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UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

PhD BY PUBLICATION

ROB CHAPMAN

A CRITICAL REVIEW

SYD BARRETT : A VERY IRREGULAR HEAD

ORIGINALLY SUBMITTED. DECEMBER 2011

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INTRODUCTION

This Literature Review contextualises the work I undertook for '*Syd Barrett: A Very Irregular Head*,' (1) a 140,000 word biography based on the life of the musician Syd Barrett, lead guitarist, vocalist, and principal songwriter in the original line up of Pink Floyd. The book is based on two and a half years of focussed research, carried out between January 1997 and August 2009. During this time I interviewed family, friends, schoolmates, fellow college students, musicians, artists, and admirers from every stage of Barrett's life, from his earliest days growing up in Cambridge, through his period as an active musician and pop star, to his final years as a reclusive and enigmatic figure in his home town. However, these 65 interviews comprise only one element of my research. In addition I utilised an extensive range of primary and secondary source material, and the bibliography for the book runs to some 49 texts. (See appendix.) I also drew upon significant audio and video material including rare and hard to find television transmissions, and archive and bootleg recordings, many of which are not in the public domain.

I was commissioned to write the book by Faber and Faber in January 2007. My editor Lee Brackstone has been responsible for bringing an impressively varied roster of popular music books to Faber in recent years, including critically lauded titles such as *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* by Jon Savage (2007), *Bring The Noise* by Simon Reynolds (2007), *ReMake/ReModel* by Michael Bracewell (2008), and *Turn The Beat Around* by

Peter Shapiro (2009). My own book was scheduled for publication in 2010, a year that also saw Faber publish *The Blue Moment* by Richard Williams, *Electric Eden* by Rob Young and *Apathy for the Devil* by Nick Kent.

The sheer diversity of the above list (esteemed anthologies, books about Disco, Roxy Music, Miles Davis, the history of youth culture and the evolution of folk music) is just a small sample of a prestigious portfolio that stretches back to *The Faber Book of Pop* anthology, (ed. Hanif Kureishi and Jon Savage. 1995) and *The Faber Companion to 20th Century Popular Music* (ed. Phil Hardy. 2001.) This illustrates both the high standard of popular music books published by Faber and Faber and the equally high standard of work they expect when commissioning new titles.

I delivered a first draft of 160,000 words in the summer of 2009. This was subsequently edited down to 140,000, and the resulting work was published in April 2010. Da Capo (2) published an American edition in October 2010, and an 11 cd audio book of the complete unabridged work, narrated by Simon Vance, was published by Blackstone Audio (3) in the same month. Spanish and Italian language editions are due to be published in 2012. Upon publication in the UK the book was reviewed by every British and Irish broadsheet newspaper. It was also reviewed in many UK music magazines, including all of the prestigious monthlies (Mojo, Uncut, Word, Wire, and Q). In addition it was reviewed in several other major publications including The New Statesman, The Times Literary Supplement, and The Irish Times. The book

was almost universally well received and praised for its erudition and the new and fresh insights it brought to Syd Barrett's life and work.

Sean O'Hagan in *The Observer* stated, "Chapman has unravelled the skeins of rumour, exaggeration and anecdote that have been wound so tightly around Barrett... (he) is very good on the array of almost exclusively literary influences that made Barrett such a singular – and definably English - songwriter, citing his debt to Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Hilaire Belloc, Kenneth Grahame, and even James Joyce." (4)

Sam Taylor in the *Daily Telegraph* said that "this is without doubt, the most serious and intelligent of the four Barrett biographies so far published... it is particularly good at contextualisation, explaining the social and political roots of the London psychedelic scene, and detailing Barrett's musical and literary influences." (5)

Toby Litt in *The Guardian* suggests, "the most interesting sections of the biography are tangential to the music but integral to the argument. Chapman sketches a clear picture of the second generation boho Cambridge which nurtured the young Roger Keith Barrett" and adds "much of this countercultural territory has been gone over again and again... but Chapman has gone beyond the usual lags and got some fantastic insights." (6)

Mike Barnes in *Wire Magazine* says "his critical analysis is inspired. His panorama of what he calls Barrett's 'found world', an unprecedented meeting

of a whimsical English tradition and modernist techniques, is impressively researched.” (7)

Mark Paytress in Mojo Magazine says that ‘A Very Irregular Head’ is “the best written, the most accurate and by far the most incisive account of the man’s life and work... The result is a brilliant piece of scholarship. Chapman has well-attuned ears, a vast critical palette on which to draw, and an understanding of the literary canon that repeatedly gives new meanings and insights to our understanding.” (8)

Adam Lee Davies in Time Out notes “though Syd has been the subject of various biographies, none has approached his peculiar life, inspirations and struggles with both drugs and mental illness with anything like the sensitivity or rigour of Rob Chapman’s heavyweight account.” (9)

Ian Thomson in the TLS says, “Without doubt Chapman’s portrait is the most sympathetic and reliable yet published. It is well written and impressively researched.” (10)

Roy Wilkinson in Word Magazine says, “Chapman aims miles beyond another reprisal of the mindmashed Syd mythography. His account is rich on pretty much all fronts – analysis, social context and revelation.” (11)

When the paperback issue was published in March 2011 Steve Burniston in the Guardian wrote “this erudite biography contextualises and debunks much of the often absurd folklore. However it’s the books wider canvas that elevates

it above conveyor-belt rock biography.....It's a passionate well argued case which seeks to locate Barrett within a cultural lineage that includes Lear, Grahame and Carroll. Chapman is also compelling in his description of the social environment of Cambridge that facilitated Barrett's talent." (12)

Even John Walsh, in an otherwise dismissive review in *The Independent*, finds time to say, "You won't read a better account of the Cambridge intelligentsia of the 1950s, or the wacky countercultural events of the 1960s than here - the Wholly Communion poetry readings, the Spontaneous Underground parties. Chapman offers some genuine insights, such as the fact that all Barrett's literary heroes – Lear, Carroll, Belloc and Kenneth Grahame – lost a parent at an early age, like him. Their works are full of "disembodied identity, a dream-like sense of the self in limbo... rootlessness, restlessness, rejection, detachment, escapism". (13)

I have selected the above quotations not for their platitudes but because they highlight two of the key areas in which my biography makes a distinctive contribution to the existing literature, namely the depth and breadth of research and analysis, and the separation of fact from myth.

There had previously been three other biographies of Syd Barrett, not four as Sam Taylor suggests. These are *Crazy Diamond : Syd Barrett & the dawn of Pink Floyd* by Mike Watkinson and Pete Anderson (Omnibus Press. 1991. Updated 2006) *Lost in the Woods : Syd Barrett and the Pink Floyd* by Julian Palacios (Boxtree. 1998) and *Madcap :the half life of Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd's*

lost genius by Tim Willis (Short Books. 2002) In addition there have been several books about the Pink Floyd, ranging from sessionographies to biographies, which also cover aspects of Syd Barrett's musical and creative life. None of these books attempts such a wide ranging analysis of Syd Barrett and his cultural milieu, and there is very little in the three Barrett biographies that is particularly substantial or worthy of serious critique. Only Julian Palacios makes a concerted attempt to contextualise Syd Barrett's work, but his book is spoiled by an unwillingness to sift worthwhile information from mere conjecture. This inability to 'see the wood for the trees' and to weigh research findings appropriately is a common fault in many rock biographies. For most of the time *Lost In The Woods* reads like a typically unwieldy first draft. It is poorly edited and there appears to be a complete lack of proofreading or copyediting (common faults in many rock books) with many names incorrectly spelled and dates frequently wrong. Interview quotations from other journalistic sources are often inaccurately transcribed, (14) as are interviews lifted from television programmes. Even the quotation from *The Wind In The Willows*, (15) which heads the opening chapter is incorrectly transcribed. This sets the tone for the rest of the book, which is littered with errors, far too numerous to mention.

Both Watkinson & Anderson's and Willis's book are morally and ethically dubious. Both make light of the fact that they effectively stalked or staked out Syd Barrett, during his final years, when he was not in the best of mental and physical health, and was living a reclusive life back in his hometown of Cambridge. Willis not only doorsteps Barrett, in tabloid press style, but

bookends his biography with details of this brief and insubstantial encounter. He then used this episode as the unique selling point of his book in subsequent publicity interviews. Watkinson and Anderson's account is equally pernicious. On pages 153-155 of their book they describe how they pursue Barrett by car from his home to the shops and back again where they, like Willis, then doorstep him. One will learn much about the pathology of fandom from such encounters but little about Syd Barrett's merit as a creative artist. Both books rely on anecdote and rumour for their narrative and neither engages in any depth with the body of work that Barrett produced.

When I first submitted my proposal to Faber and Faber I was determined to address such issues. I made two key pledges in the proposal:

1.) That I would place Syd Barrett the creative artist at the centre of my story and analyse his songs in more depth than previous accounts, and place them in their literary and musical context. I had a clear idea of where this lineage would be from the outset, based on a lifetime's interest in Barrett's work.

2.) That I would fully address the myths and lurid speculation that have grown up around Syd Barrett's work and his reputation.

I believe that I achieved both of these undertakings successfully. In fact I went far beyond this initial brief, making (and discovering en route) many new and fresh connections between the work of Syd Barrett and the Pink Floyd and the wider cultural context they operated within. I would like to draw attention at

this point to four key aspects of research in my book, which are completely original:

1. I precisely locate the source material for the cut ups and found materials, which Syd Barrett used in some of his art work and songs. See for instance my discussion of the *Fart Enjoy* art booklet (16) and my in depth analysis of the source material used in the song *Octopus* (17).

2. I precisely locate Syd Barrett's songs within a literary tradition that goes back to Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, Kenneth Grahame, and Hilaire Belloc. These are not mere impressionistic comparisons. I draw very precise parallels between the art and life of these men and the art and life of Syd Barrett. I also explore the emotional resonance of Victorian and Edwardian childhood literature and its specific influence on English psychedelic music of the mid 1960s.

3. The majority of Syd Barrett's musical and lyrical influences do not stem from the traditional rock and roll and rhythm and blues sources, normally applicable to his generation. Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Hilaire Belloc, and Kenneth Grahame are the most commonly acknowledged influence on Barrett's song writing, but as my research shows he also drew upon earlier sources such as the English pastoralists, Mother Goose rhymes and Elizabethan verse. The techniques utilised in Barrett's song writing also find echoes in the Imagist and Symbolist schools of poetry. He was also influenced by methods which he consciously borrowed from the literary avant-

garde, particularly cut ups and automatic writing, and was directly inspired by the textual innovations of sound poet Bob Cobbing and the English beat poet Spike Hawkins. I make these connections explicit in my book. In fact *A Very Irregular Head* is the first book to reveal Syd Barretts's friendship with Spike Hawkins and their shared interest in cut ups and other avant-garde techniques. It is, as Mike Barnes notes in his review, the application of modernist techniques to traditional material (nursery rhymes, fairy tales, etc) that makes Barrett such an interesting and unusual case study within rock and roll.

4. My book also for the first time draws direct parallels between the music of the Pink Floyd and wider avant-garde tendencies that came to fruition in the 1960s. This is not just a question of stylistic similarity or geographical and sub-cultural proximity. In particular I foreground the influence of the group AMM on Syd Barrett, particularly on his use of 'table top' guitar techniques, which were learned from AMM guitarist Keith Rowe, who in turn adapted them from his fine art schooling and the work of Jackson Pollock. AMM members Rowe and Lawrence Sheaff provided me with an abundance of new and previously unaided philosophical discourse on the relationship between liberation in painting and liberation in music.

