is the network of zines, emphasised at the end of almost every zine by the numerous reviews of other zines, the promotion of fanzine festivals, the frequent ‘do-it-yourself’ articles urging readers to start their own zines, and the fact that the common currency in zine culture is the zine itself, as one zine writer exchanges her or his zine with that of another (or else postage stamps to enable further distribution). A clear ideal of community exists, and a respect for others engaged in the same process of creating and publishing. The distrust is of mainstream culture, as opposed to humanity in general, and there is a concomitant desire to spread the word about that culture which remains underrepresented, such as post-rock, and to provide an individual perspective even on that which is better reported.

However, the suspicion of mainstream culture is more accurately portrayed as a hostility to order and structure than a movement with a more avowedly political purpose. The commitment to self-expression is absolute, for “saying whatever’s on your mind, unbehelden to corporate sponsors, puritan censors, or professional standards of argument and design, being yourself and expressing your real thoughts and real feelings - these are what zinesters consider authentic” (ibid., p.33). This privileging of self-expression above all else can result in zines which are not only bizarrely packaged, unconstrained from traditional publishing practices, but indecipherable to the point of being literally unreadable. Thus “what matters is

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21 The editor of Frederick’s Lament sent Duncombe a NASA photo of Saturn, an official memo form filled out with a nonsensical rant, and a card explaining the germination process of lawn grass as separate components of his zine (Duncombe, p.33). Music zines tend to be more focused in both packaging and content, so I have not received anything this strange in my zine collection, but some of the zines I have encountered have contained entirely unrelated passages and nonsensical images, often of mass culture ephemera, superimposed on interviews, commentaries or reviews without any apparent rationale.
unfettered, authentic expression, not necessarily making sense” (ibid.). Such a preference for meaninglessness has obvious links with many of the song titles chosen by many post-rockers, who either try to avoid language altogether, or opt for surrealism or pure nonsense. Duncombe draws parallels with both the Dadaist and anarchist traditions (referenced in some of the song titles), and contends that the nonsense created in many zines is the conclusion to the ideal of pure expression. He opines that

By eschewing standards of language and logic the zine creator refuses to bend individual expression to any socially sanctified order. That this nonsense communicates nothing (except its own expressiveness) to the reader of the zine matters little, for the fact that no one except the creator can understand it means that something absolutely authentic has been created (ibid., p.34).

The rejection of conventional standards of language, the refusal to bend individual expression to socially sanctified order, even when the consequence is meaninglessness, provides a clear connection to the concept of jouissance. Duncombe describes the ‘rant’ editorial of the typical zine as a “spontaneous disgorge of whatever the editor has on his or her mind”, and states that “zines are bursts of raw emotion” (ibid., p.32). In a short section on the issue of pleasure in zine culture, Duncombe notes correctly that zines, in their attempt to carve an identity against a mainstream culture which privileges passive consumer pleasures, can have something of a puritanical streak. However, he also observes that the zinesters derive great pleasure from criticizing consumer culture and from producing their own, and in being, in the words of Manumission’s Dan Werle, “the entertainer of myself” (ibid., p.129-30). Duncombe’s basic argument can be extended using the concept of jouissance, for as has been clearly demonstrated zine opposition to mainstream culture does not generally present itself in the form of rationally constructed argument rooted in a clear understanding of social structures, or even in a stable sense of identity or a definite set of values held by the zine writer (the sense of self is rather manufactured by the zinester). Instead, mainstream culture is irrupted (erupted/ interrupted) by “bursts of raw emotion” and “by eschewing standards of language and logic” - undeniably this is the pleasure of jouissance, not plaisir.
In considering the relationship between music and language, the special relevance of an examination of zines should be very apparent by now. The emphasis on the personal and the subjective as an integral feature of zine culture is potentially highly significant, considering the representation of music as a particularly private art and experience. On the other hand, the importance of community in the zine network adds another dimension. Most importantly, the eschewing of standards of language in zines, their "inarticulate articulateness", is central to a better understanding of how a music which has been constructed as 'indefinable' can be represented by those who are not restricted by editorial constraints or the demands of a mass audience.

Post-rock zines

There is a vast variety of fanzines which, whilst having an eclectic musical coverage, feature post-rock strongly, and from the end of 1996 onwards in particular, as post-rock and space rock get their own sections in independent music stores, a number of publications which concentrate on post-rock solely. The diversity of post-rock is revealed in the number of fanzines which have a particular musical focus, but still feature post-rock acts as if they were part of their own scenes. Thus the industrial and experimental music magazines Music from the Empty Quarter and Electric Shock Treatment cover much of the ground of early post-rock (1992-6) in their writing, as the psychedelia zines Wig Out! and Ptolemaic Terrascope continue to do (the Terrascope has been particularly influential in the development of the scene, releasing a compilation album and organising two three day festivals of its favourite music in America to support itself), as in places does the 'progressive' music magazine from the USA, I/E. The more professional looking and intellectual zines tend to focus on the experimental branches of electronica as much as post-rock (Immerse, Sound Projector, Obsessive Eye, Space Age Bachelor, Lizard), following the influential The Wire. The classic image of the fanzine, hand written or photocopied, a cut and paste black and white format - that which is closest to the original zine ethic born of punk and the desire of such as Mark Perry’s Sniffin’ Glue to provide a written equivalent to the sound of people just doing their own thing without regard for sales success or musical technique - is represented strongly too, with zines such as Kill Everyone Now, Drunk on the Pope’s Blood, Hedonist, Velvet Sheep and Manana Baby taking a strong interest in post-rock as well as the more usual alternative indie/ punk/ 'lo-fi'
(meaning not having a high fidelity sound, being rawly produced) guitar bands who tend to be particularly overrepresented in zine culture generally, as Duncombe also found (see especially p.118-9, which emphasises the shared "ideal that anybody can do it" in punk and in zines). The lasting influence of Riot Grrrl (which Duncombe acknowledges the particular importance of in the development of more recent zine culture in a section entitled "Revolution Grrrl Style Now!", p.65-70) permeates many zines too, from Ablaze! (Karren Ablaze’s early 90s publication which ranges from extensive and then unfashionable coverage of proto-post rockers like Moonshake, Bark Psychosis and Hood to Girl Power manifestos [several years before the Spice Girls]) and Girlfrenzy (a more general feminist zine which had one issue devoted to music that had an impressive post-rock pedigree with a Stereolab interview and reviews of Smog and Pram in amongst the more typical profiling of female punk bands) to the more recent Fast Connection, the latter a classic do-it-yourself publication full of hints and urges to form one’s own label, release cheaply on cassette, and write one’s own zine. Latterly, there have been zines devoted solely to post-rock, such as Monitor, Comes with a smile and Easy Pieces.

The variety of musical styles associated with fanzines that have a strong interest in at least some aspects of post-rock is matched by the variety of places of origin of the zines. The USA and UK are well represented, but so is Canada (Space Age Bachelor and Frequency), and France and Japan, which both have thriving post-rock scenes of their own. Opprobriu from New Zealand concentrates primarily on the free noise scene of that country, providing an excellent insight into the local colour of a part of post-rock on the other side of the world that would otherwise have remained inaccessible for research purposes.

It is important to note who are the fanzine writers. Some are the work of ordinary fans, teenagers and students sufficiently enthused by what they have heard to feel they want to say something to the world at large about it. Others are by professional journalists (The Lizard, in particular, often gave the impression of being the medium by which many Melody Maker writers could write at length about the more obscure acts they really wanted to endorse, as many of the Lizard’s writers also worked for the weekly paper and were notably more enthusiastic about the acts they were discussing in the occasional zine). Some are written by people who later go on to become professional music journalists, supposedly a fairly common route into the
profession. Thus Brian Duguid of Electric Shock Treatment now regularly writes for The Wire. The authors of Sound Projector are cartoonists, and those of Immerse similarly in the art and design business, and indeed these zines have an ultra-professional layout and are so glossily presented, they shame many style magazines available on the High Street. A number of the writers are, or become, very active players in the scene more generally, as was noted with regard to Ptolemaic Terrascope’s Phil McMullen beforehand. Dave Howells, of Obsessive Eye, has DJed at a number of post-rock gigs. Many fanzine writers are in bands themselves, mostly total unknowns, as in the case of the Cool your boots! writer, Donald Anderson of Space Age Bachelor, and Tom and Gareth from Damn you!, with others slightly better known, as the Fast Connection writers have their own band and own label (Slampt!), Rafeeq Hasan, author of Popism! from the USA is in Kleenex Girl Wonder, and Karren Ablaze of Ablaze! and subsequently The Lizard, is in Coping Saw. There are label-fanzine links, between Wig Out! and the Ochre label (an increasingly important one on the contemporary post-rock scene), and between Speeder and their Kylie label. Some fanzines have their own labels (or perhaps the labels have their own fanzines, but the zines cover far more than simply promoting their own material), such as Boa (run by Gayle Harrison, half of Electroscope, a well respected post-rock act) and Hedonist. The best known post-rocker to be running a fanzine is perhaps Ryan Anderson, of Fuxa, who edits Mass Transfer, as well as contributing to Monitor. A number of other musicians write in the professional magazines - David Keenan of Telstar Ponies for The Wire and Melody Maker, and Sasha Frere-Jones of Ui and Paul Schutze for The Wire.

Apart from the zines discussed so far, the following publications were also considered: ESP, Dig, Progression, the freebie Organ, Quality Time (Leicester-based), and from the USA, Grand Royal, Tuba Frenzy, Your Flesh, Chunklet, BaDaBoom, Bunnyhop, Speed Kills!, Yakuza, and Popwatch, and additionally Resonance, the house magazine of the London Musicians Collective, and the counter-culture publications Noisegate and Autotoxicity. In total, this amounts to nearly fifty different publications (with in some cases as many as five issues of each being considered, though some have remained one-offs) which were collected, and prepared for analysis. The length of the publications varies from two or three sheets to over a hundred pages, but an average length would be approximately thirty pages.
Reviews are generally more favourably inclined to post-rock than in the music press. Zine writers are not compelled to cover anything which they do not like in the first place, after all. As Duncombe argues, “while other media are produced for money or prestige or public approval, zines are done... for love: love of expression, love of sharing, love of communication” (op. cit., p.14-5, author’s italics), and one might add, in the main, love of what is being written about. The editors of *Hedonist* suggest to the fundamental question “Why do you start writing a fanzine?” that it is basically that “the industry and mainstream press don’t feature the bands I love and when they do it’s usually disappointing coverage fuelled by their apparent hatred of anything good” (Issue 14, p.3). They then go on to advise other potential fanzine writers “If you do plan to criticise try to do it in a positive way” (ibid.), finally ending their comments,

Fundamentally the name says it all... Fanzine (fan being the operative word), surely you should be writing about the things you like? What’s the point in wasting time dissing things - by all means a bit of harsh criticism can be useful and truthful, but crass attacks on bands you don’t like for whatever reason seems to suggest you’d be better off with [the] bitter and twisted likes of the MM/ NME [Melody Maker/ New Musical Express] instead, at least you’d have an excuse to be a wanker.

We at the *Hedonist* write about the music that we like. The tunes and the artists that matter to us, the ones we are obsessed by and in some way make our busy lives a little more bearable for both of us. (op. cit., p.4).

An important area to consider is how united fanzine culture is - to what extent can there be said to be a community of like minds, a network supporting a clearly existing music scene? Though fanzines are ostensibly the work of separated individuals doggedly pursuing their own unique visions, a number of fanzines - especially those which still hold to the old punk values and/or ‘lo-fi’ culture (in other words, the significance of ‘doing your own thing’ with limited resources) - stress the existence of fanzine culture, and feature advice on how to start one’s own fanzine, and comment on what they consider ‘good’ reasons for doing a zine as opposed to ‘bad’ ones (to look cool, to get free records). More specifically to this musical area, some zine editors have collaborated in interviewing certain artists (*Kill Everyone Now*,...
Drunk on the Pope’s Blood and Oscar smokes the leftovers have shared an interview in this manner. Generally there exists a mutual respect for fellow zine writers, and obviously this is particularly so where other zines reflect a particular editor’s own preferences. However, the very diversity of post-rock means a fair amount of criticism and ridicule of other’s efforts also exists: those who preach ‘free noise’, musicians and writers alike, have contempt for what they perceive as the loungecore or ambient techno tendencies of others who might have been linked under the heading ‘post-rock’, a telling reminder of how contested this term remains. Indeed, whilst that particular designation is used rather more in zines than in the music press, and some zines even go so far as to specifically identify themselves with it - Easy Pieces carries the banner “The nuts ‘n’ bolts of post rock ‘n’ roll” on one issue - it can be argued, even as the scene expands as measured by number of bands and releases (possibly separating out into its constituent parts), the term is more often rejected than approved and may be falling into disrepute (The Wire now prefers the older term “avant-rock”).

Another significant division is that between those which favour lo-fi acts generally against those with a more experimental, even anti-pop slant, the cut and paste zines against the artistically designed, the overly personal ramblings approach against the intellectual, perhaps pretentious, comments of others. Resonance, Electric Shock Treatment and Sound Projector thus rail against much post-rock for being too cliched and not experimental enough, whilst other zines complain in some instances of the lack of melodic qualities which allow easy access into the music. Certain fanzines are clearly influenced by post-structuralist thought (Space Age Bachelor, Lizard, Obsessive Eye - the last of which was described in another zine, though in a positive review, as possibly a dissertation), citing authors such as Barthes and using terms such as ‘jouissance’; to some extent this is true of certain writers for the music press, notably the highly influential Simon Reynolds, who has contributed to all three of the previously named zines. Some fanzines include a reading list at their end, including Drunk on the Pope’s Blood, which borrows freely from Breton’s Manifestoes of Surrealism. Others, such as Easy Pieces and Tuba Frenzy, contain quotations from philosophical or aesthetic texts (and even sociological ones). Post-rock fanzines generally have followed a trend of being much more intellectually oriented than most fanzines (or the music press) in the beginning, perhaps fitting the status of the music as being perceived as ‘difficult’ or ‘weird’, but becoming much
less so as time has progressed, as the music and its antecedents (especially Krautrock) become better known to a younger audience.

It is fair to say overall that despite all the differences between the fanzines, they are generally outweighed by the similarities. The zines mutually influence each other, and indeed the relationship between mainstream music press and zines is also fundamentally symbiotic. They refer to one another in their comments, and clearly one of the main markets for zines is other zine writers. The importance of emotionality, which has been previously noted with regard to the New Musical Express and Melody Maker, remains paramount for most of the zine writers - how the music affects the listener, its emotional and physical impact. This is just as true for the more intellectually oriented publications, who are simply more liable to cloak their concerns behind classic post-structuralist terminology such as 'jouissance'.