Aside from these distinctive and original contributions to our understanding of Syd Barrett's musical and artistic oeuvre my biography also corrected significant errors in previous Barrett books. For example:

1. I corrected previous accounts of where Barrett's nickname 'Syd' actually came from. He was born Roger Keith Barrett and was known as 'Roger' until his early teens. All previous books have erroneously claimed that the nickname came from a Cambridge jazz musician called Sid 'the beat' who played at a jazz club Barrett frequented when he was 15 or 16. In fact as my research shows it was bestowed upon him much earlier by school friends at scout camp when Barrett was about 13. It might seem a fairly minor matter, but as I indicate in *A Very Irregular Head* it is all part of a particular construction of the early myth life of Syd Barrett which gives undue attention to the hip iconography of the beat poets and jazz music at the expense of other more popular tastes and commonplace interests.

2. I corrected the timeline of places that Syd Barrett lived when he first moved to London. All previous accounts suggest that he resided at an address in Tottenham Street, off Tottenham Court Road, and then moved to Mike Leonard's house at Stanhope Gardens in Archway, where he roomed with other members of the Pink Floyd. In fact the reverse is true. It speaks volumes about the paucity of credible research that biographers cannot even get such a basic detail as the order of Syd Barrett's living accommodation correct. Again this might seem like a minor and pedantic matter, but it impacts considerably on the chronology of Syd Barrett's artistic development. At Stanhope Gardens he participated in Mike Leonard's sound and light show experiments, which had such an integral influence on the development of the early Pink Floyd. Later, at Tottenham Street, he was introduced to the I Ching and other arcana by his esoterically inclined landlady Ella O'Connell. The

order is important. All previous accounts of Syd Barrett's artistic development paint a picture of a teenage prodigy, writing songs when he was 16. I show this to be untrue. Barrett came late to song writing. Painting, guitar playing (and guitar techniques and an experimental mindset borrowed from painting) were his earliest interests. The songs came later.

3. With the above in mind I corrected a significant error in Tim Willis's book where, due to a misreading of Libby Gausden's letters from Barrett, he erroneously attributes his earliest songs to 1964, when they were in fact written a year later. Barrett rarely dated his correspondence with Libby. By painstaking and meticulous research I was able to establish the correct timeline of these letters. (18)

Those are just three examples of simple factual corrections, but they all illustrate significant omissions in previous research, and how readily music biographers replicate the work of others without meticulously crosschecking for accuracy. The worth of a well-researched biography is based as much on what is left out as what is included. I omitted several stories included in previous accounts, because they were simply anecdotes that added little or nothing to our wider understanding of the life and work of Syd Barrett.

Similarly if I could not establish the reliability of a previously aired story it was left out. For instance, Libby Gausden, who gave me invaluable help by loaning her cache of letters from the young Syd, tells a story in previous biographies of an encounter he had with Mick Jagger when the Rolling Stones, by now already successful, fulfilled an obligation to play at a small

village gig in Cambridgeshire in 1964. Despite prolonged research I have been unable to find any reference to this gig anywhere and suspect that either it did not happen at all, or that the event is a result of faulty timelines and/or incorrect memory. Similarly an anecdote aired in previous biographies tells of Roger Waters and Syd Barrett returning by train from London to Cambridge after seeing the Rolling Stones play a concert with Gene Vincent. On the journey home Barrett allegedly sketches out on a paper napkin the equipment they would need if they ever formed a band. The anecdote may well be true (although again it adds little to our understanding of Barrett as a musician) but I have been unable to find any occasion where the Rolling Stones shared a bill with Gene Vincent, therefore the story was not included. I have been similarly thorough with numerous other stories too, all of which have been eliminated as insubstantial or incorrect.

Crucial to the construction of my book's narrative is the way I have gone about utilising interview material. I am well aware of the problematic nature of face to face interviews and the wariness with which they are regarded in the specialised field of academia, and will return to this issue in more detail presently, but from the outset I need to stress that implicit in the methodology I applied to my own work was the filtering of all reminiscence and recall. I was careful to rigorously cross check the veracity of all anecdotes offered in interviews. Memory is a notoriously faulty mechanism. Recall and evocation (of events, epochs, ideas) are prone to a multiplicity of distortions and exaggerations. Distance often telescopes events, and hindsight contrives purpose or intent where none might have existed. All of this needs to be borne

in mind when analysing books or articles that rely on reminiscence for their primary source material. I believe that the advantages of using interview material greatly outweigh the disadvantages, but I also maintain that interview material has to be rigorously critiqued, carefully edited, and appropriately contextualised. Too many music biographies simply rehash previously used material, replicate received wisdom, and compound unchecked errors. I believe that these exacting criteria alone separate my work from the majority of rock biographies.

Syd Barrett's life and work represents an unusual if not unique case study within the history of rock music, and from the outset I was determined not to write a conventional rock biography. I took much of my initial impetus from sources outside of rock literature and would contend that the resulting work is closer in spirit, emphasis, and style to a literary biography. My conscious working models for this approach were Richard Ellman's *James Joyce* (19) and Jonathan Bate's *John Clare: A Biography*. (20)

Ellman's Joyce biography and Bate's book about John Clare are exemplary works, highly detailed, exhaustively researched, and largely lacking in supposition. There is a device, often used in literary and historical biography, and equally prevalent in rock literature, where the writer applies conjecture in order to contrive or justify a line of enquiry. The device often involves using such stock stylistic tropes as "one can well imagine" or "this may have been the very place where" and is as much beloved by serious historians as it is by popular (and populist) ones. My book contains no such instances of this

device. Nor have I contrived literary or historical connections without strictly contextualising them first. The reader might take issue with the strength or validity of those literary or historical connections, but that is an argument about emphasis not contrivance. Indeed in some cases I have completely discounted previously cited influences – J.R.R. Tolkien for instance, who is routinely mentioned in every previous book or article about Syd Barrett. I can find no tangible evidence of a Tolkien influence anywhere in Syd Barrett’s work. Even when my interviewees cite a comparison with a major literary or artistic figure I have been careful to always include the respondents’ or my own qualifiers. For instance on page 128 of *A Very Irregular Head* Andrew Rawlinson states “Syd is quite Picasso like” but goes on to say “I’m not comparing him with Picasso”, and makes it clear that the comparison is in the approach not the work. Similarly on one of several occasions when I evoke James Joyce (21) I am careful to say “it would be somewhat fanciful to make too many comparisons between James Joyce and Syd Barrett”, and only draw parallels in the themes of Joyce’s juvenilia and Barrett’s songs. When I cite John Clare later in the book (22) I do so with the proviso “the parallels between John Clare and Syd Barrett, as with most of Syd’s literary forebears are as much in the life as they are in the art.” As the passage suggests, this is one of several occasions where I am careful not to make direct and potentially spurious comparisons between the work, emphasising instead life and context.

Of all the areas of conjecture surrounding Syd Barrett’s life the one that has led to the most ill-informed and lurid speculation has been the issue of his

mental health. A plethora of sham-psychology provides the narrative drive for numerous books and articles about Syd Barrett. For instance it has frequently been posited that he had the condition known as 'synaesthesia'. This speculation is based on little more than Syd's sister Rosemary suggesting it as a possibility, rather than asserting it as a medical fact (23), and half-remembered testimonies, attributed by Tim Willis to former band mate Bob Klose, who supposedly remembers Syd describing a C chord as yellow (24) and members of the Soft Machine, who allegedly remember him using expressions like "Perhaps we could make the middle darker and maybe the end a bit more middle-afternoonish because at the moment, it's too windy and icy" (25). Based on these unverified anecdotes biographers have presented the slimmest of hypotheses as proof of a medical condition.

I do not avoid the issue of Syd Barrett's mental illness in my book. Indeed on page 185, during a discussion about the changes in his musical output which begin to occur from the summer of 1967, I emphatically state "this is not to make light of Syd's subsequent problems, *which were indisputably severe and lasted a lifetime*, but to reduce his post-Piper output to a mere 'effect' of psychological imbalance does scant justice to the extraordinary sequence of songs he wrote in the late summer and autumn of 1967." (emphasis mine)

This key passage is vital to an understanding of the way in which I set out my analysis. I precisely chart the way in which madness gradually becomes Barrett's 'dominant status', to use the sociological term, and how, as I put it "his fragile psyche rather than his muse became the dominant concern as evaluation of Syd the songwriter took a back seat to speculation about Syd

the casualty, as if somehow his increasingly complex and convoluted imagery was merely a symptom of mental decay". (26)

I devote a substantial portion of *A Very Irregular Head* to an examination of the mythologizing of Syd Barrett. In Chapter Nine, *Make Your Name Like A Ghost*, I examine all the elements that have gone into the creating of the myth. I have been particularly critical of much of the mystique that surrounds Syd Barrett and have directly challenged, and in many cases corrected or significantly amended assertions that have appeared in previous Barrett biographies, magazine and newspaper articles. This has not been carried out in a spirit of zealotry or revisionism. In each specific case I have drawn directly upon historical material (bootleg tapes, rare TV footage, first hand accounts) in order to critique the conventional narrative of the 'rock casualty', and the way in which this has been applied to Syd Barrett to create an archetype of the tortured artist. In Chapter Nine of my book I locate two specific works as being the source for the majority of 'Syd myths'. One is the journalist Nick Kent's 5,000 word five page feature 'The cracked ballad of Syd Barrett' which first appeared in *NME* on April 13th 1974. The other significant source is Jonathon Green's '*Days In The Life*' anthology, first published in 1988, which devotes five pages to Barrett, concentrating almost wholly on aspects of his drug use and mental breakdown.

Another major consideration in my book is Barrett's immediate social, creative and cultural milieu, initially in Cambridge, and later in London. Barrett's background and the social and cultural activities of his wider circle of friends

and associates represents a microcosm of the wider middle class cultural revolt that was taking place in the 1950s, which anticipated many of the more widely acknowledged cultural initiatives that were articulated in the 1960s. I have examined in detail the precise changes that were taking place in the English grammar school and public school system in Cambridge in the 1950s that made so many of the later social and cultural changes possible. Given that many of the cultural changes of the 1960s had their roots in the previous decade I have avoided replicating some of the more over-rehearsed and contentious arguments that normally arise when analysing the counterculture. Toby Litt acknowledges this in his Guardian review when he notes, “much of this countercultural territory has been gone over again and again...but Chapman has gone beyond the usual lags and got some fantastic insights”. (27) I believe that I have achieved this through taking a rigorous approach to my source material, particularly the face-to-face interviews I carried out. As I have already indicated, many of the testimonies of 1960s ‘survivors’ need to be carefully critiqued (and in some of the more outlandish cases discounted) and I think I successfully managed this in my work.

Another major theme in my book is the manner of Syd Barrett’s withdrawal from the rock world. There is no rags to riches to rags to redemption story here, a convenient narrative arc which drives the chronology of so many rock biographies, and indeed Hollywood biopics (28) Nor did Barrett die young in the manner of Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Nick Drake, Kurt Cobain or Jeff Buckley. Barrett simply withdrew, and withdrawal, either as a conscious strategy or as a consequence of more debilitating factors, is, as

Roland Barthes contends, what society can deal with least.(29) All kinds of theories have been offered in order to explain what Keith Rowe refers to as Barrett's 'reclusement' (30) and I have attempted to contextualise this withdrawal by drawing upon a wide range of material - everything from first hand testimony from friends, family and neighbours, to more theorised accounts, for example Susan Sontag's essay '*The Aesthetics of Silence*', (31) and the artist John Latham's various pronouncements on instantaneity and destructive art. (32)

Finally I believe I have successfully accounted for Syd Barrett's continued appeal to successive generations of musicians and music fans. The particular notion of 'Englishness' which he represented, and the specific art school techniques which he brought to bear on his work, have found resonance with a wide range of bands and artists. An active lineage can be traced from the work of Brian Eno and the German 'space-rock' pioneers of the 1970s, through post-punk, post-rock, alt-rock, and Brit pop, through to many aspects of contemporary Improv.

As I indicated at the outset, up until my biography was published there was not a plethora of credible literature on the life and work of Syd Barrett, and hardly any meaningful academic engagement at all. This means that for the purposes of doctoral research I have to extend the field of enquiry to the wider creative and cultural context that Syd Barrett operated within and the pedagogical and philosophical issues that he was informed by. For the purposes of the Literature Review I will be situating my work within the two

most relevant areas where there is sufficient comparative literature to draw upon. I do this in order to draw direct and contemporaneous parallels where possible, but also to shed further light on the cultural and intellectual milieu that Syd Barrett was part of. I will therefore be concentrating on two specific themes which have direct relevance to Syd Barrett's life and work. These are:

1. Syd Barrett and the Art School.
2. Psychedelia and the wider relationship between the 1960s counter-culture and music.

As well as offering a selective survey of significant works in the above fields I will attempt to further define what is original about my own work, what aspects of my research could be further developed, and what interdisciplinary links can be forged between the various themes that I explore. Firstly, though, it is necessary to further examine the credentials of my work by giving some consideration to the comparative methodologies of rock literature and academic research.

METHODOLOGY

In order to offer academic justification for my Syd Barrett biography, the first themes that need to be addressed are differences and similarities in methodology and approach. It is assumed that academic research will by its very nature be more rigorous and meticulously annotated, but this is true of the best rock biographies too. At the risk of sounding facile from the outset, rock biographies are as varied in quality, scope, and cohesion as any academic research. The best rock books contextualise their subject matter, research diligently and rigorously critique all other existing works in a similar field. In other words, the very concerns that inform the best academic research. The worst rock books merely rearrange the press cuttings, do little or no original research, are hagiographical in their approach, and are happy to adhere to, or supplement, the existing mythology or received wisdom.

As with academic research, the writing of rock biography for a mainstream audience obeys its own market determinants, and generates its own notions of cultural capital. Because of the mutually dependent relationship that exists between music journalism and the music industry, music books are usually celebratory in tone, or, when the climate or subject matter demands, scandalous and sensationalist. The strictures of the music industry, and the house styles and other formulaic trappings of music journalism generally militate against iconoclastic or tangential thinking. The worst rock writing

therefore, simply by default, largely serves as a functionary for the public relations wing of the music business.

As examples of the best kind of music writing, I would cite works like Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming* (1), Peter Guralnick's two Elvis Presley biographies *Last Train to Memphis* (2) and *Careless Love*, (3) and Nick Tosches' Jerry Lee Lewis biography, *Hellfire*. (4) Savage's 'long history' approach to the punk movement, Guralnick's exhaustive examination of an iconic artist, and Tosches' broad canvas view of the social mores of the southern US states typify an all too rare tendency in rock writing, i.e. the ability to see beyond discographies, chart positions, and critical orthodoxy in order to make fresh historical links and cultural and artistic connections which bring new and stimulating insight to their subject matter.

There are of course various types of music biography. The main demarcation is between authorised biographies written with the artist's approval and co-operation, and unauthorised biographies, usually written without direct access to the subject of the book, or their estate, and more often than not, family, friends, and other vital sources. The vast majority of music biographies fall into the latter category and are written without the artist's co-operation or consent. This can be both advantageous and disadvantageous. Co-operation often involves overt or subtle coercions and a tendency or direct contractual obligation to follow the 'company line'.

I made it a condition of my original proposal to Faber & Faber that I would attempt to secure the collaboration of the members of the Pink Floyd in my project. From very early on, though, it became clear that this would not happen. The group has a lengthy track record of non-cooperation with biographers. Although happy to be interviewed when they have a new album to promote (or latterly a new re-issue campaign to promote) they have never, to my knowledge, co-operated with a single biography that has been written about them. It did not surprise me therefore that I received refusals from Nick Mason, Roger Waters, and David Gilmour within days (within minutes in Nick Mason's case) of contacting their representatives. I was never able to establish contact with Rick Wright, and sadly he died during the period I was researching and writing *A Very Irregular Head*. Despite follow up letters and emails, in which I stressed my credentials as a researcher and my determination to write a more comprehensive and credible account of Syd Barrett's life than that which has appeared in previous biographies, I failed to secure the co-operation of Syd Barrett's fellow band members. In part I believe that this unwillingness to co-operate is a sad but inevitable reflection on the badly written and shoddily researched nature of the majority of music biographies. This poor standard frequently deters bands and artists from getting involved with their biographers. Given the poor track record of previous books about Syd Barrett I suspect this factor significantly hampered my efforts too.

I came in time to view the Pink Floyd's absence positively rather than negatively. There is a plethora of interview material in the public domain by

the various members of the band, and Nick Mason has written his own account of the band's history in *Inside Out: A Personal History of the Pink Floyd*. (5) I decided fairly early on that my book would centre entirely on Syd Barrett's work and life and would function as a positive adjunct to this other material, which I would only draw upon selectively and sparingly. In fact as time went on I drew upon it hardly at all, as I did not want to simply re-hash previous accounts that are largely drawn from the closed and specialized arena of the music press. One or two reviews of *A Very Irregular Head* viewed these omissions as a flaw, which I don't accept. I don't think my book suffered unduly from the non-cooperation of the Pink Floyd. If anything it benefits by not following a top down history where I would effectively have just been a conduit for the band's views.

However, there is a footnote to this. I was contacted in the summer of 2009, after my final draft had been submitted, by David Gilmour's management, who told me somewhat circumspectly that their client had acquired a copy of my book - "a copy of your book came my way" was Gilmour's equally circumspect explanation. A doctoral thesis is probably not the place to speculate on how rock stars acquire the copyrighted material of biographers through third parties, but the episode did bring home to me both the protective nature of the Pink Floyd's relationship with Syd Barrett (they, or at least Gilmour, clearly wanted to see what I had written about him) and the potential pitfalls – particularly legal ones - for any biographer working in the realm of the unendorsed. I know of at least one Pink Floyd biography where, after legal advice at draft stage, the writer has had to take out several unsubstantiated

comments regarding the band members' private lives. In fact, once David Gilmour had read the full manuscript he gave me his full co-operation and was nothing other than courteous and supportive. He congratulated me on the quality of my book and apologised for not granting me an interview earlier. His exact words were "my apologies if I turned down the chance of a chat on the subject of Syd, too much dodgy stuff comes my way, I'm afraid". This response confirms my earlier point about musicians being deterred from collaboration by the poor quality of most music biographies. In addition to making many useful corrections and minor amendments Gilmour took it upon himself to sub-edit my entire script with a pedantry and zeal which astounded me, and for a couple of weeks during the book's copyediting he was in daily email contact with me, offering elaboration where I requested clarification of his amendments, and he could not have been more co-operative at a crucial stage, as the book neared completion. Possibly because of this, and the substantial input I received from Syd Barrett's family, a smattering of reviewers referred erroneously to my book as an 'Official Biography'. 'Retrospectively endorsed' would probably be more accurate. Like David Gilmour, the family too pronounced themselves satisfied with the final result, even though I did not avoid talking about some of the less savoury and flattering aspects of Syd Barrett's life.

All of the above illustrates the complex machinations one must go through in order to secure the support, or risk the disapproval of the biographer's subject. Musicians are used to treating the music press and most music writers as functionaries, simply there to promote a new release or associated

merchandise. They are generally wary of intrusion into their private lives, often with good reason. Ironically, if artists or groups do undertake a tell-all version of their lives it is usually with the co-operation of a ghostwriter. The writer, usually an esteemed journalist in their own field, will sometimes receive a co-credit on the book cover, but more often than not will usually just be mentioned in the inside front pages or acknowledged with the phrase 'as told to.' Although the ghostwriter will do all of the writing and the majority of the research, they are rarely asked or expected to do media publicity or undertake interviews about the book. They are in essence an invisible presence. The artist or group in question will almost always undertake the promotion for the book. This is a curious situation that is rarely commented on, and the issue of whose narrative voice we are really reading would make an interesting subject for further research. It is not uncommon for the ghostwriter, having done all of the research, to then effectively lead the artist on a 'recovered memory' trawl through the long forgotten minutiae of their own lives in order to construct a coherent and readable narrative.

The great advantage of a non-authorised biography, as I found, is that the writer is ostensibly free to give an unbridled account, without the obligation to gloss over contentious aspects of the artist's life or career. Indeed if access is gained to friends and associates who have not previously been interviewed it can lead to new insights into the artist's life and creativity. Frith (6) cites Anthony Scaduto's 1971 biography *Bob Dylan* as the model for all subsequent rock books, which utilise this method. Scaduto sought out old school friends and gained access to Dylan's parents in order to, as Frith puts it, "revealingly

situate him as an ‘ordinary’ American” (7) Although I was not consciously following this example (as Frith says “Scaduto’s biography did little to make sense of Dylan’s extraordinary art”, whereas mine does) I did adhere to Scaduto’s method and reasoning in *A Very Irregular Head*. I consciously sought out and found old school friends and painstakingly researched Syd Barrett’s school days, gaining direct access to school records in order to construct a rounded picture of a young man’s life. As Frith suggests, “life before stardom seems more fun”, and it is true that the pre-fame element of an artist’s life has become a necessary component of the modern music biography.

Of the 65 people I interviewed 28 had never spoken publicly before about Syd Barrett. As well as the aforementioned school friends (one of whom - Geoff Leyshon - provided the new explanation as to where the nickname ‘Syd’ came from) I also spoke to key figures who witnessed his early creative development, such as Andrew Rawlinson, who put on multi-media Happenings in Cambridge, and the artist David Henderson, who befriended Barrett at Tech College, shared a flat with him in London and was able to comment perceptively about his art school training and unfulfilled potential as an artist. More will be said about this in the following section on The Art School. Perhaps the most important new interview I secured was with the beat poet Spike Hawkins, who was able to offer insights into Barrett’s working practices, particularly with regard to experimental writing.

As I have evoked Simon Frith's thoughts on rock biographies it would be appropriate at this point to address the other key issues he raises about the writing of music books. I will, where applicable, relate these thoughts to my own research. Speaking specifically of two, then current, biographies of Fairport Convention and Neil Young, Frith says, "Both organise their narrative around the succession of record releases and concert tours; both are more interested in public than private detail. Both describe their star's music (not necessarily in flattering terms) but fail to place it outside of its immediate biographical detail." (8) There is much that can be commented on here. Frith's initial point is true of almost all rock biographies. The structural glue is normally provided by record releases and tours, and narrative drive is normally event-led (a drug bust, a group split, a death, a messy divorce, a high profile court case.) Only a small minority of biographers seem to have the confidence or the skill to approach their subject thematically rather than chronologically. The preferred method is to construct a linear narrative from album to album, single to single, tour to tour. This method works well with short careers, but can become extremely laborious when applied to the kind of artists Frith mentions above, both of whom have enjoyed longevity as recording artists. I worked chronologically through Syd Barrett's short recording career (which only lasted from 1967 to 1970) simply because it was expedient to do so, and would almost certainly have followed the same guidelines had I been writing a biography of Nick Drake say, or Jeff Buckley. I also observe a conventional career arc, by writing chronologically about Syd Barrett's pre-fame life, his brief spell as a working pop musician, and his

'afterlife', but only do so because those three stages are so clearly defined, and in the case of the 'afterlife' so previously under-documented.