Two significant reasons for the importance of considering fanzines have now been discussed: the diversity of voices (and there remains a distinctive idiosyncrasy in the approach of the zinesters in comparison to the mainstream press, even if it is reasonable to accept that the sheer level of difference - notably in content - is not as much as I had anticipated before commencing the research) and the fact they are often written by important figures in the scene. Another aspect of their importance is that they are supposedly 'closer to the ground'. This applies not only in the sense of the presence of a few key figures writing in them, but in that they cover artists who are much less well-known, being freer from commercial considerations than the professional magazines, clearly an important issue for the relatively obscure, if nonetheless fashionable in London, genre of post-rock. Many bands are covered in fanzines before being featured in the mainstream press, whilst others only agree to be interviewed by fanzines, something which the professionals are only too aware of, as they frequently satirise fanzine culture as the preserve of 'geeks' and obsessives (something the zinesters do to themselves, anyway, as previously noted), even as they plunder (fairly) shamelessly from it, and even feature in their humour section fictional characters such as "Brian Hurst - he saw them first", a man who claims to only like bands who he saw practising in their Dad’s garage and who claims all bands who sell more than 50 copies of a release to have sold out. For their part, many fanzines express disillusion with the mainstream music press, whilst others speak of their
‘beloved’ Melody Maker and New Musical Express. A particularly high proportion of post-rock zines owe more to The Wire than those music weeklies, however.

The Construction of Authenticity

This coverage of more obscure bands, of being more directly involved in the scene itself, can be seen as part of a construction of authenticity, claiming to ‘present things as they really are’. Similarly, interviews with band members are frequently printed in a question and answer format, with all the words spoken included in the text. This is in stark contrast to the way interviews are presented in the mainstream magazines, where only isolated remarks made by group members - the equivalent of ‘juicy quotes’ in social research - get as far as the printed page, something specifically railed against by Joe Morris of the Speeder zine, who comments,

One thing I dislike about the weeklies is that you can have an interview with some band where only 10% is actual quotation, and all the rest is the journalist’s bullshit, explaining his or her ‘angle’. That’s why I usually do straight transcriptions, where you simply get our conversation (edited to remove the dross and repetition you always get) - I find it’s much easier to read and also limits the risk of misrepresentation which can easily happen when you only feature soundbites. (Speeder, Issue 2, p.15).

The rest of the article in the weeklies may just be the speculations of the journalist concerned, Morris and others contend, often focusing on a musician’s drugs and drinking habits rather than their music, an emphasis which can be related to the Bacchanalian ideology underlying rock that Pattison (1987) identifies as ‘vulgar Romanticism’. Such a focus is something which does indeed annoy many music-makers, including Stereolab’s Tim Gane, whose lengthiest response to any question in an interview in ESP (at least as presented in the available ‘transcription’) is that which allows him to criticise the mainstream music press:

For a very long time the music press did not treat us as being a serious essential music of a particular period... Now they had to write about us because they know that a small group of people are interested in our music. I
find it difficult to talk to them. A lot of the time they ask questions about me personally, I do not feel that a listener needs to know this. I like to talk about the music and what made you do this. Sometimes when I read an article about us it will be full of things such as how much we had to drink and what we got up to on tour. After a while this is boring. The people who like our music understand this, journalists see you in one dimension and that is it. These journalists are 30 years old men and they think they are talking to 14 year old teenagers. They underestimate people and talk down to you. If I was talking to a journalist and he asked me which people influence me, he would always write down the ones that everybody had heard of and who everybody knows. (ESP, Issue 16).

Very detailed information about the circumstances of the interview is sometimes provided in fanzines - how the questioner forgot to put the tape in the recorder, and thus lost half the interview (a surprisingly frequent occurrence), or how he got fined on the train journey to an interview for attempting to get away with only paying a child fare, as revealed in the prelude to one Damn you! interview. All this detail and attempt to present words actually spoken, and to cover new bands first before the music press, coupled with a frank account of the personal concerns and difficulties in the private life of some of the fanzine writers, suggest a desire to be taken as sincere, honest and open - doing 'being authentic', in a sense 22 - which can be clearly connected to the emphasis on personal authenticity in zine culture more generally.

Interviews are used in zines as a means to convey information without having to resort to the impersonal methods of using statistics to make a point (Duncombe, p.29) - a preference for personal testimony (unstructured interviews, mostly, and oral history) which mirrors many qualitative researchers in their quest for 'authentic' data (for example, Edwards, 1997, p.279-82, and Silverman, 1993, p.10). The desire to

22 More and more writers generally seem anxious to be seen to be doing 'being authentic', to such an extent that Linda Grant (The Guardian, 16/6/98) has claimed that fiction is dead, to be replaced, as people apparently seek direct, unvarnished truths free from authorial interference, by the new authenticity - the frank revelations of such as John Diamond and his recovery from cancer, Nick Hornby and his football obsession, and the (anonymous) woman who gave birth on the internet. The most perceptive part of Grant's article is her observation that such apparently frank confessions are far from being the whole truth, but are simply a version of it - a construction of authenticity.
represent interviewees accurately, and frequent questioning of scene generalisations proffered by the professional music weeklies (though the zinesters tend to use the phrase ‘post-rock’ more than the professional journalists), are all part of the concern for authenticity, in the sense of trying to represent what is really happening.

Possibly as a consequence of their diversity or of their awareness of the individuality of their voice and of their concerns, fanzines do not assume so much of a broad constituency as the mainstream music press. Whereas New Musical Express and Melody Maker talk of ‘ver kids’, use the pronoun ‘we’ repeatedly and pass comment on ‘what you should like’, albeit light-heartedly, to build up the idea of one overall music scene despite the diversity of the sounds they actually cover, this is far less common in the majority of the fanzines. Instead they employ many more personal references in their reviews, and include details of the author’s own life. Perfect’s Robin Clarke includes a five page section of reviews of music listened to when driving his car, separate from the main body of his reviews (p.31-5 of Issue 5), and the reviewing environment profoundly influences his comments. On Sea and Cake, he writes “The last time, volume up, windows down, I really enjoyed the drive. I made a fruity manoeuvre so it was time to change the tape”; on Ectogram’s ‘Eliot’s violet hour’, he comments “a single to add some mystery to the [i.e., his] drive to work”.

The Construction of Spontaneity

In what may seem initially to be in a similar vein, many fanzine reviews come across as words being jotted down in direct response to hearing the music for the first time. This is totally at odds with the approach taken in the music press, which always must remain immediately comprehensible and preferably occasionally humorous and at least vaguely reflected upon (there are review editors in such papers, for one thing). DDDD’s Simon Dee confesses he has only two days to do issue 21, “so it’ll all have to be one non-stop stream-of-consciousness outpouring, no organisation or sections”. In fact, his zine is generally quite like this with no clear division between editorial comment, reviews and interviews. An Ablaze! writer reviews Spiritualised’s “Laser guided missiles” which begins fairly typically that it “induces a shimmering placid hazed-over state of mind” with “gently ringing guitars”, then suddenly erupts “OH MY GOD! IT’S COMPLETELY ENCHANTING! (Hear the cries of a startled reviewer who never expects any of this stuff to be any good) I might even play this
one again” as if trying to recreate the illusive feeling of being overcome by a piece of music for the first time, or perhaps even writing directly in response to it, for the review concludes “Unfortunately I did play it again. It was crap hippy bullshit the second time around” (issue 9, p.44). In his Speeder zine, Joe Morris writes in a review of a Tortoise album, “A few thoughts while listening, late night film soundtrack, slow-burning solitary cigarette, a documentary about circus freaks in America, hunched over guitar, feeling every note, the bass is a big sound” (issue 2, p.30) - again he is trying to convey that illusive feeling of the images that fly through one’s mind upon first contact with a piece of music, rather than trying to summarise its qualities in a more rationalised/ professional/ perhaps ultimately misleading manner.

This attempt to write in a spontaneous fashion is again a version of doing being authentic, but it is as different as plaisir and jouissance. The authenticity considered in the previous section aimed at revealing the truth of the matter - what really happened, what someone really said, or revealing personal information about the zine writers themselves - a notion dependent on the sense of something which exists ‘out there’, even if that is only one’s own identity, a stable sense of self. The concept of authenticity referenced in attempts to capture the moment is of an entirely different order - it is rather born from the commitment to absolute self-expression, even if that involves exceeding the conventional standards of language and logic, an ‘inarticulate articulateness’, and from the belief that the authentic self is to be found in the realm of immediate emotional response, not some over-determined rationalisation constructed after the fact.

A similar method of writing, of noting down sounds as they occur rather than commenting about the whole track/ series of tracks, is featured, to more pretentious or at least less direct effect, in Robin Clarke’s Perfect zine. His review of Piano Magic’s “Wintersport” is worth discussing in full and runs as follows:

Pretty wondrous. Piano Magic are five people credited as ‘sound’ and guest vocalists. Recorded with snow on the ground. The 8.22 minutes of ‘Wintersport/ Cross- country’ begin with two alternating notes marking out the margin of error to a best fit curve. The sensation should be like a snail-shell, simple to grasp but distracting in its intricacy; Earwig’s “Under My Skin I Am Laughing” (La Di Da, 1992) got it. Hazel Burfitt sings a paragraph from a
diary you wouldn’t bother to read. Then birdsong, clocks ticking, familiar
dynamic synth music, chirrups and tick-tocks. A two a.m. tea break and
"Fourmations" on the telly. The first part of "Angel Pie/ Magic Tree" has
Raechel (sic) Leigh narrate Glen Johnson’s gnomic observations, “racing
clouds into town/ if I like”, amongst synth washes and piano notes. The
remainder introduces the guitar as stringed instrument and plays a synth tune
for colour coded keys. "Magnetic North" makes its bid for Radio 3’s “Hear
and Now”, choosing piano keys from the centre, a few from the right hand
side. (Issue 4, p.35).

The above paragraph makes for rather disconcerting reading, and is just about as far
removed from the direct, often humorous, summarising tendencies of the weeklies as
it is possible to be. The way the review follows the sounds emerging from the
recording as they are heard helps to make the experience of trying to relate to a piece
of music one has not heard (a typical dilemma in zines which cover less well known
material, as opposed to the weeklies whose task instead may be to say something
original about a record which many of its readers may already be familiar with, and be
looking to see if the reviewer’s opinion is similar to their own) less problematic. It
also serves to personalise the review, as it removes the pretence of expertise, as if the
zine writer were a friend listening to the record for the first time along with the reader,
rather than some arbiter of good taste dictating from on high. Thus this appears as just
one person's own personal reaction to something as it is happening, or at least writing
the review in this style allows a reader to feel privy to the event as it unfolds.
However, clearly there is much more to this review than that. To describe this piece of
writing as 'pretentious' may appear to be an unwarranted value-judgement, yet
somehow this description appears particularly apt. The term is appropriate because
Clarke is using references that somehow do not work; he is resorting to using a private
language in a sense, as what exactly his references are intended to conjure up to a
reader remains frequently unclear. A good writer, and some may argue a good artist
generally, is one who can communicate, can successfully convey their own brilliantly
original perceptions to a wider audience. Clarke, who significantly is not a
professional writer, at times in his writing is perfectly capable of clarity, but usually
with regard to more established musical forms. Faced with Piano Magic, he seems to
be struggling to come up with apposite phrases that will mean something to an audience. He varies between straight description or attempts to suggest the individual sounds themselves as they take their turn to appear in the recording - the first kind of authenticity, simply representing things as they are (or trying to do so) - and wildly over-reaching metaphors, such as the snail-shell one, which do not seem to successfully convey anything (though the point about being distracted by the intricacy is poignant to one who has heard the track in question), which can be related to the second kind of authenticity, self-expression taken to an extreme which borders on nonsense, something quite meaningless to a reader without access to Clarke’s own thought processes. At other times, he uses imagery drawn from popular culture to better, if perhaps ultimately cliched effect.

Clarke’s ‘gnomic observations’ (in so far as they as impenetrable as that of the Piano Magic lyricist) attempt to conjure up the flavour of the record he is reviewing. A shared language game with which one could hope to convey the sounds here on display is suggested to be an illusion - whether Clarke is using deliberately obtuse language and imagery to fit the supposed obtuseness of the music itself will have to remain a moot point - and the only possible ways of conveying such strange music then are ‘straight’ description (or attempts to suggest that all one is doing is straight description, like just saying what individual noises in the piece sound like, for example chirrups, tick-tocks), resorting to cliché, and lapsing into a kind of private language.

Clarke’s first words about the Piano Magic record are “pretty wondrous”. He clearly likes it, then, but is there anything else in the review that suggests or is used to support this favourable opinion? If one had not read those first two words, one would not know whether Clarke liked, loathed or was plain indifferent to this release. If describing the music is a difficult, possibly impossible task, then to account for its pleasurability is apparently all the more so. The problematic nature of the issue of suggesting pleasurability is conveyed again in the passage below:

This is experimental stuff, someone in the dig! office listened, mumbled something about Stockhausen,arty and bollocks and wandered off. But if you’re not fazed by what initially seems to be the sound of a synthesiser being tortured on a rack, turn it up loud drop everything and sit and listen. ‘Voodoo
Spell' is a hailstorm of scrambled reverberations, raygun shots and frazzled sound waves. But the tracks get more traditional in structure as the LP progresses, developing into epic lo-fi workouts. ‘Outside’ was probably named because the vocals sound like they were recorded through an air vent in the studio’s outside toilet. So project some frightening looking insects on the wall, turn the lights off, open the windows and wait for the UFOs to land. And yes, that’s a recommendation. 4/5. (Dig!, Issue 3, p.23).

This review is particularly interesting to examine in some detail, because it suggests the difficulty of describing the pleasurable music of something strange and new. The reviewer, Trudy Bell, clearly likes the record - she gives it 4 out of 5 - but seems aware at the end of her review that she has not quite managed to suggest why she likes it. It is one thing to contend that something is worthy and deserving our attention because it is so daring and original, and quite another, arguably considerably more problematic task, to say why it is enjoyable to listen to. In the end, Bell has to resort to clichés about UFOs landing as a comparison point for the strangeness of the record. The review works as a humorous, entertaining piece of writing, but arguably it does not successfully conjure up the reasons for the pleasurable music of The Dead C’s album at all.

The bands themselves, let alone those not privy to the intentions of the musicians, often find it more difficult than anyone else to describe the music they make. In an interview with Speeder, when asked ‘How would you describe yourselves? What is it that you do?’, Stereolab’s Tim Gane replies,

That’s the hardest question of all that is. Like when your auntie says ‘What do you sound like then?’ and your auntie doesn’t know anything past The Beatles, and you go ‘Well we’re a bit like... I don’t know - we’re repetitious, melodic, slightly minimalist music. I don’t know, it’s just a sound. (Issue 2, published end 1995/start 1996).

The Case of Labradford

To demonstrate the similarity in discourses utilised by the zines and the professional music magazines, the example of reviews of the group Labradford’s first
two albums will now be discussed, as the band are considered particularly significant and influential in post-rock circles and hence are one of the most widely reviewed and interviewed of all post-rock acts.