One problem with organizing a narrative chronologically that Frith does not mention is the tendency to canonize significant record releases and to adhere to critical convention when discussing what constitutes good and bad (or for the uncritical biographer good and less good) releases. Frith goes on to note that "these lives depend on the cuttings file for views as well as news – only the rock press is sampled for audience response." (9) This is generally true. Remarkably few rock biographies buck the critical trend – by making a positive case for a maligned album, or offering a revisionist case against a critically acclaimed work – and as Frith suggests, almost all critical wisdom is constructed by reference to record reviews alone. This inability to place music outside of its "immediate biographical context" is a constant failing of rock books and one which I consciously sought to address throughout *A Very Irregular Head* .

On the question of what constitutes appropriate source material Frith's contentions are more problematic. He states, "Journalists' basic sources of information are people; stories are written on the basis of interviews; authenticity is a matter of character judgement. Academic researchers depend much more on printed material." (10) Frith makes these comments within the context of a dispute with the Beatles' biographer Philip Norman about the selectivity of the interview material in his book *Shout!* Frith goes on to say "the problem of *Shout!* is that there is no way of knowing what material

Norman did not use, why some informant's versions of events are judged to be more authoritative than others." (11) In fact there are sometimes ways of knowing what material was not used. In more recent times both Jon Savage and Simon Reynolds have published the unedited transcripts of interview material from their research into punk and post punk music in *The England's Dreaming Tapes* (12) and *Totally Wired : Postpunk Interviews and Overviews* (13) respectively. Similarly there was a vast amount of useful material that I was unable to use in *A Very Irregular Head*, which could still form the basis of further study. One cannot simply dismiss this material as 'unused conversation', which Frith seems to do. Neither is it productive to raise the issue of 'authoritative accounts' in the way that Frith does, which seems to dwell unduly on the question of bias and selectivity. Indeed from this contention it is hard to see how any music biographer could ever match up to Frith's exacting standards. All critique, all raw data, all 'material' whether academic or journalistic, is by its very nature selective; the process of selectivity may vary from subject to subject, but the end result is the same, some material gets used, some gets left out, and unless we are positing here that there is something called true untainted objectivity which a researcher can rely upon, it is hard to see how it can be otherwise. Frith does seem to be suggesting this when he ends his dispute with Norman with the sentence. 'The definitive Beatles life remains to be written'. (14)

I would contend that no account of anything can ever be classed as definitive, whether we are talking about the Beatles or the origins of the universe, and I was careful not to use the word 'definitive' in any publicity or promotional

material for my Syd Barrett biography. This is just as well. Only a few months after my book had gone to press new unseen footage emerged of the Pink Floyd performing 'See Emily Play' on Top Of The Pops in July 1967. The rare footage shows Syd Barrett miming enthusiastically to the song and his demeanor is at variance with previous unverified accounts, which suggest that he was unwilling or incapable of performance. In fact this newly unearthed footage gives further credence to the case I make in *A Very Irregular Head*, (15) which suggests that Barrett's withdrawal and breakdown were not as instantaneous and severe as has previously been claimed. If I'd had access to or prior knowledge of this material it would have warranted at least a paragraph in my book. I would readily assume that further material might be unearthed in years to come, which will either aid or refute the various arguments I made in my book. Indeed at the moment of writing, the Pink Floyd have just commenced a campaign of back-catalogue re-issues which promises to make available some of the previously unreleased material mentioned in my book.

Rather than get bogged down in a debate about definitions of the definitive, or issues of editorial selectivity, I would rather address the wider issue at stake here, which is the use of interview material as a viable and credible research tool. All information begins life somewhere, and a significant amount of that information starts with basic human interaction and conversational dialogue. Whether it is the testimony of the last survivor of the Battle of the Somme, or the first working class youth from the Elephant & Castle who adapted the post war vogue for Edwardian suits and invented teddy boys in the process, each

has a valid tale to tell. The methodology can be critiqued, the accuracy of the detail can be questioned and cross examined, as indeed can the nature of recall, but to reduce any of this to the routine processes of journalistic practice is to devalue human interaction per se, and to run the risk of discounting entire traditions of oral history, interactive and empirical sociology and social anthropology, not to mention the best endeavours of investigative journalism.

My evocation of the Elephant & Castle teddy boy was deliberate. It was just that, an evocation. Hundreds of books about rock and roll have been written. Thousands of accounts of post war sub-cultural history have been given, but as far as I am aware no one has yet tracked down the original working class youths from south London who supposedly went up to the West End, saw the Edwardian suits in the windows of Jermyn Street or Savile Row and creatively appropriated them for what became the teddy boy look. The story may not even be true. It exists as one of rock and roll's foundation myths but we know little more than that. Although, thanks to that basic journalistic source of information, 'people', we do know a little about the pre-history of this story. In Chapter Six of his book, *Burning The Box of Beautiful Things*, Alex Seago unearths a telling piece of oral testimony where photographer Brian Duffy talks about the precursors to the teddy boy movement, the gay clique of Guards officers who first adopted the Edwardian look which was later appropriated by working class youth in South London. (16) This is an empirically verifiable account of a crucial aspect of British cultural history, a veritable 'missing link' in our knowledge of how one thing became another. Seago does not even foreground or prioritise this piece of knowledge. It is just

one detail in his wider account of post war cultural activity. Although, tellingly, the oral and anecdotal component of Seago's thesis works better than his attempts in the introductory chapter of his book to trace the development of the 'post-modern sensibility'. I address Seago's book in more detail in the next section but the point to be made here is that an interview, face-to-face dialogue between two individuals, yielded this information. Frith, in making a case for the privileging of printed material over interviews, states, "Scholars can at least cross check each others data", but they can't if there is no data to cross check in the first place. Somewhere 'out there' it is possible that the original teddy boys are still alive. They will be getting on a bit now but they have a story to tell and it may well take us back to English youth culture's very own source of the Nile. What were their motives? What was the nature of their appropriation? Evidence might eventually show that they did not come from the Elephant & Castle. It might have been some other area of south (or east or north or west) London. It might not have even been London. Indeed it might not even have been 'they'. It could have been 'he'. It might have been one closet working class homosexual who had a discreet liaison with a gay Guards officer. Imagine what that would do to our understanding of post-war sub-cultural theory. Consider its implications for gender theory or masculinised accounts of youth culture. Alas, no amount of theory will produce this information. In order to find these people, someone would have to do the necessary fieldwork and then go and talk to them.

I store great faith in my ability as a researcher (and indeed as an interviewer) to ask the right questions, to weigh the responses appropriately and utilise the

information accordingly but even the most casual interaction can reap great rewards. I have already mentioned that one of my most valuable discoveries in *A Very Irregular Head* was Syd Barrett's previously undocumented friendship and working relationship with the beat poet Spike Hawkins. This discovery was made completely in passing. Towards the end of my interview with the poet and lyricist Pete Brown, which had dwelt considerably on Syd Barrett's working methods, and very little on his pop fame or personality, we were talking about Barrett's use of elision. I mentioned to Brown that the only other person I could think of who utilised elision in a similar way, "where you couldn't see the join" as I put it, was Spike Hawkins. "Oh I think Syd knew Spike," said Brown. He went and fetched his address book and within seconds I had a valuable and vital new contact. It is often in such informal circumstances, from casual asides such as the above, that new contacts and information are yielded. I am well aware that such encounters are the standard tools of journalism. I would like to suggest here that they should not be undervalued as research aids either.

Another issue that needs to be considered is the style of language utilised in music biographies and music journalism in general, and the ways in which this might differ from formal academic writing. I am perhaps one of a fairly small band of writers who have had direct engagement with both fields, having had books published as an academic (17) as well as drawing upon over twenty years of experience as a music journalist. My work has been published in *The Times*, *Guardian* and *Independent* newspapers, as well as specialist national music magazines such as *Mojo*, *Uncut* and *Word*. I am also a published

novelist (18), so I am very familiar with a wide range of writing styles and the respective requirement of these different fields. I am also part of an even smaller band of music writers who has had an active career as a performer, having enjoyed a brief period of popularity as lead singer and lyricist with the Bristol based post-punk group Glaxo Babies. These differing levels of experience allow for the development of a very flexible aesthetic when regarding rock music's critical discourse as it is enacted in the respective fields of academia, journalism, and biography. However such diversity also presents its own challenges and being required to portion off aspects of ones musical consciousness into separate fields of enquiry can be extremely problematic.

As someone who is to all intents and purposes a non – musician (ie I can play a bit of rudimentary rhythm guitar but that is the limit of my musical abilities) I am fairly reliant as a writer on non-musical terminology. I am not musically inept. I have a good ear. I recognize a bum note when I hear one. I know how to construct a song and have an intuitive understanding of the workings of metre and scansion. I know the difference between a major key and a minor one. I know what a time signature is and can tell the difference between (and beat out tum-te-tum style) 3/4 4/4 and 5/4. I know what a root chord is and where to find middle C on a piano. But like many 'non-musician' music writers I depend largely upon simile, adjectives, metaphors, and analogies for my descriptive powers. This is not problematic in itself. Unless one is using very precise technical or musicological terminology (which is, for the most part, chiefly of use to theoreticians or fellow musical practitioners) all other writing

about music deals primarily in similitude, the adjectival, the metaphorical, and the analogous. On a qualitative level at least it might be said that good music writing can be judged largely on the strength and effectiveness of the writers utilization of these descriptive tools.

This has led some skeptical commentators to suggest that writing about music is like dancing about architecture. The quotation has been variously attributed to Frank Zappa, Charles Shaar Murray, Charles Shaar Murray quoting Frank Zappa, Lester Bangs, Charles Chaar Murray quoting Lester Bangs, Elvis Costello, and many others. The writer Robert Christgau offers the best riposte to this old canard when he states, “one of the many foolish things about the fools who compare writing about music to dancing about architecture is that dancing usually is about architecture.” (19)

The comment comes from Christgau’s essay ‘Writing about music is writing first’ and I will draw briefly on relevant portions of this work whilst at the same time offering further elaboration on my own writing aesthetic, and how this impacts upon my writing of music biography. Christgau notes that, “Music is the most evanescent of the arts - invisible in a visual culture, gone in an instant. Musicologists note that few of the listeners who intuit its formal logic enjoy a full theoretical command of its harmonic syntax.....its rhythmic syntax is comprehended by fewer.” (20) He qualifies this assertion by observing that, “even its syntacticians are seldom so arrogant as to claim they can enumerate its effects on the emotions. All of which is to adduce only

formal qualities when historical, cultural, social and psychological associations render it incalculably more complex.” (21)

This is a key consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of music writing. There is for instance a school of musicology which privileges, say, the ‘pandiatonic clusters’ and ‘flat sub-mediante key switches’ in Lennon and McCartney’s songs, as William Mann famously did in his 1963 Times review of the Beatles, (22) but analysis of these formal qualities will, as Christgau suggests, reveals little or nothing about our emotional engagement with the music or the wider ‘historical, cultural, social and psychological associations’ which as Christgau rightly claims ‘render it incalculably more complex’. Deryck Cooke, noting this, in 1968, surmised at the time that “there has been too much concentration on harmony following Mann’s original dove-cot fluttering Times article.....A purely harmonic analysis is misleading and only leads to misleading retorts.” (23) Noting that “from Saussure on down, nothing can be reduced to words, not even words” Christgau suggests that “writing about writing is also like dancing about architecture.” (24) Subjectivity therefore is paramount, and perhaps what is being contested ultimately, in music criticism at least, is our competing subjectivities.