One of the most prominent meta-discourses identified in previous chapters as relating to post-rock in general was that which was termed the discourse of insubstantiality. Descriptions of the music of Labradford as being in some way insubstantial are legion across the range of publications examined. Thus their "songs have a haunting, dreamlike quality" (Music from the Empty Quarter, no. 12, Aug./Sept. 1995) and are "in a delicate, haunting fashion" (Vox, August 1995), and the word haunting is also considered particularly apposite by Wig Out! and Obsessive Eye. Tom Ridge in The Wire remarks that "What vocals there are to be heard are way back... semi-recited whispers, adding to the music's dream-like qualities" (no. 136, June 1995), and Graeme from Kill Everyone Now concurs "the introspective spoken vocals convey dream like moods" (issue 3). Lucy Cage in The Lizard finds the music so conducive to the dreaming state that she recounts an actual dream actually experienced whilst "dreaming to Labradford" (no. 5, Summer 1995). She then goes on to suggest that there is something in the music of the group "that suggest the practically unhearable, the almost imperceptively [sic] faint sounds". Such music it is being said is so lacking in solidity that it is almost not there at all, a point echoed in Simon Reynolds' Melody Maker review, as he comments on the "barely enunciated whisper, buried deep within the instrumental fog" and later remarks that one track reaches us "smudged and indistinct, like sunlight refracting under the sea surface" (24 June 1995). David Howell, whose approach in his Obsessive Eye fanzine is to eschew the conventional interview or review for an extended commentary about a band, argues that in the case of Labradford "There's none of rock's flesh or drive here, none of its grinding insistence. Instead the form is thoroughly filleted and feminised, abstracted to a gorgeously gaseous shimmer and swirl, a pale glow" (Vol. 2, Issue 1).

Some of the most frequent discourses used in the reviews of Labradford's music are not surprising, such as reference to the instruments used by the band members, background information about the group (their previous records, where they come from), and attempts to describe their sound by reference to other groups. However, the frequency of usage of some discourses is quite revealing. The number of references to the act of reviewing itself, and to other reviewers, is abnormally high,
which can be seen as testament to the difficulty of adequately doing justice to the music using conventional vocabulary. *Kill Everyone Now*'s Graeme begins his review with the observation,

I don’t think I can recall another band accruing such a diverse collection of reference points in reviews. Labradford have been compared to (deep breath) Main, Spaceman 3, Einsturzende Neubauten, Kraftwerk, Brian Eno, Stereolab, Flying Saucer Attack, Can, Neu, Telstar Ponies, My Bloody Valentine, Codeine, Suicide, The Aphex Twin and even Slowdive and The Cure. This means that either the critics don’t know what they’re talking about (partially true, especially the one who reviewed this in Select) or Labradford are doing something totally unlike anything else (true, at least in the present state of things). (op. cit.).

A number of reviewers seem to be taking particular care to avoid simplistic classifications and comparisons with this music. Graeme ends his comments on Labradford with the parenthetical remark “and I didn’t use the word ‘ambience’ once”. The editor of issue 12 of *Music from the Empty Quarter* similarly rails against what he calls the “a-word” (i.e. ambient) used as a catch-all generalisation by latecomers to lump together the differing strands of experimental music he enjoys and considers to be part of his scene. The reviewer of Labradford’s work in the same issue pointedly comments “And sorry, but I fail to see the Stereolab comparisons” in an effort to refute ignorant claims of correspondence, and earlier worries “it’s probably a cliché but ‘David Lynch soundtrack’ frequently comes to mind”. Indeed, it does seem to be something of a cliché, as *The Rough Guide to Rock*’s (Penguin, 1996) entry on Labradford utilises the same reference point, as does *The Wire*’s Tom Ridge, who contends the music is “similar to the soundtrack of David Lynch’s *Eraserhead*” (op. cit.).²³ Clearly this corresponds with the finding of a ‘filmic’ discourse, as discussed previously, and the fact that two of the reviewers of Labradford’s work compare it to the soundtrack music of Ennio Morricone only serves to confirm this. On a small

²³ The music of Stars of the Lid (who have toured with, and both remixed and been remixed by, Labradford, suggesting a strong mutual respect) has been similarly described by critics, but as commented upon in the previous chapter, that group went one stage further by titling two of their tracks “Music for Twin Peaks”.

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internet site set up by a lone individual (as opposed to a magazine site) with a page devoted to Labradford, the writer begins his/ her description of the group “They’ve been described as a mix between FSA [Flying Saucer Attack] and Spacemen 3, compared to Spiritualized and have also been called a krautrock band. This is not bad at all but they deserve a description without other bands mentioned because none of the above could be referred to with Labradford”.

It is also noteworthy that there are a large number of personal references, references to the reviewer him or herself. Lucy Cage’s writing about her dream has already been mentioned, but the personal pronoun is used recurrently through a number of reviews, as we have seen already in the reviews taken from Music from the Empty Quarter and Kill Everyone Now, but this occurs elsewhere too. Taken in conjunction with the findings of the previous paragraph, this can be seen as evidence of the problematic nature of simply getting on with the job of describing the music itself - that the reviewers feel a need to simultaneously stress the subjective (how they themselves relate to the music) and the collective (appealing to how others have described the music, either as a possible ally or simply to stress the difficulty of such a procedure in this case) reveals they perceive such a task as far from straightforward. This clearly relates to the emphasis in zine writing on the personal and subjective, and the idea of a community of zinesters linked by a fanzine network.

The use of title tracks as some kind of guide to the nature of the music in reviews, as an attempt to find an appropriate set of linguistic descriptions, similarly suggests a feeling that one is rather groping in the dark to find the right words to suit the sounds in question. Hence the comment “That two tracks have the word ‘listening’ in the title also conveys some of Labradford’s static yet skyward reaching intent” (Kill Everyone Now, issue 3) comes across as a perhaps flawed attempt to justify a claim about the music by rooting it in the less ambiguous realm (compared to music, and especially this apparently so insubstantial brand of music) of language. The reviewer in Speeder concludes his comments “There is no stable reference; this floats, ‘Balanced on its Flame’ (sic), and the effect is to create an ambient masterpiece” (issue 2). He not only includes one song title explicitly, though inaccurately, but uses as a prime way of summing the album up its actual title, namely ‘A Stable Reference’. The difficulty of describing new music is illustrated particularly effectively on the occasions when the comments of reviewers seem little more than a listing of the song
titles of an album. As discussed in the previous section, however, there are clear patterns to the titles that surround post-rock music, and a significant relationship between these titles and the discourses utilised by those attempting to describe the music.

Rafeeq Hasan's account of his first exposure to Labradford in Popism! that precedes his account of his interview with the band (issue 3, 1996, p.10-11) provides the kind of insight into a person's first reaction to a strange and unfamiliar musical form that only the personalised confessional style of the fanzine could. After describing his trip to buy the seven-inch on a particularly blustery day, as he recounts it, he says,

The first time I played the a-side ('Julius') I was a bit confused - it didn't really sound like anything, the b-side either. But then, having nothing else new to listen to, I put it on again. This time I just sat in front of my stereo system and listened, really listened. It blew me away.

'It didn't really sound like anything' - if ever there was a sentence that encapsulated the difficulties encountered in describing this music it must be that one!

Continuing the detailed examination of reviews of Labradford, one finds that words are on occasion used to evoke the music, as opposed to merely describing it. Thus the music is said to be "tiptoeing into the realms of Morricone's westerns" (Vox, op. cit., my emphasis) and contended to be a "weave of soft vocals and resonating strings" (Lizard, op. cit., my emphasis). Perhaps in a similar vein, many writers seem to use an array of rather fanciful phrasing. So they talk of "The genesis of a unique sound" (Kill Everyone Now, op. cit.), rather than more simply 'Where it all began'. Lucy Cage argues

\[24\] Graeme from Kill Everyone Now writes of Drain's 'Offspeed and in there', "they've come up with an original set of slowdrivin' helicopter burnin' nitrous shuffles" (Issue 3, p.58), a sentence which makes no sense whatsoever unless you happen to know the titles of the tracks on the album include 'Burma slowdrive', 'Helicopters are burning' and 'The nitrous shuffle'. On the other hand, the references to movement (slowdriving), to an incendiary physical effect (burning), and to gaseous insubstantiality (nitrous) both in the song titles and the general attempt to describe the music contained on the album mirror previous findings regarding the discourses surrounding the music as commented upon in earlier chapters.
there’s something in the timbre of the notes, their extenuated vibrations, that suggest the practically unhearable, the almost imperceptively faint sounds of micro-harmonics shimmering skywards. The beauty lies in the cross-texturing of guitars and keyboards, the stately progressions towards and through each other’s harmonies, like aural aerial acrobatics. (Lizard, op. cit.).

Meanwhile Simon Reynolds in Melody Maker (op. cit.) compares one track to “the subcutaneous threnody of inner-body music”. Arguably, this use of impressive/pretentious vocabulary reflects or attempts to suggest a quality about the music that may imply its difference to mainstream popular music.

Previously, the usage of what was termed the “one thing and its opposite” language device has been discussed. This is evidenced in a number of reviews of Labradford’s work, as “they somehow manage to sound simultaneously dense, sombre and minimal” and indeed are “at once desolate and uplifting” (Music from the Empty Quarter), are “both ice-cold and golden-warm” (Speeder, issue 2), have a “static yet skyward reaching intent” (Kill Everyone Now), and one Wire reviewer (no. 126, August 1994) writes that “The surrounding sound hovers between an exhilarating high and a low end swamp, populated by indecipherable drones. This unresolved tension proves highly attractive, straddling both melody and noise on ‘Everlast’, and capturing calm and turbulence on ‘Splash Down’”, an entire series of contrasts that nonetheless operate to perform as a whole. Reynolds is explicit in his description of Labradford’s music as a “unique, paradoxical sound (cloistered expanse, thunderous hush)” (Melody Maker). In my opinion, this language device is used by the writers as a way of suggesting the indescribability of the music - it is simultaneously one thing and the precise opposite of that thing. How, then, can one provide “a stable reference” (ironically itself the title of Labradford’s second album) to adequately sum it up?

Change over Time

It can be observed at this point that whilst the music of Labradford is particularly prone to be described as in some way insubstantial or viewed as simply

25 ‘Subcutaneous threnody’ translates as ‘an ode or song of lamentation from under the skin’, which I only learnt after looking up the words concerned in my Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary - and Melody Maker is supposed to be the mainstream, accessible magazine!
indescribable (in the sense of those terms hitherto indicated) as the previous section revealed, the way these discourses are employed is by no means unique to them but rather can be substantially generalised to much of the way the rest of post-rock has been reviewed. Thus when fanzine writers are faced with a post-rock release, they are more likely than otherwise to include a reference to the act of reviewing, or to include some relatively oddball reference point (more personal, subjective, a kind of private language) in the way Robin Clarke of *Perfect* was shown to do earlier. Faced with a whole series of post-rock releases (perhaps it is a new enthusiasm for him) Speeder's Joe Morris, for instance, is forced to confess (on Long Fin Killie) "I'm hard pushed for a suitable description (as usual) but I suppose Pram are kind of a reference point... but really they are in a world of their own, the songs building and burning, to steal from Labradford, balanced on their own flame" (issue 2, p.29) and (on Tortoise) "Another band that's a bastard to describe but a virginal angel (so to speak) to listen to" and later "Oh boy, another review, another failure to describe" (p.30). Such honesty is classically fanzine and would be impossible in the professional environs of the mainstream press. Morris' review of Long Fin Killie is particularly revealing for in it he refers to a previous review earlier in his zine (as well as relying on song titles to make his point for him), as if assuming readers would just read his work straight through rather than specifically look for remarks about their favourite artist, that the desire to participate in and support the underground music scene would be more important to the reader than comments on a particular release (something which could in no way be assumed by the editors of the mainstream weeklies). However, as discourses have stabilised around post-rock music - in particular the ones already identified in the previous two chapters - then an established set of language patterns becomes available to the hapless reviewer, and the feeling that one cannot find the words to convey the sounds on display is subsequently lessened. Hence the need to use particularly personal reference points which may or may not mean anything to anyone else, and the desire to reflect upon what it is to review something, are likewise diminished. The experienced failure to be able to find the words, itself a central discourse in the early stages of post-rock, is gradually replaced, though never completely, as the community of fanzine writers and professional journalists develop an accepted lexicon of ways to discuss this music.
Another development to befall post-rock as it has evolved has been the changing of the reference points utilised around it. Initially, reviewers tended to compare early post-rockers, arguably rather inadequately, to others immediately preceding them in the independent music scene. These comparisons varied from the simplistic but understandable references to Stereolab, My Bloody Valentine, Loop and Spacemen 3/ Spiritualized to wilder, dubious links to indie contemporaries, or else complete bafflement and a feeling that what is being done is wholly original and new. As post-rock has grown in terms of the number of bands and cult popularity more generally, however, the historical antecedents to the movement have become better known, notably the significance of Krautrock. References to Krautrock now appear in very nearly all self-consciously post-rock reviews (in other words, ones where the writer has stated directly or indirectly an awareness that what s/he is reviewing is at least allied to post-rock)\(^\text{26}\). This contrasts with their virtual absence in the early days - in Progression (no. 2, 1992), Greg Herriett concludes his interview with Main “Apart from the obvious discussions on Loop [the band from which Main originated] and talk of various German musicians who I remain oblivious to, that’s pretty much it”, thus not even bothering to transcribe the bits about Krautrock, as he perceives them to be of no interest - followed by a stage where writers anxious both to appear reasonably knowledgeable but not to the point of seeming to be obsessive geeks, would mention Krautrock, or say Stockhausen, in a joky style (c.f. the remark in Dig! quoted previously, “This is experimental stuff, someone in the dig! office listened, mumbled something about Stockhausen, arty and bollocks and wandered off”). In a sense, this bears out the comment earlier quoted from Tim Gane, that journalists only mention known influences, when transcribing interviews or writing reviews, whether these are the most important to the musicians concerned or not.

The overall picture is that of an initial difficulty in encountering new and strange music(s) gradually transforming itself into a much more settled pattern of discourses to describe and construct the sounds in question. This process is, in general terms, accompanied by a greater acceptance of the music in the main, alongside a much lesser feeling of excitement being generated upon contact with it in some

\(^{26}\) Indeed, a number of magazines have featured their own histories of Krautrock - from The Wire to Melody Maker at the professional end (though even The Face has carried a piece on the Krautrock club, Kosmische, in action in London for the past three years) to zines such as Popism! and Chunklet.
quarters at least. That is, it suddenly does not seem so unmanageable, so alien, but, in the case of much post-rock (though not all), it could be argued the threat was always more apparent than real. It seemed so experimental, so new, perhaps only because most people had forgotten large chunks of their musical heritage. The rediscovery of Krautrock, itself caused by a desire to hear what had influenced the ‘innovators’ of today, only illustrates this point more forcefully.

Concluding Comments

The focus of this chapter has differed from those of the previous two in that to a large extent it has concentrated on examining the style of language usage as opposed to attempting to identify the precise content of discourses surrounding and constituting the music. This is largely because, as should be clear by now, to simply identify the discourses around the music would be only to cover the ground of those earlier chapters once more. Fanzine writers are no less likely to use the meta-discourse of insubstantiality, and its constituent discourses of dreams, fragility, gaseousness etc., and the other discourses such as movement, science fiction and nature than are the professional journalists. They are no less likely to describe the music as being impossible/difficult to describe, though certainly they may do so considerably more frankly. This last point brings us on to what is, in my opinion, the real distinction between the zines and the mainstream weeklies in their approach to post-rock - namely a difference in style rather than one of content. Those writing in fanzines are more likely to experiment with style because they do not have to adhere to a strict model of writing accessible, not-too-serious prose as do those paid to work for Melody Maker and New Musical Express. They can therefore include copious personal references or experiment with unusual and challenging layouts and use illustrations to provide means beyond the narrowly linguistic to relate to the music they are accounting for, or perhaps just to make their publications appear more interesting looking.27

27 The zines most prone to reference intellectual ideas - whether aesthetic, philosophical or sociological - are most likely to employ radical design layouts, namely Obsessive Eye, Space Age Bachelor and Easy Pieces. Certain passages of text may be overlain with others, experiments are made with the text’s font style and size, and even direction (upside down, on its side), to such an extent it is on occasion rather difficult to read. Passages from other writers are included wholesale, sometimes to illuminate what is being written about, but other times the only effect is to confuse. Considering the influence of surrealism and deconstructionism, my opinion is that the confusion engendered is quite deliberate.
The most significant difference between the zines and the professional magazines is the former's commitment to personal authenticity in its various forms. Thus Rafeeq Hasan's account of his trip back from the record store and first encounter with the music of Labradford, Lucy Cage's recounting of her dream in response to the same band, Karren Ablaze's eruption of delight midway through listening to writing about Spiritualised before abruptly changing her mind, and Robin Clarke's attempts to convey the music of Piano Magic can all be seen as aspects of the desire for authenticity - whether in terms of the desire for honesty or to allow for the insertion of details of the writer's personal lives in the name of self-expression, or in an attempt to convey the 'bursts of raw emotion', the spontaneous feelings aroused by music experienced for the first time. It has been shown that such findings correspond to previous research on the contemporary zine culture more generally that has been conducted by Duncombe on American fanzines. Most importantly, the accordance between the diverse concepts of authenticity and the distinction between jouissance and plaisir has been noted, and in particular it has been observed how an understanding of this correspondence in turn develops a superior comprehension of the relationship between language and music as that relates to post-rock.

(William Burroughs' work on cut-ups is influential too), and relates to the desire and attempt to escape meaning altogether, bypassing meaning by going beyond (a shared) language to the truly 'authentic' realm of the private, of emotion and music.
ANALYSIS OF META-DISCOURSES OF POST-ROCK

Introduction

The focus of this final analytic section will be somewhat different to that of the preceding chapters. Whereas the analytic approach thus far has concentrated on providing something akin to a discourse analysis version of the thick description favoured in ethnography, aiming to ground the analysis wholly in the data and then building up an overall picture of the relationship between music and language as that concerns something called 'post-rock' from these isolated elements, it is necessary - simply for the purpose of trying to reflect the data itself - to take a rather more summarising approach here. This is not done in a vain attempt to identify certain integral characteristics of post-rock, to provide categorical assurance of what this music definitely is, but simply because to ignore the efforts of those writing about the music themselves, fanzine writers and professional journalists alike, to suggest such a clear essence and try to provide convincing criteria to judge 'post-rockness', would be to miss a central feature of writing about the music(s). Thus the following sections will concentrate on what can be termed meta-discourses of post-rock, where music writers have striven to propose a series of definitions to delimit the qualities of post-rock more precisely. The chapter will additionally consider the emergence, increasing predominance, and subsequent fall into disrepute (at least in certain quarters) of the term 'post-rock' itself.

The writing of Simon Reynolds

An emphasis on one individual may appear to grant too much weight to the idea of the subject, and even to fall into the trap of the now highly unfashionable approach of political history with its stress on the supposed "great men" of history. Certainly such an approach can be seen to be of dubious sociological value. Nevertheless, in consideration of the development of meta-discourses around post-rock in general, and subsequent influence upon others attempting to communicate about the genre, the effect of Reynolds' analyses is difficult to overestimate. A professional journalist who has written extensively for Melody Maker and The Wire, he also contributes to a number of fanzines, and is the author of three books about contemporary popular music. Most tellingly in this context, it was Reynolds who
originally coined the term ‘post-rock’, and who has written the most articles about post-rock as a distinct genre. An examination of the role of Reynolds in the development of the genre is critical not simply because it recognises his pivotal influence, but also because the problematic nature of the relationship between music and language is highlighted by the manner in which his attempts to summarise appear both to convey something integral about the music which might otherwise be overlooked concentrating solely on the ground level, and simultaneously to elide certain fundamental aspects of the music and the surrounding scenes.

The first article about the post-rock scene, in that the three bands discussed in detail in the article are three of the prime movers in post-rock - namely Stereolab, Seefeel and Main - was an article in which the term ‘post-rock’ does not feature at all. The two-page article, written by Reynolds for Melody Maker (Oct. 2 1993, p.50-1) was entitled ‘Easy Lizzzzzing’ (sic) and proclaims as its primary focus, ‘Ambient’ (a more concise version also appears as part of Melody Maker’s review of the year, Dec 25 1993/ Jan 1 1994 issue, p.43). Reynolds discusses a list of proto-ambient recordings (including ones by figures as diverse as Brian Eno, My Bloody Valentine, Neu!, Thomas Koner, King Tubby, John Cage and Jimi Hendrix, suggesting both a relationship to avant-garde composition, Krautrock, dub and the difficulty of demarcating when post-rock can be said to begin, as one could include My Bloody Valentine and Koner themselves as post-rock), recounts a visit to a “soon-to-be-legendary Ambient Tea Party” (a club more related to rave ‘comedown’ culture), and provides a concise analysis of ambient, in addition to three short band interviews; or, as the article puts it, he “spliffs up and chills out with post-Cocteaus/ Valentines ambient-indie practitioners”. Though summarising all he describes under the heading ‘ambient’, Reynolds distinguishes between what he calls “the post-rave zone” and “the post-indie front”, of which the latter can be seen as the forerunner to post-rock itself.

Even at this early stage, Reynolds identifies certain core components of the music, most of which he continues to see as central in later articles. One can draw from his article that he sees ambient indie, or post-rock, as sharing the following components:
1) **Studio sound**: A departure from ‘naturalistic’ recording (i.e. the simulation of a live band), using the studio-as-instrument.

2) **Psychedelic**: Providing the “ultimate destination of the psychedelic impulse. Technically, in that psychedelia pioneered stereo and the illusion of spatial dimension; spiritually, in that ambience is the heavenly end of the psychedelic trip. Where acid rock plunges into the cosmic beyond, ambient is more like treading water, drifting in cosmic/oceanic womb-space”.

3) **Musical qualities**: Sharing the musical attributes of minimalism, un-eventfulness, even-ness of dynamics, droney timbres built up by layers instead of riffs and chords.

4) **Hippies vs. punks**: A “quiet revolt against grunge, a nouveau hippy riposte to grunge’s punk revivalism”.

5) **Anti-rock**: “An anti-rock gesture, or rather a rewriting of the meaning of rock: rock, as in a cradle motion, or rock as in petrified, stoned immaculate. Ambient is un-rock ‘n’ roll because it’s built up by layers, whereas rock is about jamming”.

Reynolds’ characterisations clearly bear much in common with the discourses identified in previous chapters. Thus the discourses of physical space, religion, liquidity, cosmic space, and infancy (“womb-space” and “cradle motion”) are all utilised even in this very short description. However, Reynolds conjures up something considerably more definite and, above all, more familiar in his analysis. In his reference to precise musical attributes on the one hand, and his discussion of particular moments in rock cultural history (namely hippies and psychedelia) he provides a stable reference to the reader. Yet it is exactly these generalisations which are the most controversial, for the brief interviews conducted by Reynolds reveal that the groups themselves perceive matters very differently. Thus in one interview Reynolds has to admit

Robert’s [Hampson, principal spokesperson of Main] pretty scornful of the current vogue for ambient. He’s never liked hippies, always preferred the proto-punk nihilism of The Stooges or MC5....

‘I can’t go along with the hippy attitude, you do need a bit of ugliness and confrontation’, he says. ‘Cos we don’t all love each other, we don’t want to embrace everything’.
Mark Clifford of Seefeel offers another view, as he argues

‘Ambient’ has lost its definition... Now it just means anything that’s droney and drifting. But it’s good that there’s so many different meanings to ‘ambient’ now. The term’s either been emptied of meaning, or it’s been filled up with lots of meanings. [Ambient now means] any band that wants to go beyond the constraints of three-minute punky pop, beyond choruses.

When asked by Reynolds “is ‘ambient’ the final death of punk?”, Clifford replies

We did a gig where we played one truly ambient piece... and this old punk shouted ‘bring back the Sex Pistols’. It seemed such a negative and old-fashioned comment. ...Anyway, someone like Richard James [aka Aphex Twin] is modern punk, his music has that DIY, lo-fi naivety.

Clifford’s remarks raise a number of significant issues regarding ‘naming’ in music. Firstly, is punk a distinct style of music, three-minutes long and similar in sound to the Sex Pistols, or an attitude of independence, of ‘DIY and lo-fi’ (whatever else post-rock is, it certainly is not the former but is frequently the latter, just as “ambient indie” pioneers, the Cocteau Twins, always maintained themselves to be punk)? Secondly, Clifford contends that ambient has lost its definition, having a potentially very wide (range of) meanings (term has ambiguous meaning), yet talks of a piece being “truly ambient” (my emphasis), suggesting the term does have a specific set of connotations for him (term has definite meaning). However, Main’s Hampson is sufficiently sure of ambient’s meaning to be contemptuous of it (definite meaning), whilst creating music of a similar enough hue to ambient to be included as exemplary of it in a summary article (ambiguous meaning). Similarly, the editor of the fanzine Music from the Empty Quarter is incensed enough about ambient to devote all his editorial of issue 11 (1995) to a rant against the “a-word” (definite meaning for ambient), which seems born of the claim that the wider music media is muscling in on his area of musical interest, and defining it in a way he objects to (the term is ‘up for grabs’, hence its ambiguity). Not only is the relationship between music and language one of an
unstable reference, then, but the level of stability involved is itself uncertain - sometimes the exact same person is on one occasion confident of what a term corresponds to, and on others argues the same term is irredeemably ambiguous.

Reynolds originates the term post-rock in an article published in *The Wire* in May 1994 (issue 123). This was originally part of a series of articles by various authors on the theme of 'Music in the 21st Century'. It is worth noting the term has its basis in the idea of a future music, a sonic fiction or at least an ideal type of current practices which are imagined as developing into something more definite in the years to come. Though the heading for the article in the contents page is “The Ambient Rock Pool”, Reynolds makes very little reference to ambient, or easy listening for that matter, in the article itself (unsurprisingly as his list of post-rock predecessors has now expanded to include The Velvet Underground, The Jesus and Mary Chain and the post-punk diaspora incorporating Joy Division and PiL, in addition to Krautrock, Eno, Cocteau Twins, dub reggae and avant-garde *musique concrete*) which begins “Today’s more adventurous rock groups are embracing technology and the avant garde to forge a new genre: Post-Rock.” (ibid., p.28). The article continues later

What to call this zone? Some of its occupants, Seefeel for instance, could be dubbed ‘Ambient’; others, Bark Psychosis and Papa Sprain, could be called ‘art rock’. ‘Avant rock’ would just about suffice, but is too suggestive of jerky time signatures and a dearth of melodic loveliness, which isn’t necessarily the case. Perhaps the only term open ended yet precise enough to cover all this activity is ‘post-rock’.

Thus the author selects the term because he considers it “open ended yet precise” (a classic example of the ‘one thing and its opposite’ language device identified in earlier chapters). In his article, Reynolds is aware of the considerable differences between many of the bands he characterises under the same heading. However, he once again develops a number of key points, which he formulates in explicit opposition to the views expressed in Joe Carducci’s book *Rock and the Pop Narcotic* about the nature of rock, and which he contends are central to all the groups concerned:
1) Using rock instrumentation for non-rock purposes, using guitars as facilitators of timbres and textures rather than riffs and powerchords.

2) Use of technology. Reynolds devotes a sizeable portion of the article to various bands use of computer technology (MIDI, Cubase sequencers, sampling), but recognises (arguably insufficiently) that some post-rock acts opt to use ‘outmoded’ or lo-fi technology.

3) Use of studio-as-instrument, rather than to replicate live performance, coupled with an ambiguous attitude to playing gigs (in fact, the vast majority of post-rockers are highly committed to the live circuit).

4) Desire to retain some element of physicality and/ or spontaneity, to develop an “interface between real time, hands-on playing and the use of digital effects and enhancement” (ibid., p.32), thus not totally abandoning the rock process unlike techno and drum ‘n’ bass.

5) Commitment to aesthetic innovation rather than pursuit of financial gain as the purpose of making music.

Such a characterisation places the emphasis far more on the process of the music creation rather than the outcome. Reynolds’ article suggests the methodology behind the music, but conveys little of what it actually sounds like, perhaps recognising the diversity of the end products.

Post rock finally makes it to headline status in Reynolds “R U Ready 2 Post-Rock?” (Melody Maker, July 23 1994, p.42-3), another summary article containing three interviews, this time with Laika, Scorn and God. Much of the article reiterates Reynolds’ previous writing - themes he emphasises again include use of rock instruments but not being rock, use of technology, symbiotic relationship with ambient (which it is nonetheless distinct from), disgust with grunge, and positive relationship with the avant garde - but some important additions are made. That post rock is a scene but not a scene is made clearer, as Reynolds begins

Imagine, if you will, a scene without a location, a community of misfits, a loose confederation of exiles and prophets without honour. Bands... who are gradually linking up into a network as they drift further out from the indie mainstream.
For want of anything snappier, I call this phenomenon ‘post-rock’ because, technically and ideologically, that’s precisely what it is.

Reynolds here asserts the appropriateness of the term he has coined, specifying further how it is post-rock bands use rock instruments for non-rock ends. Not only are guitars used to generate timbres, textures and drones rather than riffs, and not only do post-rock groups increasingly utilise digital technology, but in addition “post-rock is music that happens along the vertical (layers) as opposed to horizontal (dynamics); music that opens up space (aural, imaginary) as opposed to developing through time (verse/chorus/solo).”

Post rock does not merely lack a cohesive scene, but is inherently opposed to the very idea of scenes, according to Reynolds. He contends that...

...post-rock severs itself from rock ‘n’ roll ideas like ‘youth’, ‘community’, ‘populism’. Post-rock bands have responded, consciously or unconsciously, to the industry-sponsored monolith of mediocrity that is ‘alternative’, by reviving the old ideals of ‘independent music’ (back before indie labels became merely a farm-system for the majors). They have given up the idea of mass success or even indie cult-hood, and accepted the idea of being marginal forever.

Reynolds recognises more of the divisions within post-rock, commenting that “the post-rock vanguard is torn in two opposite directions”. Some bands, such as Main, are said to be “abandoning rock’s kinetic energy altogether, losing the backbeat and dissipating into ambience”, but others such as Laika are looking for a different non-rock form of dynamic, and finding it in the grooves of hip hop, techno, dub and, soon, jungle. This music is physical in its impact, but not in its playing - it’s constructed from programmed rhythms and sampled loops - and so can properly be considered post-rock.