Outlining his own aesthetic, Robert Christgau states, “I’m scornful of slack grammar, ramshackle exposition, unclear referents, vague verbs. Latinate desiccation, basic-English condescension, clichés and anything else that turns prose soft, witless or dull”. (25) All writers, all conscientious writers at any rate will offer variants on these *bete noires*. I have a stock list of phrases I

assiduously avoid in my music writing. Many of these have been developed specifically to counteract certain prevailing tendencies in contemporary music journalism. As I stated in a paper I delivered at a symposium on music and publishing at Oxford Brookes University in 2011;

“I don’t do sonic templates, or templates of any kind. Templates are for sewing and kite making not music. –Scapes as a lazy suffix is also highly problematic. I won’t entertain filigree brushwork, smorgasboards, or food analogies of any kind. Sonic buffets are right out. I’ll have no truck with tsunamis of sound, buzzsaw guitars, or the boysy ladrock language of swagger. I don’t much care for screeds, flurries or arcing. And being fairly set against decade-ism in my writing I’m not very cuspy either, or anything else that suggests that music can be divided up into precise epochs for anything other than marketing purposes, lazy journalism or thin histories. Descriptions of music, whether adjectival or otherwise, can I find be used almost interchangeably. One can be playful in a Barthesian sense on this issue. Does it matter for example, in a cd review, or a live review, whether I say beautifully stark vocals and foreboding ethereal keyboards or foreboding ethereal churchy vocals and beautifully stark keyboards. In fact over the years I’ve found the only way to retain any sense of self worth with that kind of writing is to be playful with it. Part of the art of a being a music writer is trying to find many different ways of saying the same thing. Reviewing a Hawkwind box set for Mojo magazine several years ago I soon realized that the use of the phrase acid-heads was going to get fairly repetitive. In order to counteract this I came up with the phrase Dr Hoffman’s Pharmy Army. I was inordinately pleased with this, offering as it did a nod to the man who first synthesized LSD and a pun on the horde of traveling cricket fans who followed the English team around the world. To my dismay the reviews editor omitted the phrase from the printed review. I was so pleased with ‘Dr Hoffmans Pharmy Army’ that I attempted to include it into several subsequent reviews. Each time the reviews editor took it out. It took me four attempts before finally it slipped

undetected and uncensored into a review of Julian Copes auto-biography Head On.”. (26)

In order to put these journalistic experiences into some sort of context it is important to consider the editorial (and other sometimes self imposed) constraints that music journalists operate under. Most music magazines will have a house style, overt or covert in its application. Some will issue an actual style guide. At other publications the guidelines will remain unwritten, and writers will be expected to intuitively observe and adhere to them. Sometimes writers will only become aware of such guidelines when they unwittingly breach them. The personal pronoun, I or me, for instance, goes in and out of favour in music journalism, sometimes on an editor’s whim, as do the possibilities for personal, directly experiential discourse that go with them. As a writer I have both benefited from and fallen foul of that very whim, usually when a new editor takes over at a publication and wishes to assert their preferences.

Writing a music related item for a publication can entail anything from a major 10-15,000 word career retrospective to a cd review consisting of 140 words and a bullet point. When writing a lengthy feature (or indeed when writing a 140,000 word music biography) one can, naturally, be expansive, and research extensively. Writing a 140 word and bullet point review can be so reductive as to be almost pointless. Given 15,000 words to play with one can contextualise and, where appropriate, establish an agenda. Trying to summarise music in 140 words and a bullet point, was personally one of the most dispiriting things I ever had to do during my time as a full time music

journalist. It reached the stage where I realised that the only time I thought like that and wrote like that was when I was writing 140 word and a bullet point reviews. One could make a case for evaluating this type of writing as a particular journalistic skill, or for seeing the 140 word review as a text with its own particular formal qualities, but being unwilling, and in the end unable, to reduce my musical consciousness to such rigid industry requirements, renders me incapable of making that case here.

In order to conform to such brevity one is forced to rely on the very stock phrases I was dismissive of in my Oxford Brookes conference paper. To use terms like 'foreboding ethereal churchy vocals' and 'beautifully stark keyboards' interchangeably or otherwise is of course a form of critical shorthand and it is commonplace in all kinds of critical reviews and is not just restricted to music. Again, the writer is dependent on an ability to use such phraseology accurately and with intent. Elements of these stylistic devices can easily creep into more expansive writing and often exposes the weaker kind of music biography. With forethought and rigorous editing I make every attempt to avoid such flimsy phrasemaking in my work, although at first draft stage it is often sobering to see how many of these phrases creep in. The key is to avoid and eliminate what is merely habitual and to be able to justify one's phraseology at every turn. In my Syd Barrett biography I summarise Barrett's latter day musical decline as "the cry of a man who was beginning to embrace entropy as a permanent condition," (27) I describe his tendency to play almost everything on the Barrett album in slow tempo in the key of A as "his all-purpose lick, his underpass busker strum" (28). These phrases are not arrived

at randomly or via casual recourse to a Thesaurus. They are purposeful. They mean precisely what I intend them to mean, and convey precisely what I want them to convey.

A reader might take issue with some of my qualitative descriptions and critical evaluations, such as my description of *The Madcap Laughs* album as “a lop-sided and tangential masterpiece.” (29) The critical reader might accept ‘lop-sided and tangential’ but might balk at ‘masterpiece’. This raises interesting questions about the appropriateness of superlatives, and the tendency to utilise them in music writing instead of more sober forms of evaluation. In this particular case I read ‘masterpiece’ as a relative term not an absolute one, ie something can be a masterpiece of its kind, within its own domain, its own cultural sphere. To apply absolute readings to the term masterpiece is to canonize, and by inference or intent to uphold traditional notions of high and low culture and their attendant value systems. To paraphrase what I have stated earlier, with regard to literary or historical connections, the reader might take issue with the strength or validity of my critical judgment, but that is an argument about emphasis and tone more than anything else.

Having made my case for the defence, it should be stated that music writing is riddled with lazy application and hyperbole. The word genius is frequently misapplied, as is icon. Reductive phraseology, of the kind that appears in any arts review, has its own lexicon and its perils and pitfalls. As an illustration of ‘bad dancing to good architecture’ I would like to offer just a few brief but salient examples from *Wire* magazine. I chose this publication because

although it is one of the few magazines that offer in depth coverage of left field music it does at times display a somewhat convoluted and over elaborate house style. In fact it was this kind of writing I had in mind when in my novel *Dusk Music* I offered a thinly disguised parody of *Wire* as *Artfist* magazine and observed of my main character;

Keith Gear had an on-going love-hate relationship with ArtFist. On the one hand its writers had always given him generous, and largely uncritical coverage. On the other hand he hated the magazines earnestness, its elitism, and its dense convoluted prose. In the twenty years of its existence ArtFist had made a fine art out of tautology and mixed metaphor, while some of its analogies were so tortuous that, as Drum once suggested, someone should have photographed them and sent them to Amnesty International as evidence of abuse (30)

The article I would like to use to illustrate my point is a primer on the music of the art rock band Henry Cow, written by Philip Clarke. (31) The article itself which runs to six densely packed pages is highly informative, but throughout the piece Clarke offers the kind of florid phrases which typify the kind of *Wire* writing I am referring to. At one point for instance he talks of 'pointillistic splashes of sound.' One might reasonably ask how pointillism, an art form rendered in fine meticulous dots can be splashed. The writer then compounds his stylistic felony by suggesting that these splashes 'blossom into a harmonically secure chorale'. The same writer in the same piece also offers the phrase 'neo-Bachian counterpoint'. I once presented this article to a group of students at Huddersfield University as an example of bad writing. One of the music students immediately picked up on 'Neo-Bachian counterpoint.' 'So,

counterpoint then' he said, immediately recognizing the tautology and the genuflection towards over-writing. Among the other choice phrases in the same piece were 'off-pastoral harmonies and shifting asymmetrical time signatures' (one could possibly cite John Lee Hooker in order to make a case for 'shifting asymmetrical time signatures', but it still hints at tautology) 'cathartic incidental detail' (meaning I assume some form of purgation that is not central to experience and therefore no kind of catharsis at all) and 'rhythmically displaced energy,' (which might have some currency in the language of wave formation, but in the context here, like 'off-pastoral harmonies' is merely verbiage.)

This kind of writing can best be described, as Richard Williams once said of Paul Morley's equally florid prose, as 'throwing shapes'. (32) In this case, the construction of an overly elaborate style, in order to compensate for the fact that the writer might not have the necessary expressive tools to describe the architecture he is attempting to dance about. - the neo-Cagian counterpoint if you will to John Cage's apposite paradox 'I have nothing to say and I am saying it'. It is a perfect example of the ramshackle exposition and unclear referents that Christgau outlined earlier.

This style of exposition typifies an entire school of music journalism, and evidence of it is commonplace in both journalism and music biography. Tired or lazy phrasing, crammed with compound nouns and adjectives. As an illustration of the vigilance and precision required in order to craft readable lucid prose I initially commenced the previous sentence with "Tired or lazy

writing, over-crammed with compound nouns and adjectives...” until I spotted the tautological ‘over-crammed’ and removed it. However, I note that spell-check quite happily recognizes ‘over-crammed’ as long as I hyphenate correctly.

Robert Christgau talks about the “countervailing tendencies” of his own particular areas of expertise (journalism and academic writing) and takes issue with “in academia the theory driven disdain for so called belletrism, and in journalism the priggish and/or hard boiled drive to expunge colour (and) pretension”. (33) I have dealt fairly extensively with the latter, but attention should also be paid to the former, the elevation of theory as an organizing principle over more aesthetic considerations, and the attendant disdain for the anecdotal, the colloquial or the conversational. In the arts and humanities theory is frequently privileged over practice and the writer will often be required to set up a hypothesis which involves situating subject matter within a dominant school of thought, be it Bakhtin’s Carnavalesque or Hegelian dialectics. The academic researcher will then be judged on how successfully they achieved this. As someone who works in both academia and the world of professional journalism I am acutely aware of the differing expectations of these two fields. Academic writing is, ostensible at least, more formal, its citations are expected to be more precise and more frequently applied. It is however prone to exactly the same stylistic tropes (like the overuse of the word trope for example) as music journalism. It also frequently displays a propensity for over-writing, and an over-reliance upon jargon, which can lead to mystification, and willful obscurantism. There is currently an interesting

debate going on regarding the fact that academics are often researchers first and writers second. Writing is a craft skill like any other and as Christgau rightly notes, 'in academia, prominence is no guarantee of verbal felicity'. (34)

In order to illustrate this point, in 'Writing about music is writing first', he copyedits sections of the published work he is criticizing and offers suggestions for improvement. In doing so he reveals to the reader the very processes that all diligent writers undertake during the editing and polishing of draft material. He points out for example the mixed metaphor in the phrase 'the Stones were perched swaggeringly on the cusp of two decades', asking how one might perch while swaggering. He also points out the ways in which writers frequently over utilise unimaginative or unnecessary linkage in phrases like 'as such', 'there is the implication of,' 'associated with' and 'tied to'. (35)

In the same spirit of deconstruction I would just like to take one example from my own recent readings and make similar points about the inconsistency of academic writing. In the American Counterculture anthology 'Imagine Nation' David Farber begins his chapter on drug use in the 1960s with the following sentence;

"Among the cognoscenti in the history-of-the-sixties business, the current fashion has been to denude the so-called Sixties counterculture of its peacock feathers and to piece it well inside the puzzle of the (ever) burgeoning consumer culture of the twentieth century." (36)

There is much to detain the sub-editor's critical faculties here. Depending on whether one reads 'puzzle' as 'dilemma to be pondered' or as an elision of

'jigsaw puzzle' then the peacock feathers denuded or otherwise, either introduce a mixed metaphor or at best clumsy imagery. The fact that this puzzle is then part of something that is growing in size makes its sense of proportion (or is it propulsion?) very hard to grasp, or indeed to understand what it is that one is actually grasping. The sentence contains a stylistically inconsistent mix of the breezy ('history-of-the-sixties business') the imprecise or vague ('so-called Sixties counterculture' 'piece it well inside' 'ever burgeoning') ambiguous tense ('the current fashion has been') repetitive phrasing ('history-of-the-sixties' 'Sixties counterculture' 'consumer culture') and the overly verbose ('cognoscenti' 'burgeoning'.)

Had I been writing, or indeed subbing the same paragraph it might have read as follows.

"Among cultural commentators the current fashion is to challenge some of the more extravagant claims of the 1960s counter-culture and to place it within the wider context of twentieth century consumerism."

This both simplifies and clarifies the point being made, but then, as the old rural joke goes, when a local is asked for directions to an out of the way village, "well, I wouldn't be starting from here!" I would not have been starting from where Farber starts from either, but regardless of the many ways in which I might have critiqued the passage, those peacock feathers would have been the first things to go.

The most important point here is not to indulge in pedantry but to recognize the stylistic tendencies on display. Farber is writing in a style that is assumed to be appropriate to the task and its context.

In *The Empire of Signs* (37) Roland Barthes used Japan to exemplify the richness of surface. The same can be said about pop music. It is rich in surface. The writer does not always have to be seeking out the revelatory or hidden depths. I am not suggesting that pop music has hidden shallows instead, although a case can be made for that, and a very convincing aesthetic built around its assumptions. The challenge, and the peril, as Christgau suggests, lies in summarizing immediacy and trapping the moment, not, as Barthes also says, in overloading with significance. (38) When faced with the pretentious or the preposterous Lester Bangs often invoked the maxim “yeah, but could they have written Louie Louie?” Music writing needs a flexible aesthetic to content with the myriad complexities of the form, but it should also be born in mind that it needs appropriate critical tools when the architecture it is dancing to sounds like ‘Louie Louie’.

Finally I would like to say something about the nature of fandom. As an example of the kind of music biography of which he approved, Simon Frith cites Roger Williams’ book about the country singer Hank Williams, *Sing A Sad Song*. Calling it “a model of scholarly biography” Frith says “It combines all the approaches I have been discussing; as a fan Williams begins from his own responses to the music; as a journalist he talks to as many people as he could, tried to pin down what really happened, explores the relationship

between the man and the myths; as a critic he situates his star, analyses his musical, commercial and social conditions of production.” (39)

I would contend that my book is a ‘model of scholarly biography’ too and that it fits all of Frith’s requirements. The one aspect of the above that I would take issue with is the assumption that fan responses are a prime element in a biographer’s armoury. I don’t think that fandom necessarily equates with successful biography. Indeed fandom can and frequently does hinder objectivity. My own fan tendencies were restricted to some brief biographical detail in my introduction, explaining my life long interest in my subject matter. I always tried to marry my fan passions with sober judgements and meticulous attention to facts and perspective. Presumably this is what Sam Taylor was suggesting in his Daily Telegraph review when he says that the book is “written in simple unpretentious prose”. I choose to interpret this as “he doesn’t gush like an indiscriminate fan”. The fandom in *A Very Irregular Head*, such as it is, is in the experiential elements the reader never sees, or even detects.

Sitting in a cardboard box not five feet from where I write is a lifetime’s accumulation of Barrett marginalia, including press clippings, my own interview transcripts, bootleg recordings, fanzines, magazine articles, and an original copy of every known interview that Syd Barrett ever gave to the press. It is from such a lifetime’s accumulation, some of it purposeful, some of it casual, almost all of it useful as ‘aide-mémoire’ that my Syd Barrett biography emerges.

And it is from the processes of casual accumulation that some of my most vigorous research emerges too. As I have already mentioned, one of my most significant contributions to our understanding of Syd Barrett's working methods was my analysis of the sources of the song *Octopus*. I am glad to have been recognised for this work because it is the result of a lifetime's assimilation. I would have known Sir Henry Newbolt's 1931 poem *Rilloby-Rill* and some of the Mother Goose rhymes that Barrett utilises, such as *Mr Nobody*, at junior school, possibly even infant school. Between 1975 and 1978 while at Bristol Polytechnic, I studied and acted in mummers' plays and first became familiar with *Summer's Last Will and Testament* by the Elizabethan playwright Thomas Nashe, from where Barrett lifted and adapted *Octopus*'s opening refrain, *trip to/heave and ho/up down/ to and fro*. Nashe's version ('trip and go, heave and ho, up and down to and fro') is sung by three Clowns and three Maids. It was not widely known at this time that the original title for *Octopus* was *Clowns and Jugglers*, so although I would have recognised the source of Barrett's lyric, I probably didn't realise how explicit the link was until much later. I first encountered John Clare's *Fairy Things* in the early 1980s while living in Northampton. My sister worked as a psychiatric nurse on the John Clare ward in St Andrews Hospital, originally the Northampton Asylum where Clare spent his last 30 years. One of her patients at this time was James Joyce's daughter Lucia, who my sister nursed until Lucia's death in 1982. It was during this period that I first became fascinated with the pastoral poet Clare and found *Fairy Things* in the James Reeves 1954 collection *Selected Poems*. My sister's genealogy research at this time

unearthed a direct link between my own family, via my paternal grandmother, and the gypsy Smiths, whom Clare knew from an early age. All of these piecemeal connections transcend my Syd Barrett fandom.

I only discovered the other significant source of lyrics in *Octopus* – Shakespeare’s *King Henry VI Part 1*, - while researching *A Very Irregular Head*. Following up a casual comment about Shakespeare by Barrett in a *Melody Maker* interview with Chris Welch in 1970, I was initially sceptical about any linkage between *Octopus* and *Henry VI*. It seemed to be based on little more than the tenuous link between Barrett’s line “heigh-ho huff the Talbot” (which is lifted from a Mother Goose rhyme) and the fact that there is a character in *Henry VI* called Sir John Talbot. In fact close content analysis of the Shakespeare play revealed that several words from the first verse of the Barrett song all appear in the first five pages of *Henry VI Part 1*.

The final missing piece in the *Octopus* jigsaw came when I started to randomly Google lines and sources from the Syd Barrett song. Unsurprisingly, the majority of Google hits that came up referred directly to the Barrett song. But among these numerous references and links to Barrett fan sites I was led to a book entitled *Manual Of Voice Treatment: Pediatrics Through Geriatrics* by Moya L Andrews. (40) Sample pages from the index of the book contained the full versions of both *Rilloby Rill* and *Mr Nobody*. Believing that such close proximity could not be coincidental I emailed Ms Andrews, who was at that time Professor Of Speech and Hearing Sciences at Indiana University, Bloomington. This in part was her reply.

Dear Rob,

This is very interesting indeed and I enjoyed reading your explanation very much. My source was THE JUNIOR LAUREL AND GOLD ANTHOLOGY which is a book I had when I was a child growing up in Australia and I learned both of those poems by heart in my art of speech lessons. The book was published in Great Britain at the Press of the Publishers, Cathedral St Glasgow. In the acknowledgements the publishers and Editor express gratitude to a list of authors including Sir Henry Newbolt for Rilloby- Rill reprinted from POEMS NEW and OLD published by John Murray. Rilloby Rill is on Page 10 of my book and it is followed by a black and white ink drawing of a fairy, and then on the next page(12) by Mr Nobody. The general editor of my book is John R. Crossland and his name is listed and then followed by VOLUME 42. LAUREL AND GOLD books were a series I gather. I cannot find any edition on my copy though there is a list of copyrights starting with Feb 1936 and the ninth impression is listed as 1948.

From this information I was able to track down a copy of the book in question, which also contained other poems which Syd Barrett used as found material, and was therefore without doubt the source of a significant portion of what went in to the song *Octopus*.

There are numerous other instances in *A Very Irregular Head* where I could trace the evolution of a line of enquiry which transcends mere fandom and spans the four decades of my life since I first heard the Pink Floyd's *Arnold Layne*, as a boy of 12, while sitting on a low wall outside Sandy recreation ground one spring evening in 1967 with my friends. I can't remember which offshore pirate station *Arnold Layne* was playing on. It won't have been Radio

London, because they banned the Pink Floyd's debut single. I somehow doubt if it was Radio Caroline either, because reception was fairly patchy after about 6pm in my part of rural Bedfordshire. It could have been Radio City. They had a very enterprising play list and a good strong signal. Diligent research might yet eventually reveal this vital component that first sparked my interest. The boy with the transistor radio was called David Humphries. I remember that. The offshore radio stations are of course, long gone, and I haven't seen David Humphries for 40 years.

The wall is still there.

III

THE ART SCHOOL

Central to my thesis on Syd Barrett was the fact that he was initially a painter who dabbled in music. Art not music was his first love and his initial training was as a painter. He enrolled for a degree at Camberwell School of Art in 1964 but left in his final year, six months before completing his studies. Later in life, long after abandoning music completely, he returned to his primary creative impulse, and painted prolifically until days before his death in 2006. In *A Very Irregular Head* I trace Barrett's development as an artist and place his activities and techniques in their wider cultural context. I initially examined the role of the multi-media Happenings that took place in his hometown of Cambridge. These events were directly influenced by the pioneering work of Robert Rauschenberg, Josef Albers, John Cage and Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. The work of Chaim Soutine and Nicolas de Stael were also major formative influences, as were Mike Leonard's sound and light experiments at the Hornsey School of Art, and the work of light show pioneers such as Mark Boyle.

In considering Syd Barrett's painting I have fully acknowledged that his interrupted and incomplete 'apprenticeship' has massive implications for any assessment of his worth as an artist. There is no fully formed artistic development. Therefore we cannot make definitive judgements about the merit of his work. I have though attempted to precisely locate his influences and inspirations. Perhaps as important as those influences cited above was

the conceptual influence on Barrett's work of John Latham, particularly Latham's series of 'one-second' spray gun paintings and his concept of the 'least-event'. Many of the techniques which Syd Barrett utilised during his short music career, both as a guitarist and songwriter, derived from his art apprenticeship – specifically the use of collage and 'found' material. He also utilised an approach to his guitar playing which relied as much on textural considerations as on technique. What follows is an attempt to expand on my original work by tracing more thoroughly the cultural context in which Syd Barrett worked and the major critical ideas, theories, and techniques which informed his development as an artist and musician.

The only two books which examine the connection between the art school and pop music in any depth, and make the relationship the prime focus of their study, are Simon Frith and Howard Horne's *Art into Pop* (1) and John A. Walker's *Crossovers : Art into Pop. Pop into Art.* (2) Both were published by Methuen, within months of each other in 1987, and each book provides much useful historical information about developments in art school education and art school recruitment from the post war period onwards. Walker's text is, as he admits in his introduction, "descriptive rather than theoretical", and as Peter Smith puts it (3) the book is "more of a catalogue of selected cross-overs." Linkages are generally fairly sketchy and as Smith notes "are presented as equivalent and coterminous products of more or less undifferentiated practises." (4) This 'taken as read' attitude to subject matter makes the book rather uncritical and 'listy' in places. Frith and Horne cover much wider thematic territory but like Walker do not explore in any substantive

way actual similarities in creative practice between pop musicians and art students. This was a deficiency that I was determined to address in *A Very Irregular Head*.

Both books offer compendia of well-known pop musicians who attended art school. In the second paragraph of chapter one, 'The Art School Connection', Walker lists 38 musicians including Daevid Allan, Syd Barrett, Ray Davies, John Lennon, Jimmy Page, Keith Richards, and Pete Townshend. Frith and Horne's book contains two lengthy lists, one which makes a tenuous connection between the locations of suburban art schools and their proximity to certain rhythm and blues clubs, (5) and another which lists art college educated musicians who were active in the late 1970s pop scene. (6) The only time Syd Barrett's name appears in either book is in these lists.