A brief passage about post rock in Melody Maker’s end of the year review (Dec 24/31 1994, p.36) repeats Reynolds’ arguments but adds two points. Firstly, it asserts the social relevance of the music, arguing that “post-rock is music that not only
says something about today (lyrical themes tend towards urban tension and dread) but says it using forms appropriate to the mid-Nineties (only five years 'til the new millenium, folks!)”, a perhaps controversial viewpoint considering the relative absence of lyrics accompanying this music. Secondly, the article claims the music is uniquely British, going so far as to suggest that “post-rock is the real reason to be patriotic about British music this year”, a contention which is difficult to justify, and one born of ignorance of the underground music scenes of alternative nations, especially (accepting that most of the post-rock groups of other European nations had yet to blossom) those of the United States, New Zealand and Japan.

Reynolds' next influential article about post-rock, published in The Wire (Nov. 1995, Issue 141, p.26-30) concentrates solely on the music coming from one geographical area, namely the States, which introduces such genre-defining bands (in the sense that they became key points of comparison in reviews of new bands) as Tortoise and Labradford. Flagged as “Space Rock Stateside” on the cover, the subheading on the contents page suggests “Reynolds trances out to US avant rock”, re-applying alternative generic terms, such as space rock, avant rock and even trance rock, to the music. Reynolds reiterates the claim of British primacy at the vanguard of post-rock, and argues that the origin of this music in the States makes it qualitatively different from that emerging from Britain. Again a number of core characteristics Reynolds perceives as integral to the groups can be garnered from his article, comprising:

1) *Outer Space*: a turn to science fiction and outer space “to free up their imaginations”. Reynolds locates this turn in four factors, (a) a reaction to grunge, which he says literally means ‘dirt’, as earthbound music; (b) the titles of the songs and of the groups themselves, which was considered previously; (c) interviews with band members conducted by Reynolds in which the theme of the tarnished promise of space travel is raised by different individuals; (d) the alignment of some of the bands with the space rock musical movement (Reynolds namechecks Silver Apples, Hawkwind and German Kosmische Musik).

2) *A desire to go beyond the limitations of traditional American rock*: Reynolds argues that the turn to space rock/ post rock is a reaction against lo-fi culture - its “retro-eclecticism”, as he puts it - which he himself considers reactionary, for “As the
ersatz folk culture of fanzine editors and record store clerks, lo-fi was an aesthetic and cultural dead-end).

3) A desire **not to go too far beyond the limitations of traditional American rock**: Unlike their British post-rock counterparts, the American bands are held to be deeply suspicious of digital musical culture. They retain a belief in the importance of working in the real-time group format, a preference for the 'warmth' of analogue synthesisers rather than digital instruments, and "the traditional American privileging of live performance over sweatless studio-trickery", 'sampladelica' and remixology.

4) **Absence of black music as influence**: "Post-rock is a Transatlantic phenomenon, but there are telling differences between the British and the American strands, and most of them revolve around British bohemia's susceptibility to the influence of black music, whether American, Caribbean or homegrown. U.S. post-rock can almost be defined as the absence of dub as a living legacy, and by the avoidance of HipHop".

Reynolds suggests another definition for post rock in an article about Tortoise (Melody Maker, February 6 1996, p.10), when discussing PiL's 1979 album 'Metal Box', he describes it as "music that retained the emotional force of rock but expanded/exploded the form. Post-rock, in other words". In this instance, the emotional qualities of the music are stressed: thus it is claimed that post-rock relates to rock not only in terms of using similar instrumentation (albeit in a different way), but it is also argued that it does not dilute the emotional impact of rock music by experimenting with the processes of sound creation.

**Critique of Reynolds**

Reynolds recognises the same distinction between various strands of U.S. post-rock as he sees in its U.K. counterpart, namely the difference between bands of a more ambient persuasion and those who wish to retain an element of groove and the physicality of rock. However, in other respects his comments demonstrate far too much of a willingness to generalise about the post-rock scene, and a lack of appreciation for the efforts of those who do not fit into his preconceptions. By this stage, Reynolds' musical sympathies lay increasingly with hardcore drum 'n' bass, with aspects of the rave diaspora that matched his preference both for the experimental and for music which conveyed and caused jouissance. He briefly
includes a passage on the musical style called ‘math rock’, which he says “refers to an avant-impulse that is expressed entirely through rock’s anti-dance rhythms and through the traditional line-up of guitars/ bass/ drums... [and in which] Riffs are chopped up and tesselated; dynamics, tempos and time signatures are convoluted; strange and complex chords are clustered”: for Reynolds a combination of prog rock and punk rock. Reynolds regards math rock as sharing certain features of U.S. post-rock (the re-invention of the guitar and the commitment to live performance), but perceives it as a fundamentally different music to post-rock. Similarly, he actually considers post-rock to have risen in opposition to lo-fi culture.

However, the opposition Reynolds posits between post-rock on the one hand, and lo-fi and math rock on the other may be more apparent than real, a result of Reynolds' own growing musical preferences for post-rave music. He himself admits, just after having dismissed lo-fi as “an aesthetic and cultural dead-end”, that “Like, I suspect, a lot of Brits, I'd more or less stopped keeping tabs on it [lo-fi] by last year: with all manner of post-rock, TripHop, drum ‘n’ bass and art-Techno provocations afoot, who could be bothered tracking lo-fi’s latest miniscule permutations on the canon of avant-garage rock?” Reynolds has been attacked, notably in American fanzines such as Tuba Frenzy, precisely because his article about U.S. post-rock was born out of an ignorance of the developments in underground American guitar music in the early 1990s, causing him to see a major revolution instead of the gradual evolution both the Tuba Frenzy writer and his interviewee, a member of math rock band Polvo, feel has occurred. Certainly math rock pioneers Slint are considered pivotal in the development of post-rock worldwide now.

Critically, the underlying ideology behind lo-fi is not so different to post-rock. As post-rock has continued to develop, many of the bands have demonstrated a strong commitment to playing gigs, and the fanzine community has embraced the music to a considerable extent, as the proliferating number of zines commenting on post-rock groups amply shows. Most fundamentally, the ideal of doing it yourself remains paramount in post-rock, just as it was for lo-fi and, before that, for punk. Post-rock has seen the emergence of a number of independent record labels committed to releasing music that is distinctive from both the mainstream pop charts and the so-called ‘alternative’ indie scene. Interestingly, the group Six Finger Satellite are seen as exemplary of U.S. post-rock by Reynolds in this instance, but as quintessentially lo-fi by
Jakubowski in his summary article about the U.S. lo-fi network in *The Wire* (August 1994, Issue 126). According to Jakubowski, some of the features of lo-fi include: an opposition to grunge; going against the traditional guitar-bass-drums line-up by incorporating non-rock instruments such as flutes, didgeridoo, cheap noisemaking devices and analogue synths; an influence from post-punk and Krautrock; a sense of musical experiment, and improvising at least part of the time (a theme in much post-rock too); a reaction to "both the breakdown of the Great American Jobs Machine and with the senescence of rock music as youth culture" (p.73) (c.f. Reynolds’ comments about post rock severing itself from ideas of ‘youth’ and ‘community’); and, financial restrictions leading to "the ultimate Lo-fi fetish of a limited edition vinyl 7" release, usually split between two groups" (p.32) (a common way for post-rock groups, especially the less well known ones, to release their product). All of these features lo-fi shares with post-rock. Arguably, it is the financial limitations the music-makers find themselves confronted with in their pursuit of 'doing their own thing' that is at the root of what Reynolds views as an aspect of their musical unadventurousness. The preference for analogue over digital is frequently financially motivated, as the price differential has been considerable, especially in the States. To the extent that some actively prefer the sound of analogue, this is not a national issue, as, to give but one example, Main (from the U.K.) state their distrust of samplers and Labradford (from the U.S.) now actively employ them. The dub-influenced methods of remixology meanwhile have now been adopted by American bands (to name but a few) as diverse as Tortoise, Ui, Stars of the Lid, Brise Glace, Labradford, and Bowery Electric. The list of such groups is not a short one.

Further evidence of the diversity of American post-rock can be found in two articles written in the independent music publication *Magnet*, which is itself a U.S. magazine. The articles, both by Fred Mills, detail respectively the Space Rock scene located in the Detroit area (Issue 24, Aug/Sept 1996, pp.47-53) and the Psych Rock scene of Texas (Issue 30, Sept/Oct 1997, pp.37-44). Mills’ writing suggests that far from U.S. post-rock being a cohesive entity, there are instead crucial geographical variations in the style of music being created, frequently bolstered by local networks of groups, playing together on the same bills, forming record labels and sometimes radio shows with particular aural identities, and sharing band members. The theme of local identity in post-rock, and how this affects the characteristics of the music being
created and performed, is reiterated in articles on musical communities found in places as diverse as the south island of New Zealand (in the New Zealand zine Opprobrium), the Ruhr valley of Germany, France (both in The Wire) and Japan (discussed briefly in Melody Maker, The Wire and the zine Music from the Empty Quarter).

Though Reynolds' generalisations about post-rock (really the British post-rock of 1994), and the half-post-rock/half-traditional rock of the U.S., can be criticised for over-simplification, they have received considerable support in numerous English music zines. Reynolds' influence spread not only to the professional publications he has contributed to (The Wire and Melody Maker), but fanzines he wrote for (The Lizard, Obsessive Eye and the Canadian zine Space Age Bachelor), and beyond those he is namechecked in still other zines.

A Zinester writes

The musical preferences of David Howells, the editor of (and almost sole contributor to) Obsessive Eye, DJ at some post-rock gigs and now writer for The Wire, and whose writings were briefly discussed in the theory section, have followed a similar pattern to those of Reynolds. Howells favours UK post-rock over US post-rock, and for the same reason as Reynolds - namely, the former's closer proximity to the developments in post-rave culture and use of the latest digital technology, making it more genuinely innovative, in his eyes. Howells and Reynolds also share an influence from post-structuralism and feminist thought. They both seek a music of 'jouissance', freely quoting from the works of theorists of desire such as Bataille (Reynolds' Blissed Out: The Raptures of Rock [1990] is predicated on the jouissance-plaisir distinction), and their interest in gender manifests itself in Reynolds' co-authored (with his partner, Joy Press) The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock 'n' Roll (1995), use of Cixous in his earlier book, and Howells' quotations of Kathy Acker and tendency to deploy the discourses of gender and feminisation, which he relates to the musical identity of Pram, Movietone and Laika (all of whom have prominent female musicians), but also to all-male bands such as Labradford, as previously seen.

Howells declares a musical manifesto, in his opening piece in Obsessive Eye No. 3 ("written, researched and compiled during June '94 - May '95"), an outpouring
of ideas and wishes about music in general, but clearly with its hopes pinned on post-rock (the issue contains interviews with Disco Inferno, Pram, Flying Saucer Attack, Seefeel, Insides, Laika, Bark Psychosis and Movietone, with only features on AMM, Aphex Twin and Autechre, all of whom have shared compilation space with post-rockers [and a lengthy passage taken from Russolo's Futurist Manifesto, "The Art of Noises"], to break up the post-rock monopoly. Much of Howells account is similar to that of Reynolds - thus he claims post-rock is marked by the use of the sampler, by the use of non-rock instrumentation (theremin, clarinet, piano, bits of household junk etc.), by "its approach to the instrument itself as a musical source", and repeats the argument that the sounds are constructed through layers not riffs. In addition, and in contrast to Reynolds, Howells suggests that lo-fi bands such as Flying Saucer Attack "bring the whole notion of production values into question", and also that post-rock explores the relationship between structure and improvisation: "questioning structure and live reproduction through the struggle of improvisation".

Howells also contends that "Abandoning the linearity of 'the song' as a narrative device, many of these bands prefer to work through processes of dissonance, improvisation, repetition, and ambience". He attributes to the influence of rave culture that "music here is often utterly text-less, pure texture". Thus

Instead of rigidity: osmosis, impermanence, morphosis. We'd get engulfed in the thrill of the now through a shifting, moment-to-moment awareness.

...With vocals sometimes partially buried or rendered vulnerable, and that driving 4/4 backbeat removed, this is rock castrated, testosterone-free, the guts torn from it. This doesn't imply any weakness, just that it's increasingly open, less tunnel-visioned.

Howells continues, to suggest that this can be connected to wider social changes,

Just as contemporary (urban) experience is fragmented, utterly complex and multi-cultural, we believe that music should be too. This is the art of scavenging, being a chameleon, a nomad. ...our ultimate aim is a move towards: spontaneity, chaos, intermedia, multiple viewpoints; new situations and environments in which sounds can occur.
It is worth including some lengthy passages from Howells' declarations, to provide some insight into the promise of post-rock, as perceived by those involved in it. He begins (after quoting the Futurist Marinetti):

An argument against stasis and conservatism in favour of change, reactions; the displacement of tradition with novelty; focused meaning with decentred, environmental madness; acceptance with questioning. Let's get to a place of difference, open-endedness, chaos.

...The whiteboy/girl (Brit)rock in vogue all around us seemed dull and regressive, based on tradition, accepted language, conventions. ...inevitably spawning (and spawned through) a media-fed consensus of familiarity, we saw mostly boredom, narrow-mindedness, reverence, a tired kind of toothlessness.

Howells here affirms again his desire for change and disruption for its own sake, his antagonism to focused meaning and accepted language - in other words, his preference for jouissance over plaisir, and for spontaneity, as well as reiterating the typical zine writer's hostility to the mainstream media (and preference for the 'multiple viewpoints' of intermedia). He describes the post-rock opposition thus,

Others were attempting to force rock to finally collapse in on itself, splintering, breaking away from the stasis of conventional form and content (verse/chorus dynamics; the 4/4 beat; predictable changes, tunings, dynamics, production). Finding new colours and textures, NEW WEIGHTS AND NEW INTENSITIES [author's emphasis]. Scuttling out from under stones, working from the margins, in isolation, unconcerned with starlust or financial success, a network of outsiders began linking up, breeding, throwing wild sparks off one another, spinning out in new directions, discovering new allies, AN ALTERNATIVE ANCESTRY [author's emphasis].

Howells replicates Reynolds' arguments about the musical processes behind post-rock (beyond conventional rock), the lack of concern with outside recognition, and how this is a scene that yet is not a scene (a network of outsiders). He also discusses the number of clubs, album compilations and specialist radio shows which have
something of a post-rock interest. Howells’ use of the phrase “an alternative ancestry” is particularly significant, as it suggests something new and different - alternative - and yet with a history, and even a tradition of its own, as it has an ancestry. He continues to talk of “mad connections made”, as if to say the talent lies not in creating something wholly original, but rather making links between previously existing forms of music that are themselves a new way of looking at something. As Howells proceeds to provide the usual extensive list of what he terms “non-rock or rock that had scrambled its identity as such” - Krautrock, post-punk, dub, Industrial, avant-garde modern classical, art-jazz etc. - and its similarity to the lists provided by Reynolds becomes evident, the idea of an alternative ancestry becomes even more central. Howells describes “our history” (my emphasis), a clear reference to the idea of community, as

A diffuse, wide-ranging history of moments and methods where (through structural fragmentation; intensity; pure invention) codes, time or meaning were ruptured.