Aside from the somewhat arbitrary and eccentric nature of these head counts (the pop singer Lynsey De Paul and the comedian Alexei Sayle feature on Walker's list, without explanation) they are further problematised by the fact that very rarely in either book do the authors articulate any explicit links between their subjects' art school training and their subsequent pop music practice. In the cases of Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and Ray Davies, for instance, it would be hard to make any connection at all, while it has been well documented that John Lennon gained little from his art school education, other than the fact that it introduced him to Stuart Sutcliffe. One could just as easily find musicians from the same bands who did not attend art college but whose creative role was just as integral to their success. Robert Wyatt, Kevin

Ayers, Brian Jones, Mick Jagger, Roger Waters, Dave Davies, Paul McCartney, John Paul Jones, and John Entwistle, for example. Some of the most conceptually astute pop stars of the past forty years did not attend art school: Marc Bolan, Morrissey, and Bono for instance. Glen Matlock attended art school. John Lydon didn't. Malcolm McLaren attended art school. Larry Parnes didn't. One could pursue this selective legacy through the history of pop music, without really proving, or disproving anything.

At no point do the authors offer intellectual or aesthetic justification for their lists, or establish any meaningful contextualisation. Instead, as Peter Smith suggests, Frith and Horne articulate “an acceptance of pop in its myriad forms as a given. It is a cultural datum, the wholesomeness of which, for these writers, is self-evident. Pop is, one might say, a reified object of unquestioned appeal.” (7) Concerning Walker’s descriptive approach Smith states “this results in a kind of formalism in which the adaptations made by art educated pop musicians of techniques *associated with* the visual arts leads to an uncritical acceptance by him of their renewed usage... which in turn leads to a narrow reading of some arbitrary or even quite superficial borrowings.” (8) (italics mine.)

In neither book is much attention paid to technique or craft, or the wider pedagogical or curriculum issues which might impact upon these practices. Walker, for instance, mentions bricolage and mixed media without attempting any in-depth analysis of their application. He cites “the found-objects and cut-

up techniques associated with the art of assemblage and photo-montage” (9) but only notes their influence on “the dress style and graphics of punk” (10) not on the music. When examining the relationship between fine art and pop music in chapter two he concentrates solely on how the former depicts the latter, i.e. as subject matter for paintings. When Walker looks at the ways in which pop uses art he restricts his approach to iconography, and does not examine the art school influence on music or lyrics. An analysis of The Who, for example, might have been more instructive had Walker looked in detail at the subject matter of Pete Townshend’s songs, or at his utilisation of auto-destructive techniques in his guitar playing. Instead he restricts himself to a few words about the Who’s fashion sense, and their appropriation of pop art motifs (the target, the Union Jack) on their T shirts. It was precisely this lack of cross-pollination that I was trying to address in *A Very Irregular Head* in my explorations of the way Syd Barrett utilised techniques borrowed from a fine art apprenticeship in both his lyric writing and guitar technique.

In Frith and Horne’s book, there is at times, particularly in chapters two, three and four, a tendency to offer ‘thin’ histories and to lapse into journalese, to take just two examples. The authors note that “British hippie musicians – from ‘psychedelics’ like Hendrix and Cream to ‘progressives’ like Soft Machine and Pink Floyd – lay claim to a special knowledge and the models for their claims – pop stars as seers – were found in poetry and painting.” (11) Several questions arise from this assertion. Why the demarcation between ‘psychedelics’ and ‘progressives’ for instance? How are these terms being defined? And why are the Pink Floyd on the latter rather than the former list?

Most crucially, how, why and where do these bands articulate this “claim to a special knowledge”? Given that the bands in question contained Noel Redding, Ginger Baker, Robert Wyatt, Hugh Hopper, and Nick Mason, some of the most pragmatic and phlegmatic musicians working in the late 1960s rock scene, it would be instructive to learn where their perceived seer status has been gained. Similarly, the authors state “Pink Floyd may have found fame playing hippie venues like Middle Earth, UFO and The Marquee but they’d already served their apprenticeship on the London Art School circuit.”(12) Leaving aside the unchronological and arbitrary listing – UFO existed well before Middle Earth, while the Marquee at the time could by no means be called a hippie venue – the Pink Floyd had barely played a handful of gigs before the period in question. In fact it was their singular lack of a time-served apprenticeship which made them so widely distrusted by the London musician community, nowhere more so in fact than at the Marquee Club. (13)

Such generalisations pervade both books. Walker claims that “art students tend to be passionate opinionated individuals, suspicious of entrenched ideologies and critical of intellectual pretentiousness.” (14) Frith and Horne emphasise “the recurring importance of art schools simply as a scene, a place where young people, whether students there or not, can hang out and learn/fantasize what it means to be an artist, a bohemian, a star.” (15)

This residual appeal to the romantic/bohemian archetype of the art student, although occasionally accompanied by caveats, is frequently the most under-theorised component of Frith and Horne’s book, and it is one that Peter Smith is particularly scathing about. “None of this offers much in the way of a critique

of art education,” he states. “Most of the old shibboleths are left unchallenged. Ultimately Frith and Horne’s version of the art school context is heavily influenced by the mystique of art and of stardom, which as they seem to argue are two sides of the same coin.” (16) This latter consideration is crucial. In both books, consideration of pop musicians who attended art school is synonymous with pop stars (and indeed art stars) who attended art school, hence the selectivity and shortcomings of the lists which I highlighted earlier. Again Smith’s comments are pertinent when considering those who are absented by this romanticized view of the art school.

“This somewhat lyrical view of art education gives little attention to the malcontents amongst the thousands of art students over the years. Little effort has been made to diagnose the malaise or to account for the hostility expressed by many art students on discovering the inadequacies of the art school system. The cults and coteries which these authors describe were in fact I suspect, of little interest to the majority of art students, many of whom, *like students within other disciplines*, had expectations that the art school had something more to offer than the opportunity of hanging out.” (17) (italics mine.)

In other words, neither book takes account of the thousands of students whose experience of art school was similar to John Lennon’s but who didn’t go on to be John Lennon. I have emphasised “like students within other disciplines” above, because as well as raising comparative considerations lacking in both books (why not also look at music students or English literature students for example? Is their approach and experience different or similar?) it offers a necessary corrective to the prevailing romantic ‘outsider’ notion of art students, which informs Frith and Horne’s analysis. Syd Barrett, for example,

was, as my own research shows, a diligent, committed, hard working art student, as were all of the fellow art practitioners I interviewed for my biography. Maggi Hambling, Duggie Fields, David Henderson, Keith Rowe, Lawrence Sheaff, and Graham Coxon all spoke at length about technique, the rigour of their apprenticeship, about philosophical issues, and about a questing spirit to find an artistic voice and identity, and, with the exception of Maggi Hambling, said little or nothing about 'hanging out'.

Another issue to consider is the era in which each book was commissioned and written. It is not within the remit of this literature review to deconstruct the commissioning process of populist academic texts in the mid 1980s but a few contextual considerations are worthy of comment. Smith, for example, makes an issue of the poor quality of the cover for the Walker book, and cites a Neville Brody cover which was commissioned but then rejected. (18) In fact Brody's rejected faux-Constructivist cover, reprinted in Smith's review, now looks every bit as dated as the cover that he disparages.

I am also aware that one cannot simply use hindsight in order to criticise comments made in faith at the time, as for example, when Walker makes the observation that "in the early 1980s there was a vogue for electronic Pop based on the use of synthesizers and tape machines". (19) What, for Walker was 'a vogue' is at the time of writing the dominant sound of contemporary pop music, and has arguably been so for the best part of a decade.

Smith contends, albeit without direct evidence, that “Methuen may have encouraged a populist strategy when these books were commissioned.” (20) Again, this is not problematic in itself and will have given both books a wider market outside of academia. But it does partly explain why there is an absence of theoretical rigour in both books, and a privileging of ‘style’ - a somewhat ahistorical and asocial privileging at that. As I have already stated, these are in the main entirely retrospective considerations. As with any analysis, some observations have held up better than others. And all of them of course have been subject to the very fluctuations of fashionability, which the authors themselves chronicle. Some however cannot be accounted for so readily, as for instance when Walker makes the following claim in his introduction.

“Whether the interaction (between pop and art) can continue in the future is...uncertain. A maximum degree of interaction seems to have been achieved, so that further interactions are liable to yield diminishing returns.” (21)

This is the Cultural Studies equivalent of End of History thinking. There is an uncritical nod to punk’s year zero legacy, an inability to see beyond the zeitgeist, and an acceptance, or at least an assertion that certain post-modern conflicts have been fought and won, and that those high and low cultural hierarchies, so beloved of publishers blurbs, have been breached and dismantled for good. This kind of critique could be viewed as complacent in any era. Walker makes it during the very period when hip hop culture was transforming music and the ways of thinking about music making. The models

of musical resistance that are prioritised in Walker's book are almost wholly synonymous with punk and post punk music. He omits any consideration of the ways in which hip hop was transforming records into found material, and utilising techniques that Walker evokes elsewhere by creating montage and bricolage via the medium of the mix. In doing this hip hop was subverting the very notion of music as finished text, while simultaneously having a massive impact upon fashion, graphics, dance, and yes, style. Such an omission reveals either a lack of perception or a reluctance to engage with material outside of some fairly narrow frames of musical, and cultural, referencing.

Consideration of ethnicity and gender are significant omissions in both books. There is some good historical analysis in Frith and Horne about jazz, but this is largely confined within a construction of the black hipster and related considerations of Beat style. Equally significant is the omission from both books of any meaningful consideration of the influence of Afro-American culture and the black avant-garde upon the very themes that are central to both books.

Alex Seago's *Burning The Box of Beautiful Things* (22) emerged from his own PhD research and chapter one, entitled 'Years may come, years may go, but the art school dance goes on forever': Art and Design Education and an English Postmodern Sensibility' is effectively the author's own Literature Review of work relevant to his, and to a significant extent my own, study. Seago attempts to place much of the existing literature in the context of his book's subtitle *The Development of a Post Modern Sensibility* and begins by

acknowledging the importance of Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture*. Seago calls *Bomb Culture* 'a rambling highly idiosyncratic story' (23) - 'a rambling highly idiosyncratic account of a rambling highly idiosyncratic story' might be more accurate - but recognises, as I did, the book's importance in locating linkage between the 'hitherto distinct 'art' 'protest' and 'pop' subcultures' of the 1960s. I drew upon *Bomb Culture* for a significant portion of my 'pre-history' to the counterculture in *A Very Irregular Head*, and Nuttall's account remains, I believe, one of the most accurate primary sources for mapping out the formative artistic and sub-cultural tendencies of the period.

Seago also notes the significance of Robert Hewison's *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75* (24) but claims, unfairly in my view, that "Hewison's approach is methodologically conservative, focusing upon the relationships between artistic activity and the institutions, both cultural and political, which create the climate in which individual artists and writers have to work". (25) Seago prioritises the way in which post modernism challenges these relationships rather than the inter-connectivity of the relationships themselves, and in his eagerness to find evidence of the post-modern break he attributes tendencies to Hewison that are simply not apparent in his work. For example, he states, somewhat disapprovingly, that "the raw material for Hewison's brand of cultural history resides in the stacks of university libraries and archives." (26) This is simply not true. The 'Notes and Sources' section which Seago cites contains an impressively wide range of bibliographical material, which is both comprehensive and abundant in literature which lies outside of the normal range of academic research. Seago also states that

Hewison takes a traditional high art view of culture and that “pop culture, that is jazz, pop and rock music, advertising, commercial radio, television and even film, is virtually ignored.” (27) Again, with the exception of film, an absence that Hewison himself acknowledges, this is untrue. There is a plethora of index entries for popular culture, including The Beatles, psychedelic bands, and pirate radio, and there are multiple index entries concerning the 1960s counterculture, which is examined in detail and depth.