Again, Howells favours, in accordance with post-structuralist ideology, the rupturing of meaning, but this time he sets this in the context of a history - a series of past occasions when similar disruptions are presumed to have occurred. Yet, critically, to contend that the diffuse moments have an element in common, even if all that is shared is the irruption of meaning itself, is to generalise beyond the moments themselves, and attempt to formulate - or at least suggest the possibility of formulating - a definition of the thing known as ‘rupture of meaning’. By incorporating ‘rupture of meaning’ into meaning systems, into “accepted language”, its potency to go beyond established boundaries is dissipated.

Howells seems to have an awareness of this dilemma. He attempts to ‘deconstruct’ his own text by splashing certain paragraphs in an apparently random manner across the page, making it at times literally difficult to follow his argument, and by breaking it up with passages from other works (some pertinent to what is being written about, others of a seeming surreal irrelevance, doubtless a deliberate effect), strategies also adopted by Anderson in his Space Age Bachelor zine, and in Drunk on the Pope’s Blood (which also quote liberally from post-structuralist and surrealist
works). The ending of his commentary is quite explicit in its rejection of generalisation, for

In no way is this intended to be any kind of comprehensive survey or overview. Born out of love and hope and sheer fucking excitement rather than any academic intentions, this is merely an attempt to open things out, to encourage, and hopefully push towards fresher ground. Opposed to the generalizations of any scene, this is rather music as a myriad of sparkling possibilities. Each of these bands exist autonomously, alone in its vision. The affect of each is different: a series of tiny revolutions. ...post-rockers find themselves Marginalised precisely because they choose innovation rather than lining up in the stale discourse of rock (use of capitals selected by author).

However, by linking certain contemporary bands together, by suggesting a common set of ancestors, by using the term ‘post-rock’ itself, and by suggesting what these acts have in common, Howells is clearly contributing to the formation of a scene, even as he is stating his opposition “to the generalizations of any scene”. He is himself creating a particular cultural phenomenon, much as he may be loathe to admit it. His attempts to discuss the music(s) in question obviously go beyond ‘pure description’ anyway, but the essential point is that even such a descriptive approach itself would serve to actually construct that which it claims it is merely trying to give a voice to.

‘What is this thing called post-rock?'

This was actually the title of one (very) short zine given away free at a Mogwai gig situated on a boat on the River Thames in London in December 1996. Subtitled “A mini-fanzine about bands that do less for more”, it consisted of just two features, the article which gave it its title, and a joke piece on playing Tortoise records at the wrong speed.

The lead article, about the music scene in general, recognised that 1996 was the year that saw the general acceptance of the term ‘post-rock’. Accepting the significance of Reynolds, the zine quoted extensively from a definition of post-rock he had provided in New York Voice in 1995, namely that post-rock uses that most traditional of rock instruments, the guitar, in a non-traditional way by abandoning the
verse-chorus structure and the songwriter's narrative, and through the use of samplers and sequencers to create a form of music that is “organised around fascination rather than meaning, sensation rather than sensibility”. Whilst this matches the post-structuralist agenda of Reynolds and Howells, it is highly questionable whether an emphasis on sensation over meaning distinguishes this music from other rock.

The most distinguishing aspect of post-rock, according to the zine writer(s), is the new status placed on the audience. Paraphrasing Tom Cox of the New Musical Express, they suggest “you must listen for what you can’t hear, rather than what you can”. Their point is that more is demanded of a listener to post-rock, and this in turn raises the question of whether these bands can repay an audience’s attention - by providing a pleasurable experience - without reverting to more traditional forms. Unlike Howells and Reynolds, the concept of pleasure being considered here seems very much to be allied closer to that of ‘plaisir’ as opposed to jouissance.

Like Howells, the author(s) recognise the dangers of classifying by genre or scene, but argue this also has a positive dimension:

 Yet the general grouping of similar bands within a ‘scene label’ is useful - allowing the audience to discover new bands that operate within a broadly comparable musical environment.

A template forms

During 1995 and 1996, the insubstantiality of post-rock took on more solid form. If the summary article in Melody Maker’s end of year review, ‘Post-Rocking in the Free World’ (23/30 December 1995, p.48; no author is given, but the included attack on U.S. lo-fi and praise for sampladelia is suggestive of Reynolds) begins typically,

Post-rock isn’t so much a genre, as a state of dissatisfaction. It’s what happens when musicians who’ve grown up with guitars find themselves disgusted by rock’s retro-fixated stagnation.

then it soon provides evidence of definite boundaries around the term. Thus Pram and Flying Saucer Attack “both put out excellent albums... that basically fine-tuned their
established sound”. In these instances, the “state of dissatisfaction” has transmuted into an “established sound”. Moreover, the albums in question are considered by the writer to be both classically post-rock - the first artists discussed in a summary article solely about post-rock - and particularly praiseworthy examples of the music - “excellent”. Thus the development of an established sound cannot be presumed to be anathematical to post-rock as a genre.

Another group, meantime, are suggested to be so exceeding any established sound that they extend beyond post-rock itself. Thus “Techno Animal’s awesome May LP ‘Re-Entry’, took on techno and trip hop’s sampladelic production so thoroughly that it wasn’t so much post-rock, as beyond rock altogether”. The generic term here is becoming less open-ended and more precise, and to a certain extent the links to post-rave - to techno and hip-hop - are in the process of being severed (“it wasn’t so much post-rock”), even as the writer finishes the article by commenting, “At long last, the brightest Yanks are responding to the studio-science, rhythm-mutation and remixology of hip hop, techno and jungle”. The relationship to post-rave music appears to be growing more confused, and the association less of an obvious one, as the meaning of the label ‘post-rock’ takes on more definite overtones.

The years 1995 and 1996 saw an increasing awareness of the significance of Krautrock in the prehistory of post-rock. A number of fanzines featured summary articles about this music, paying particular attention to Can, Faust, and Neu. Reynolds wrote a two-page article about Krautrock (‘R U Ready to Krautrock?’) and the later bands influenced by it (not only post-rock acts) in the July 27, 1996 issue of Melody Maker (p.16/7). Julian Cope, ex- Teardrop Explodes and solo performer, published a book on the subject in 1995, Krautrocksampler, developing two articles originally penned for The Wire, which proved influential. The annual Melody Maker summary article about post-rock published on December 21/28 1996 actually had the title ‘Deutsch Courage’ (p.52).

Whilst the idea of post-rock as open-ended dissatisfaction with the status quo rather than as established sound formula is reiterated at this point, it appeared increasingly difficult to maintain. The ‘Deutsch Courage’ article begins, “You can bet that when a musical genre that was important for its attitude rather than its actual sound influences current artists, it’s those who beam in on the impulse and spirit of
that music, rather than slavishly trying to recreate its sound, who’re gonna be the most interesting.” Reynolds article about Krautrock ends,

Listeners are turning to it, not as a nostalgia-inducing memento of some wilder, more daring golden age they never lived through, but as a treasure trove of hints and clues as to what can be done right here, right now.
Krautrock isn’t history, but a living testament that there’s still so far to go.

However, such a close linking to a pre-established musical genre could only serve to delimit the definition of post-rock from its originally seemingly wholly open-ended beginnings (at least as a term). At the same time, the wider success of some post-rock acts suggested the growing awareness was not only of the history of the music, but in terms of how many people knew about this putatively non-commercial genre. Discussing Tortoise’s second album in ‘Deutsch Courage’, the writer states “What was weird is that everyone bought it”, remarks on their sell-out tour with Stereolab, and finishes by predicting (rather over-optimistically, as it happened) “Tortoise on ‘TOTP’”.

In an interview with Tortoise which includes particular reference to parallels with the post-punk music circa 1979 (Melody Maker, Feb. 3 1996, p.10-11), Reynolds remarks

Almost as soon as ‘rock’ consolidated its identity in the late Sixties, there’s been post- or avant-rock; for decades, a post-rock continuum has been running in parallel with the mainstream.

At this stage, the identity of post-rock had both widened to include, for example, post-punk and Krautrock, at the same time as the boundaries around the term were becoming more fixed and less open to negotiation. Increasingly, the label ‘post-rock’ was becoming associated with a particular type of sound: with musical outcomes, as opposed to simply processes. The success of Tortoise saw their particular brand gain predominance in the way the term was understood. ‘Post-rock’ became differentiated from ‘space rock’, as the two terms were used to categorise particular (recent) releases in specialist record shops, when formerly neither term had
been used as a category to sell records presumably as they would have been too ambiguous to mean anything to the buying public. By 1996, more and more bands of a similar persuasion were touring together and in the same year Virgin released the well-received ‘Monsters, Robots and Bugmen’ compilation of post-rock music. However, perhaps the clearest evidence of the meaning of post-rock solidifying can be found in the hostility the term faced from bands and critics alike from 1997 onwards, a hostility to the *label* itself which grew in intensity even as the fanbase for the music expanded, more self-identifying post-rock record labels and zines were formed (what could be described as the formation of a kind of scene or community, in opposition to Reynolds earlier speculations), and as the number of groups making this kind of music proliferated.

**Rejection of the term**

An interview with Trans Am, a band who had toured considerably with Tortoise, begins,

> We might be tempted to call it post rock, but Trans Am would really rather we didn’t.

That’s way too restrictive a label for this Washington DC trio, who dip their brush into the same tonal tar as, say, Autechre or Aphex Twin as often as they do that of Tortoise, Ui, Labradford and a whole host of other US bands who made a sharp left turn once they saw the signs reading ‘Rock: One Way Street Ahead’ (written by Sharon O’Connell, *Melody Maker*, Feb. 15 1997, p.15)

It is no surprise that any artist should not wish to have their art restricted in meaning and categorised so simply, but here it is apparent that the term ‘post rock’ has assumed a specificity which can alienate those tarred with its implications. The term no longer suggests open-ended musical exploration, but rather has too be rejected precisely because it is redolent of something very particular and confining. That the interview with the band starts with this clear dislike of the label is all the more telling when the article as a whole contains another summary feature about other post-rock acts, entitled “Seven more ways to reach post-rock nirvana without leaving your armchair...”.
In fact, this pattern of using the term ‘post-rock’ in an article, whilst at the same time suggesting the limitations of the label in terms of how it applies in this instance (particularly when the acts under discussion are being praised), has established itself as the norm, at least in Melody Maker and New Musical Express. This continues to the present day, as a review of a live gig by bands Billy Mahonie and The Wisdom of Harry amply testifies, beginning

Call it what you want: post-rock seems woefully unrepresentative now. As the recent Foundry Records compilation ‘Will Our Children Thank Us’ (for which this gig is the launch party) proves, many of today’s more experimental bands share little more than their own restless, investigatory spirits (written by Stevie Chick, New Musical Express, 3 April 1999, p.35).

Thus post-rock, a label originally coined precisely because it was “the only term open ended yet precise enough to cover all this activity”, in the words of Reynolds, has now been rendered obsolete because it is too specific to capture groups united only by their “restless, investigatory spirits”.

If the above examples reveal a dissatisfaction with the term, more and more criticism has been directed against the music itself, despite or rather precisely because of the expanding number of bands falling under the ‘post-rock’ umbrella. Often this is voiced simply in terms of fans with more mainstream tastes coming into contact with the music because of its proliferation and generally positive media coverage, but an increasing number of dissenting voices have attacked the music because it is not experimental enough. In an article disseminated in early 1997 on the Internet music zine Silencer (which developed from the print zine The Lizard) titled “The Last Post”, Lucy Cage complained about the lack of a cutting edge in more recent post-rock. She writes that “1996 was the year that Post Rock broke”, and “Looks like even the mainstream style slaves have got the idea about ‘Post Rock’ these days”, but bemoans “The simple fact that what’s being picked up on now (essentially the second generation of such stuff) isn’t good enough”. Cage pays tribute to “the canon of early 90s Post Rock” but attacks more recent artists for their lack of imagination and originality, demanding of them
They should be BETTER, better than Bark Psychosis, better than Stereolab, much better than Faust or Can or any hoary old hippy. (Listen! we've had Public Enemy and Tricky and Aphex Twin, we've decades more music than those poor Germans stuck for ever in the 70s. Of course we should make better music now. Roll on Time!)

Cage's criticism is exactly that the new generation of post-rockers sound like what has already been done - that post-rock has come to stand for a particular range of musical sounds, rather than the open-ended desire to explore novel territories it had previously been.

If the term 'post-rock' still retains some currency, then perhaps one sign of its ultimately terminal decline is to be found in the turn away from the label in the magazine that gave birth to it. The Wire has recently decided to use the term "avant rock" rather than "post-rock", because it feels the latter label is too associated with a particular musical movement. The editor of the magazine, Tony Herrington, devotes his 'Editor's Idea' column (Issue 181, March 1999, p.5) to a discussion of the significance and necessity of music categories, after noting the refusal of Ornette Coleman to be identified with jazz (for him, the "J word", as ambient is the "a word" for others). He then continues

Take that innocuous looking strip which runs along the bottom of the magazine's cover each month [a strip which includes reference to five musical categories commented about inside the magazine]. Read the text within it. Some time ago we changed that text, tweaked it, thinking no-one would notice. Wrong. One of my visitors [a foreign journalist] asks a question. With regard to that little strip [but also, it should be noted, in the reviews section of the publication itself], why did we change 'post-rock' to 'avant rock'?... OK, I'm ready for this, because I've been asked it before, believe it or not, and anyway, it's a variation on a query that seems to get lobbed my way with weary regularity..., i.e. why do we need music categories?

One answer to that takes me back to Ornette's comments: we don't, it's all about advertising, or rather marketing. But on a more benign level, music categories are also a form of shorthand which allows us all to cut to the chase
when we talk to each other about specific (or even non-specific) styles and genres of music.

An example: the text in that thin blue strip on the cover, it's a list of music categories, more or less, put there to give an indication of what a reader might find when they open us up. It doesn't say everything about the magazine or its contents, but it gives an idea, a flavour. Post-rock became avant rock because the latter felt more all-encompassing and able to accommodate the various strains of 'specialist' rock-based or inspired musics featured in the magazine, from Sonic Youth to the ReR back catalogue. The former tag, on the other hand, was specific to a style of music-making that had come to be associated with a loose collective of groups that emerged in the mid-90s and whose music utilised the tools and trappings of rock but inverted its dynamic, emphasising texture rather than rhythm, drones rather than chord changes, anonymity rather than ego, incorporating influences from a number of parallel initiatives such as Minimalist composition, Ambient electronics blah, blah, blah, blah. You see, it's easier just to say post-rock and be damned with it (it fits better on a magazine cover too).

It is worth quoting Herrington in full, as his commentary does not only reveal the extent to which the term post-rock had come to have a highly specific set of connotations, incorporating both musical process and musical outcome and a definite sense of period. The professional music journalist's argument also suggest the unavoidable nature of the confrontation between the refusal to be defined (by music-maker and often fan) and the necessity of using such shorthand definitions for the purpose of effective - or rather, rapid - communication.

Concluding Comments

This chapter has detailed the development of post-rock as a distinct musical genre with an identity of its own, as revealed in the meta-discourses which served to construct it utilised by a number of journalists, both professional and amateur, whilst acknowledging the particular influence of one of them, Simon Reynolds. More specifically, it has shown how a term originally coined precisely as a result of its open-endedness eventually fell into disrepute, as the label came to carry certain very
definite connotations. The chapter has also revealed that attempts to define the term invariably overlooked elements conventionally labelled by it, as post-rock, much like ambient before it, retained a meaning simultaneously specific and ambiguous. In this sense, the term itself could be perceived as being as ‘indefinable’ and ‘insubstantial’ as the individual musical pieces comprising post-rock, at least in the earlier phases of its development. There would appear to have been a deliberate desire to retain the ill-defined nature of the term, at least as far as the writers Reynolds and especially Howells are concerned, to avoid the implications of the development of a given ‘scene’. It has been discussed how such a desire relates to the post-structuralist thought which informs the arguments of both writers. The wish to escape the analytic approach is made very evident in the passage below:

American rock criticism is totally fixated on the notion of song-as-story, as autobiographical confession or pseudo-literary vignette. ‘Resonance’ is the big buzzword; music that has no text to interpret (whether sociological narrative, or the singer's individual neurosis) simply does not compute. Which is why America’s current crop of wholly or partially instrumental bands - Tortoise, Ui, Labradford et al - are so unusual, so refreshing, and so ignored in their native land. This is music that can't be analysed using Lit Crit or Social Studies techniques; metaphors from the pictorial arts or cinema seem more appropriate for these audio-sculptures, soundscapes, mood-mosaics and soundtracks-to-imaginary-movies. (Reynolds, interview with Tortoise, Melody Maker, February 6 1996, p.11).

Nevertheless, the term has been shown to have solidified quite markedly (enough that it be rejected by a magazine editor because it “was specific to a style of music-making...”), in association with a number of factors: (1) a growing awareness of antecedents, notably Krautrock, providing easier and better conventionally established definitions; (2) the expansion of the music - more bands, and more fans, requiring more effective and speedier communication about the phenomenon; (3) an increasing self-awareness on the part of the participants, as zines, record labels and mini-festivals with an appreciation of their links to a wider scene slowly emerge, as the “community of misfits” organises itself; and (4) the effect of marketing, as post-
rock became the title of a section in specialist record stores, and a way to package diverse artists together on compilation albums.

Ultimately, this section has revealed the failure of the original exploratory, experimental promise of post-rock, as the comments by Cage and Herrington particularly attest to. As post-rock became better, more cogently, defined, it appeared to lose some of the difference, the otherness - the possibility of jouissance, in other words - that had seemed to make it so exciting to some in the first place. However, as this seemed to correlate with the partial success of the music (as well as a more primed feel for what had already been done in the past), the question is raised over how necessary such a reduction in the scope and potential of post-rock was, for it to have achieved any significant effect on the mainstream (which is not to say it has anyway). And yet a still more pertinent conundrum may be to ask whether without such definition and growing self-awareness, post-rock could actually be said to have existed at all. For post-rock’s existence is predicated not on a shared cultural background related to patterns arising from social structural formations. Rather, post-rock operated and continues to operate as a number of quite diverse explorations in mini-scenes (in small parts of small towns) across four continents (there is no African post-rock as yet): a phenomenon both local and global. Any attempt to generalise across the scenes invariably will lose much of the essence of one or both (consider Fred Mills’ investigations into the geographically specific music labelled by others under the post-rock banner, of what he then generalised as the ‘Space Rock’ scene of Detroit and the ‘Psych Rock’ scene of Texas, in which he found marked differences in individual towns within the state). In this respect, post-rock mirrors hip-hop in its Frankfurt and Newcastle environs, as Bennett (2000) found.

Post-rock functioned primarily as a musical attitude, a wish to go beyond the limitations of rock, and was a term intended to generalise little more than that. That it now functions as something quite musically specific appears an extraordinary evolution, as the term has come to stand for precisely what it was earmarked to oppose. Nevertheless, it is precisely such a fate which also befell psychedelia, punk, indie and industrial music. Even the term ‘alternative’ has been used to market a particular type of music, with its own definite aural identity, and it has been known for artists to reject the terms ‘avant-garde’ and ‘experimental’ because they feel such categories are too suggestive of a certain sound that they do not wish to be identified.
with. However, the lack of an associated subculture with post-rock makes it a particularly significant case, in terms of a fuller understanding of the sociology of language. Post-rock is, at most, a postmodern subculture or 'post-subculture' in the sense indicated by Muggleton (1997), privileging ephemerality, fragmentation and incoherence, and shaped by media representations. Without the discourses of post-rock, the phenomenon could not truly be said to exist: it would seem to have no basis in social structure, in wider social change, at all (which punk and psychedelia certainly have been claimed to have). The discourses which surrounded it in fact constructed it. Those self-same discourses, as they solidified, then served to delimit that which they created, preventing it from fulfilling its original protocol. Post-rock, it may be observed, was truly hoist by its own petard - a 'music of the future' which came to occupy a significant, and very specific, section of the present.
CONCLUSION

In this concluding section, some final observations about how post-rock has been linguistically constructed will be made, before the findings are linked back to the theoretical concerns outlined at the beginning of the thesis, leading onto a wider argument about what some of these concerns suggest both for sociology as a scientific discipline, and for contemporary society more generally.

The linguistic nature of post-rock

Rather than summarising the various discourses discussed in the chapters presenting an ethnography of the language of post-rock, the focus here will be to elicit certain aspects of the findings of particular relevance to the theoretical interests of the study, as suggested beforehand. Five central findings emerged about the discourses surrounding post-rock, about how post-rock was linguistically constructed, which are worth paying particular attention to.

Firstly, post-rock has been, and continues to be, a tenuous concept and a term disputed, and sometimes rejected outright, by those labelled by it. It has had to compete with other terms which are meant to correspond with something similar, but not exactly the same. Local variations have been seen to be pronounced, but often overlooked in summary articles. Secondly, although not entirely free from flux even today, the term has solidified to mean something with a definite set of boundaries, when once it stood for little more than a sense of open-ended experimentation. Accordingly, descriptions of post-rock became increasingly settled over a period of time. Another critical and related point is that in the early stages of attempts to describe this music, the discourse of indescribability was especially prominent. This can be seen to complement the resistance to titling, and use of nonsense titling, by many of the artists actually making the music. Fourthly, even when descriptions extended beyond this relatively simple idea of the music’s indescribability, post-rock was still conceived as having a lack of clarity, of being at odds with an idea of solid structure. This was evident in the use of the ‘one thing and its opposite’ language device (the way the music was described as having qualities which are by their very nature mutually exclusive) and in the usage of the discourses of insubstantiality - for
example, of the oceanic, of dreams, and of movement (in that it is opposed to stasis). This is in turn related to a fifth fundamental point, namely that the discourses of post-rock were often of a very abstract and general level, the same descriptions being used in attempts to suggest the essence of this particular kind of music, as have previously been utilised to describe all music.

The critical theme underpinning these five points is the overwhelming evidence that the relationship between language and music is essentially an arbitrary one, certainly as regards post-rock. There was no obvious way of describing the sound of post-rock, which would successfully communicate the aural experience of listening to the music to someone who had not heard it, until after a period of time had elapsed the set of discourses solidified into near coherence. That the emotions aroused by post-rock music have a quality of vagueness and non-specificity peculiarly unique to the genre, over and above the vagueness of musical emotion in general, as suggested by, for instance, the reviewer of Stereolab’s single of the week (it made him feel “anxious and agitated and relieved and f***ed off and happy and confused and exhausted and exhilirated”), provides additional testimony to the difficulty of communicating the nature of post-rock. The use of private languages and personal references by many of the fanzine writers, communicating apparently little other than the impossibility of communication, but in fact demonstrating a peculiar eloquence in their “bursts of raw emotion”, testifies further to this.

Making meaninglessness meaningful

As has already been discussed, the idea that music and musical pleasures cannot be rationally understood, that music is abstract and non-denotative, an essentially private experience which has no essential need of a relationship with the reality of the society around it, has a long history. However, in the words of Frith,

what interests me here is another point - not music’s possible meaninglessness, but people’s continued attempts to make it meaningful: to name their feelings, supply the adjectives. (1996, p.262).

As Frith notes, “music is, in fact, an adjectival experience” (ibid., p.263), and he additionally discusses the possibility that “in describing musical experiences we are
obliged to apply adjectives, and that we therefore attach feeling words conventionally and arbitrarily to what is, in fact, a purely aural experience" (ibid., p.262). He continues later, “someone quite unable to read music can perfectly well convince us that they’ve ‘understood’ a work: they make sense of our own experience of it through their figurative description”, adding “This is the job of the rock critic, for example” (ibid., p.263). The significance of the role of ‘figurative description’, of the ‘adjectival experience’, in music clearly should not be underestimated, but as has been observed this may be a decidedly problematic task.

The evidence of the discursive history of post-rock reveals what happens when people attempt to convey the nature of a music for which no pre-established set of adjectives exists - they resort to clichés used to describe music in general or contend the music is indescribable (at least until the conventions become sufficiently generalised). Alternatively, if the people in question are writing for a fanzine, they can relish the opportunity - free as they are from the necessary obligation to communicate in a way others (either anyone at all, or specifically those outside their zine community) will comprehend and/or relate to - to associate the music with their personal experiences and describe it using a form of private language. Alternatively again, if the people in question are the ones who created the music, they can revel in the possibility of evading any meaningful description whatsoever, and fulfil the artist’s usual inclination to avoid being defined and therefore have the scope of their work limited. Of course, it should be stated that the discourses of space, of natural forces, of dreams, of the oceanic, of movement, of drugs, of science and technology and of insubstantiality in general were all utilised in the titles chosen by bands and in the zine articles and reviews, but the duty to make sense was not so present as for the professional writers (“the job of the rock critic”).

A number of features about post-rock (above and beyond music in general) can be seen as fundamental in its resistance to conventional description, which have made it a particularly interesting subject for a case study in this instance. A first point concerns the music itself: that this is ‘experimental’ music, or at least music which is made by groups and individuals consciously striving to produce something different to the mainstream, something new and original. This again returns to the argument about whether post-rock is a true genre at all, or an attitude of experimentation, and, as previously documented, it seems to have evolved from being the latter to becoming
the former over time. In its earliest incarnation, nevertheless, this inherently open-ended, undefined characteristic, must have made the task of adjectival description all the more difficult. Secondly, the lack of a clear social foundation, the absence of a relation to a subculture to provide a context to the creative outburst of sound-making, again serves to problematise easy description. Finally, the general lack of lyrics, places this music in the category of instrumental work. Frith comments that

> instrumental music came to be valued above vocal music for its ability to release feeling ‘from the confinements of prosaic everyday reality’ [quotation from Winn, Unsuspected Eloquence, 1981], that is, from its attachment to particular objects or states. (op. cit., p.254).

Instrumental music is even less representational than vocal music, it is contended, and thus even harder to describe. Answering the title of his essay “Why do songs have words?” Frith remarks “In a culture in which few people make music but everyone makes conversation, access to songs is primarily through their words. If music gives lyrics their linguistic vitality, lyrics give songs their social use” (1987, p.101, author’s emphasis). Less representational and apparently with less social utility value, the predominantly instrumental music that constitutes post-rock presents a further obstacle to description.

**A link back to the theoretical concerns**

The fundamental purpose of this research was to provide an enriched understanding of the relationship between music and language, by considering in some detail the evolving linguistic descriptions utilised around a particular newly developing musical genre. This was considered to be a fascinating question in its own right, both from a pragmatic perspective because categorisation and description of music is so key in how much of a wider appeal a novel, generally unheard, musical form would have, and because of what the relationship between music and language can tell us about what it means to be human, in the sense of how what have been most frequently conceptualised as our ‘emotional’ and our ‘rational’ natures intertwine. It was never conceived that such research could hope to resolve some of the fundamental philosophical questions underlying the longstanding academic interest in
this relationship, such as the question of whether musical forms can be seen as representative of social forms, or of whether the emotions aroused by music are socially constructed, discussed with necessary brevity in earlier chapters. All these issues certainly relate to the question of the arbitrariness or otherwise of the relationship between music and descriptions of it, itself a potent introduction to the irreducible complexities of comprehending the 'mind/ body' problem.

Nevertheless, these core intellectual dilemmas have a quite specific and significant resonance for the discipline of sociology. The post-structuralist arguments considered in the very earliest chapters represent part of an attack on the very possibility and even the desirability of providing a rational, objective understanding of societal trends. The ideas of Foucault, Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard and, especially, Barthes' theory of 'jouissance' were themselves echoed in the views of music writers such as Reynolds and Howells, to name but two notable examples. However, the potency of post-structuralism's critique of sociology is severely undermined, as was observed, by its internal paradox in considering the relationship between language and the non-rational (variously, the body, sex, death, madness, woman, jouissance or, as in this case, music). By utilising two quite separate arguments to undermine claims to the privilege of truth - namely the view that there is no sphere of reality outside language, because all reality is linguistically constructed, and holding that there is a truth about universal experience which can be located solely in the non-rational - an inherent contradiction in post-structuralist thought is evident. In this light, considering the relationship between music and language is particularly interesting.

Yet this is of more than philosophical interest. Increasingly evident in contemporary society are cultural trends favouring the non-rational - for instance, the rise of the 'new age' movement, emotionality and spontaneity being seen as true markers of selfhood rather than rational thinking, and the emphasis on hedonism in the self-representations of consumer capitalism (the ideology of 'vulgar romanticism' of rock clearly relates to this most appositely). Here is highlighted a disjunction between postmodernism as a way of understanding reality, or rather of coming to appreciate there is no one version of reality (related to the 'linguistic' side of post-structuralism), and the postmodern society, seen as a very real, objectively 'out there' phenomenon, an actual set of social structures.
It is this very idea of a relationship between a newly evolving social formation (or series of formations) and a philosophical and methodological approach to the understanding of issues of truth - classically understood in the sociological tradition as the relationship between structure and culture, but now greatly enriched by an appreciation of the particular significance of language - and how this relationship is in actuality quite ill-fitting but nonetheless absolutely essential to appreciate, which will serve as something of a leitmotif through the remainder of the chapter.

Language as action: constructing not describing

Perhaps the most critical analytic point to emphasise is that language is used not simply to describe 'post-rock', but rather plays an active role in constructing it. To state the matter baldly before further elucidation, it will be argued that post-rock is a linguistic construct, with no relationship to society at large whatsoever at least as far as the relationship between music and society is conventionally understood (the caveat in italics is crucial, and as perhaps the focal point of this entire study, will be returned to at some length in a moment).

As the chapter examining the meta-analyses of post-rock revealed, generalisations about this genre proved difficult to substantiate upon closer examination. It is possible to propose an argument that post-rock simply represents a quest to explode the rock canon, a desire to introduce new experimental approaches, but the same could be said of, for example, psychedelia or indie in their early days, and as the quotations from David Keenan, a professional journalist and member of Telstar Ponies, and Stuart Braithwaite of Mogwai attest, part of the essence of (some segments of anyway) rock has always been experimentation. It is possible to argue that post-rock represents a particular musical methodology and even (eventually) sound, but in reality the diversity of instrumentation, of attitudes to the use of technology makes generalisation difficult, and the simple fact that musically it is problematic to know when, for instance, 'nu psychedelia', Krautrock, oceanic rock, ambient, or math rock end, and when post-rock begins, suggests that what is unique about post-rock is not the actual music.

Instead, it can be contended that post-rock exists as a set of discourses, precisely those discourses already considered in previous chapters. That a discourse of 'indescribability' says little about what the music sounds like is obvious, but, as has
previously been argued, the use of discourses such as that of insubstantiality, of movement, and allusions to oceans and dreams, also offers little hint of the nature of this music, because such metaphors are used about music in general. This is music which (perhaps like all other music) cannot simply be described, rather a set of discourses had to develop around it, shared by the participants in post-rock. Hence post-rock has to be seen as constructed by the discourses, as opposed to being described by them. Initially, the descriptions simply alerted a reader that something different was happening here. The necessarily arbitrary relationship between music and language meant discourses could only be established by convention, not by direct reference to the qualities of the music itself.

The return of the social

It was maintained previously that post-rock was an example of the complete absence of the social in music, at least insofar as the realm of society has been conventionally understood. This is indeed music that it is not sociologically possible to analyse, as Reynolds has claimed, to his poststructuralist delight - that is, if one means the sociological tradition before discourse analysis and ethnomethodology. There is no possibility of subcultural analysis, in the Hebdigean sense, as this is "a scene without a location" which "severs itself from rock ‘n’ roll ideas like ‘youth’, ‘community’...", in the words of the man who first defined and demarcated the genre. Post-rock, then, is without a social basis and even without a clear material foundation - its existence is predicated on the set of discourses this thesis has set out to identify, and as such it is a linguistic construct.

Unquestionably, Reynolds’ claim that post-rock severs itself from the idea of community is much too strong. The presence of local scenes with the same musicians playing for different bands, certain groups sharing record labels (usually run by one or more of the band members) and playing gigs together, and the lack of a separation between performer and audience at many concerts (where bands join the audience when they themselves are not playing to watch the other acts) all suggest an element of community in the sense of shared ideals, tastes and determination to do something. This aspect of post-rock is best illuminated by its close association with fanzine culture. The idea of community is critical to the world of zines, but it is a community of the fiercely individualistic, where people are united (usually) only by a shared
desire for spontaneous self-expression - "a community of misfits" indeed, as Reynolds aptly (he does not mean the term 'misfit' as an insult) describes the post-rockers, the music critic belatedly recognising some sense of community after all.

Nevertheless, this is not a community grounded in social structure. The communities in question are localised and transient, depending on the continued will to participate of the individuals who comprise them. Again, post-rock as a pan-global phenomenon is a dubious concept - at best a deliberate (because useful in approaching the diversity of music) journalistic simplification, arguably at worst a marketing tool. Individual scenes, based around a local area and shared labels, band members and gigs, certainly have a definite reality outside of a discursive formation, but beyond this, post-rock is wholly a construct of language. It cannot be compared to the case of, for example, hip-hop, which also has definite local variations, but still retains a relationship in the main with the experience of ethnic minority groups in western society (both from the perspective of producers and consumers), as shown by, for example, Bennett (1995 and 2000), who demonstrated the attraction of Turkish youths in Germany to hip-hop. Post-rock is a 'post-subculture', to use Muggleton's terminology once more, shaped by media discourses and accented towards fragmentation and flux.

To reiterate, the reality of post-rock is the discourses which construct it. It is precisely this basis in discourse which allows for the return of the social in an understanding of post-rock. Discourses are intrinsically social, as they are a socially conventional analytic ordering of concepts. The return of the social is most obvious in the application of figurative description conventionally used to describe music in general specifically to post-rock. The impossibility of meaningful communication without usage of the pre-established discourses society already has at its disposal (in an attempt to overcome the inherently arbitrary relationship between music and language) is heavily suggested by the fact that such discourses have been seen to dominate descriptions of post-rock, notably in the accounts of the professional journalists.

It should be noted this was not an obvious or expected finding. On a personal level, as a fan of much of this music, I am myself very aware that descriptions using certain of these universal metaphors seemed to me to have a very particular resonance, to evoke in my mind something quite specific about what a certain release might
sound like, as someone who had not heard the piece in question but who was imagining what it might be like as a potential consumer. That this power of the words to evoke sounds in a reader's mind appears to rest primarily in convention seems very counter-intuitive to this particular avid reader of music magazines and buyer of obscure records he has not heard before (or rather has only heard through the words used to describe them in the magazines). An important caveat is that whilst these very general figurative descriptions have been applied to music in general, they are generally not applied to the rock, pop or dance music discussed in popular music magazines (at least only sparingly). The use of these apparently very general, and thus seemingly non-descriptive and unhelpful to the reader, terms in fact serves to signify something quite unusual about this music, to highlight its difference to mainstream rock. Yet despite this, it remains incontestable that the usage of these universal metaphors suggests a paucity of available language with which to discuss these sounds, an inadequacy rooted in the aspects of post-rock discussed above - most significantly, its simple newness, but also the experimentalism innate to the genre, the instrumental nature of the music, and its lack of connection with any subculture.

Of course, alternatives to such universalistic metaphors around music have also been identified. It remains now to be shown how the deliberate eschewing of the rational - and hence the social - displayed in the occasional explosions of private language in the fanzines and in the refusal to make sense or be named by a number of the groups themselves is itself very much a social phenomenon, the practices of individuals who are part of a specific society.

The strange case of the society which does not believe it exists

It has already been remarked upon that a number of cultural trends in contemporary society can be seen as favouring the non-rational and the emotionally spontaneous, associated with a new concept of the authentic self - of what it means for a person to believe they are being themselves. The intensely individualistic turn towards what Turner (1976) conceptualised as the impulsive self as opposed to the institutional self can be allied with this location of authenticity in spontaneity. The wider social and cultural trends that form the basis for this shift can be traced to the relationship between vulgar romanticism and consumer capitalism (Campbell, 1987) and have been generalized by some as part of a transformation into a postmodern
society (Featherstone, 1991, provides a good account of this debate), or part of the ‘cultural logic of late capitalism’ (Jameson, 1984). Such in-depth sociological analyses suggest that whether or not a new formation of society as a whole is in the process of developing, unquestionably the changing focus of what it means to be human for many today from a predominantly rational to an emotional conception involves wider cultural and arguably social structural factors. Figures as prominent as Giddens (1991) have re-thought notions of the ‘self’ and ‘intimacy’ in an effort to comprehend critical transformations in the cultural and social forms of life. Belgrad (1998), in his account of the history of the postwar avant-garde (including, amongst much else, the abstract expressionism of Pollock and Rothko, bebop jazz, gestalt therapy, beat poetry and Zen Buddhism), actually titles his book The Culture of Spontaneity (and one of the latest post-rock bands calls itself ‘Rothko’). Witkin (1995) describes Cubist art (which he sees as critical in the development of the avant-garde Belgrad focuses on) as one where “there are no fixed forms, just a miasma of shifting meanings, relationships and events, a vast panoply of allusive interconnectedness with the observer counted in as integral” (p.52). He also notes that “the perpetual revolution involved in the notion of an avant-garde art reflects [a] concern with operating at the level of a continuous process of becoming” (p.51, author’s italics), and relates this to the mode of social relationship which in his schema he terms ‘intra-action’ - “a mode of relationship in which the characteristic form is that of improvisation” (p.40, author’s italics). In the previously quoted words of one music group, “Disobey! It’s the law”.

In this light, to contend that an indulgence in what I have conceptualised as a form of private language, or a refusal to make sense and so communicate in a established pattern, rather than being a rejection of social mores is in fact precisely to uphold the new values of society, should not seem such an outrageous claim. It can indeed reasonably be argued that our society is fast becoming one which does not believe in its own existence, or at least one which feels its own presence as an unnecessary burden. To phrase the matter another way (before drawing out the disparate elements of the argument in more detail), and for now taking for granted a realist perspective because it helps to illuminate the unusual (in the sense of self-contradictory and seemingly too strange to understand) nature of what is being said: that which reality (the individuals which constitute our society) perceives as being
irreducible to reality - for instance, music as jouissance - is seen as being most real precisely because reality does not consider itself real (because estranged from its 'true' self). 'Indescribable' music, powerful emotions which cannot be defined (it is supposed) and acting for the moment (by its nature meaning without rational forethought) are held up as desirable because they cannot be explained away - the idea, again, that they are 'beyond language'. When Reynolds claims this is music which cannot be analysed sociologically, for him, this is the highest pinnacle of praise. The claimed impossibility of easy explanation or description, and even more so of sociological analysis, makes this music irreducible to an external reality (the rationally organised, social world). Unamenable as it is to the external realm, the music is thus perceived as more 'real', or authentic - music which can be explained with reference to the socio-political sphere has long been held in deep suspicion, in the New Musical Express and Melody Maker at least. Thus individuals in contemporary society, following the ideal type formulation hitherto outlined, hold in greater admiration those things which do not apparently relate to their everyday lives (rationally organised and socially oriented as those lives necessarily are). Believing their authentic self is rooted in spontaneous action, they invert the Hegelian contention, and claim 'The Real is the NON-Rational' and 'The Rational is the UNreal'. The 'true' self is considered fleeting, ephemeral, transient - insubstantial even.

It must be stated that I am not contending that there is a fixed self, that this view of the true self as being written anew in every new interaction is incorrect. The idea that the self is inherently transient, that the true self should be more correctly located in the condition of becoming rather than being, was first made by Heidegger (Being and Time), and I am in no position to contend with him on matters of philosophy. Rather, what I am trying to suggest is that the argument that the authentic self can only be that which is free (including free from society and free from formal rationality) is a view which should be related to the culture and society in which such ideas were formulated and came to prominence (even, or rather especially, if such ideas are held by many to be self-evident today, who are unaware as to the origins of their beliefs).

The post-structuralist position is, in a sense, an elaboration of this same point. Attacking claims to truth, by opposing both the idea of an external reality (including society) and the possibility of rationally understanding that reality (including by
sociological methodology), the post-structuralist position is itself undermined by its fetishising of the non-rational, its privileging of jouissance. This leads to the fundamental opposition between language and jouissance (incorporating the other non-rational categories - the body, madness et al.) that introduced this thesis. Such an impasse can only be resolved, in my opinion, by recourse to the rejected category of the social order - the return of the social. This can be achieved by utilising the methodology of discourse analysis - an approach not predicated on the idea of a reality outside linguistic constructions of it, but which still allows for a consideration of the role of social factors because the very nature of a discourse is that it is available to agents in society (not in the sense of social structure, but a more fluid conception). Though the possibility of self-expression purely as private language remains, ultimately it is precisely through language that the social is allowed to return and retake a position of importance in an understanding of what it means to be human. Language, discourse, is by its very nature inherently social and rational - that is the essence of meaningful communication.

Thus the perspective favouring the non-rational and the non-social is itself the product of a very specific set of relatively recent social and cultural changes - "the culture of spontaneity" indeed. Witkin, whose idea that a significant contemporary mode of social relationship is 'intra-action' was introduced previously, explicitly states that in his formation of this concept of different modes of social relationships is "a critique of the interactional model of social relationships which is the cornerstone of classical sociology. [because]...this model of social relationship is generally seen as the form of sociality and yet, when applied to either 'tradition' or 'modernity', it proves wholly inadequate to the task of theorizing either" (op. cit., p.32). Nevertheless, Witkin retains a firm belief in the relevance of social structure as a variable related to these changes in modes of social relationship, in this case, from 'interaction' to 'intra-action' - an understanding that social factors are at the root of the (relatively recent in human history) emphasis on 'becoming' and 'improvisation'.

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28 A note on my position on the explanatory power of the category 'social structure': it is not necessary to believe in such a thing as an objectively 'out there' social structure for the purposes of this research - the return of the social I have been speaking of comes, in this instance, through the category of 'discourse'. This does not mean that I believe that the idea of social structure is misleading or irrelevant; rather, the point has been to provide a riposte to the post-structuralist critique of sociology by using its own analytic categories - its focus on language in particular - rather than utilising analytic categories it would refute as non-existent anyway.
The words of Elias seem particularly apposite, as his concept of the ‘controlled de-control of emotions’, discussed in the section on the sociology of emotions, resonates with significance, suggesting as it does that the freeing up of the emotions that has marked our society in particular over the past century is far from being some ‘natural’ outburst of feeling, but has rather had a definite order (and social basis) to its development. This is not the age of spontaneity, then, but the age of the ‘spontaneity workshop’ (and to talk of an age of spontaneity is intrinsically to locate this sudden upsurge of feelings within a given period, a certain social framework).

Final thoughts

There have been two fundamental aims of this research. One, an empirical concern, has been simply to reveal and discuss the discourses of post-rock, and by so doing to demonstrate that these discourses have an order and pattern to them. The second, grander target, has been to suggest that in this revelation of the order and pattern in the discourses, the possibility of the continued analytic relevance of the discipline of sociology is maintained.

As such, it is hoped that this research represents in some small way a defence of sociology, by showing that in precisely those areas of life sociology might be conceptualised as having the least relevance, the subject remains highly significant and pertinent. This is so in a study which has honed in on the so-called ‘private’ areas of music and emotion (and especially of jouissance), and on a genre lacking in the social structural or subcultural aspects of interest to traditional sociology. The essential point is that even in such an extreme case as this one, examining an aspect of human life in which the main protagonist (in the sense of the primary definer of the discourses in question) declares openly his view that “This is music that can’t be analysed using... Social Studies techniques” (Melody Maker, February 6, 1996, p.11), sociological analysis still has a major contribution to make. Such a claim is confirmed by the increasing prominence of studies of the sociology of the body and the sociology of emotions in addition to a growth in the sociology of music itself. The sociology of music and youth cultures has been reinvigorated by the use of conversation analysis in

29 Two or three years ago, I came across an advertisement for something calling itself a spontaneity workshop, in which people were invited to join in order to learn how to behave spontaneously. The somewhat absurd and counter-intuitive idea behind this - that there are rules of spontaneity which can be identified and taught - appears considerably more reasonable now.
studies of youth 'subcultures' (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995), and by the new perspectives of Redhead, Thornton, Muggleton, Bennett et al. stressing the constructive rôle of media discourses, the significance of local factors (an admission of fragmentation) and the critical importance of language.

In this sense, this thesis is a small effort to assert the continued relevance of sociology even in the light of the post-structuralist critique of the primacy attributed to the categories of the rational and the social. In a society whose very structure seems to be evolving in such a way as to emphasise the transient elements of human life, as a rapidly changing society highlights that much in our lives can not be seen as the product of an established order, that the fluidity and impermanence of a conversation or of a throwaway magazine article may contribute more to the construction of a situation than the stable references of social structure, the argument for sociology itself to mutate into another form appears compelling. But as a final thought it is worth bearing in mind that sociology and rock music may have something in common. Both have at their heart an exploratory impetus, a resistance to closure and an inherent diversity of approaches, making them rather well adapted to the relativism of a society that may be postmodern or perhaps just a little more modern than it used to be. Just as the claims of the existence of post-rock as a new art form separate to and distinct from rock may be rejected (as, it has been previously shown, they have been by many post-rockers themselves), so the clamour for some kind of post-sociology may ultimately prove premature.
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