Seago’s definition of Hewison’s methodology as ‘conservative’ can also be contested. One theme that Hewison sets up very strongly in his foreword is the schism between the ‘actual’ sixties and the ‘media’ sixties. Quoting Peter York’s 1978 article ‘Recycling the sixties’ (originally published in *Harpers and Queens* – a decidedly non-academic source – and later reprinted in York’s anthology *Style Wars*) Hewison makes a vital qualitative distinction between, as York puts it, “what really happened and what the media said was happening.” (28) This approach informs Hewison’s sober and non-sensationalist analysis of historical events but it is not inherently conservative. Seago’s contention would appear to be based partly on his desire to place everything in a post modernist context, and partly on a misreading of Hewison’s foreword where the author, possibly over-stating his own case, bullishly refuses to defer to the media version of the 1960s.

In contrast to his dismissal of Hewison’s methodology Seago lauds Bryan Appleyard’s *The Pleasures of Peace: Art and Imagination in Postwar Britain* (29) for its recognition of ‘the postmodern break’. Appleyard, according to

Seago, defines pop art's reaction against pre-war 'painterly mainstream modernism' as a 'rejection of the emphasis on form and the painted surface'. Appleyard prioritises instead "the deadpan or ironic pose." (30) Aside from the issue of how modernism can be mainstream (or indeed how 'painterly mainstream modernism' is being defined here) this offers a rather limited view of both post-modernism and Appleyard's analysis. To reduce the postmodern sensibility to considerations of the 'ironic pose' undermines the very conceptual framework that Seago is attempting to construct.

Bernice Martin's *Sociology Of Contemporary Cultural Change* adopts, as Seago acknowledges, "a more rigorous model of culture and cultural change derived from... Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and the interpretive phenomenology of Peter Berger." (31) There is therefore less about irony and other postmodern tropes and more emphasis on the "arts and politics of a cosmopolitan intelligentsia." (32) Martin recognises that traditional cultural elites "located close to the status, if not the power centre of industrial society" particularly "the upper middle classes in the expressive professions" play a crucial part in the dissemination of cultural power. Again, as he did with Hewison, Seago dismisses what he perceives as Martin's "conservative cultural critique". He associates her negative evaluation of post modernism "as being synonymous with anomie and a decline in aesthetic standards". (33) But Martin's critique does at least allow for some consideration of the way in which political and economic forces shape artistic practice. Her analysis is rooted in considerations of economic power and cultural capital, and these

infrastructural considerations stand in stark contrast to postmodernism's often vague and nebulous appeal to stylistic options and poses.

Before considering Horne and Frith's work Seago first identifies the importance of Horne's earlier critique of the CCCS theorists' approach to sub-culture in his PhD thesis *'Hippies : A Study In The Sociology of Knowledge'* (34) Citing what he perceives to be the inapplicability of the CCCS methodology to the counter-culture, Horne places radical countercultural activity firmly in the tradition of middle class bohemianism, and thus lays down the groundwork for the model of cultural practice that is explored more thoroughly in *Art Into Pop*. The influence of middle class bohemianism was undeniable in my own research and I devoted a significant portion of the early chapters of *A Very Irregular Head* to examining the middle and sometimes upper-middle class cultural milieu of Syd Barrett's Cambridge bohemian associates in the 1950s and 1960s.

Seago is broadly in agreement with Horne's thesis and notes approvingly that in *Art Into Pop* the authors recognise that "the only way to account for the curious link between art and design education and British pop music is 'to put musicians themselves at the centre of the pop process'." (35) My own contention, elaborated earlier, is not that Frith and Horne did not do this, but that they did not make the link explicit enough, or explore its conceptual and material implications more thoroughly, something I consciously sought to amend, when I examined Syd Barrett's own engagement with artistic and musical practice.

Seago emphasises the fact that the counterculture's "aesthetic strategies of change involved posters, printing, publishing, bookshops, music, film and video" and attributes this to Frith and Horne's recognition of the postmodern sensibility in "the cross-fertilization between romantic ideology and popular culture during the 1960s". (36) Again this is questionable, and I see very little direct articulation of this linkage in *Art Into Pop*. On similar thematic ground Seago cites Christopher Williams for recognising in 'A Survey of the Relationship between Pop Art, Pop Music and Pop Films in Britain from 1956-1976' that "the key technique underlying British pop, whether musical or visual, was the fluid eclecticism of collage." (37) But collage, as Seago himself later acknowledges, was a technique first applied as a serious art form by Picasso and Braque in 1912-13, and was in his own words "the single most important medium pop borrowed from the modernist avant-garde". What he doesn't mention is that collage was a major feature of contemporary American music too. In fact it could be argued that the application of collage techniques on the early records of Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention was, with the possible exception of The Who's *Who Sell Out* LP, far more sophisticated (and it could be argued, more playful in a postmodern way) than anything going on in British pop at the time. On a similar comparative note Williams claims that "British pop could be distinguished from the American variety by its humour and theatricality" (38) a distinction that might also be made between English psychedelic music and its American counterpart, and which I noted, when I analysed the perceptual shift from R&B to psychedelia on pages 131-132 of *A Very Irregular Head*. (39)

Nigel Whiteley's *Pop Design: Modernism to Mod* (1987) is credited with making crucial distinctions between the three stages of pop art; namely 'intellectual pop', 'conscious pop' and 'unconscious pop', Seago notes that "unselfconscious pop is defined as the 'do it yourself' variety of pop endeavour created by people who were simply responding to the trends of the time. Much, but not all, British pop music of the period under discussion falls into this category." (40) This simple pragmatic assertion provides fruitful working criteria for further analysis of the developmental strategies of British pop music in the mid to late 1960s. In recognising commercial considerations and market forces it forcefully undermines some of the more contentious and speculative claims regarding authenticity and artistic motives that are frequently made on behalf of pop music's practitioners. Seago calls *Pop Design : Modernism to Mod* "the definitive work on the pop design phenomenon" (41) and I will return to the importance of Whiteley's work presently.

Finally Seago considers John A. Walker's *Crossovers: Art into Pop, Pop into Art*. Again, he reads Walker's work largely in terms of its usefulness to the post-modernist project, and does so selectively. He reiterates Walker's claim that "modern art's shock value has virtually evaporated' and that "social criticism, political opposition, utopianism, aesthetic radicalism, and difficulty once crucial to certain avant-garde movements has been taken up by young musicians." (42) Aside from the problems that arise from grouping 'social criticism, political opposition, utopianism, aesthetic radicalism, and difficulty'

under the one thematic umbrella, or indeed from assuming that their relationship with shock value is causal or even consistent, there is little evidence beyond the anecdotal of how this 'taking up' has been enacted.

It is at this point, in the concluding pages of chapter one, that the inconsistency of Seago's use of post-modernism becomes most evident. In contrast to my portrayal of art students as conceptually astute, and indeed Frith and Horne's as hard working, Seago quotes Walker's view of the typical art student's work ethic, noting that they "do not spend long hours researching in libraries or attending lecturers or seminars ; practice is more important to students than theory." (43) This assertion is made during the period when conceptual Art was the dominant tendency in the UK, and at a time when the media savvy YBAs were in their ascendancy. From Seago's reading of events we are to assume that the conditions and practices of postmodernism emerged, instinctively, from this apparent atmosphere of rampant anti-intellectualism. Seago claims that "art and design students were among the first to be aware of and articulate the social implications of postmodern culture" despite, as he admits "the fact that the framing definition of post modernism was not yet in existence. These students had never heard of the term 'postmodernism'". (44) Seago calls this 'a sensibility', but his reasoning remains implausible. As Anne Massey notes, Seago's example "apparently constitutes evidence of a post modern sensibility. However I would argue that this marks the delayed impact of modernism on British visual culture, not a nascent postmodernism." (45)

In her own book *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture 1945-59* (46) published in the same year as Seago's, Massey makes the opposite claim. She sees the contribution of the Independent Group (and therefore by inference all those who were subsequently informed by its cultural agenda) as part of a wider "re-evaluation of modernism, with special focus on Adolf Loos, Dada, and Marcel Duchamp." (47) Massey claims that this, along with "the retention of notions of quality in mass culture and the pleasure of the process of consumption are three areas which do not directly correlate to post-modernism." (48) Subsequent schools of thought on the relationship between consumerism and postmodernism might call the later assertion into question but Massey's reading of the Independent Group's relationship with modernism is sound on the first two claims

The imprecise reasoning and nebulous terminology that Seago uses in reducing complex cultural practices to a 'sensitivity' is problematic. It is as if a kind of postmodern osmosis is at work. There is an overriding emphasis throughout Seago's introductory chapter on "the *idea* of creativity" (author's italics) "the *cult* of the author", (my italics) Differences between 'typical teenagers' and 'art students' are read in terms of differences in "*attitudes and dress*" (my italics). Penny Sparke's *Theory and Design in the Age of Pop* (49) is lauded for what it has to say about design rather than what it has to say about theory. Nowhere in any of this is there any consideration of technique, craft, or material conditions. Artistic practice has all but been erased from the picture. When it is considered it is done so reductively. Seago lapses into the same caricatures that undermine Horne and Frith's analysis, stating "pop

culture offered the promise of fame glamour and adulation – a stark contrast to the silence and solitude of the painter or sculptors studio.” (50) To define the difference between pop musicians and art students in these terms is simply inadequate. It is not plausible empirically, or even anecdotally. When I arrived to interview the painter Duggie Fields he was playing Verdi at full blast in his studio. When I interviewed the sculptress Emily Young at her workshop under the Westway, she was chiselling away to the permanent rumble of traffic and tube trains.

When Seago writes about the environment in which such postmodern sensibilities supposedly thrive, he dispenses with the theory and little further attention is paid to the ‘postmodern break’. Instead he concentrates almost exclusively on the social and cultural forces, which shaped artistic practice between 1945 and the mid 1960s, and uses his primary research into activities at the Royal College of Art as a microcosm of wider developments in British post-war art. Although drawn from a fairly narrow study sample this proves to be a highly effective methodological strategy - I utilised exactly the same approach in *A Very Irregular Head*, using the middle class grammar school revolt in Cambridge in the 1950s as an indicator of wider cultural tendencies in the UK. (51) It is in this study of a relatively under-documented period of British art life that Seago’s book has most to offer. When he engages in primary research and offers empirical analysis, as he does in the later chapters of the book, he contributes much that is original to the existing body of knowledge. In these later chapters there is a real sense of artists going about their business and justifying or articulating their modus operandi

unencumbered by bolted-on and inconsistently applied critique, or what Anne Massey calls “a veneer of post-modern theory”. Jean-Louis Fabiani notes that “descriptive precision constitutes the great merit of” *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things*, “but sometimes it looks like an accumulation of biographical or graphic detail that does not really correspond to the author’s first ambition.” (52) Fabiani recognises that the “difficulty arises from the use of post-modern” and notes “although the author is quite aware of the confusions that arise from the term, he goes on using it in a not constantly controlled way. Becoming synonymous with a rather vague spirit of the times, post-modernism might be applied to any cultural movement or form.” (53) This is a crucial observation. Once Seago’s narrative dispenses with its untenable theoretical framework it offers instead a fascinating history of post-war British culture, as mediated through the eyes of its leading art exponents. Chapter two concentrates on the contents of the RCA student magazine, *ARK* between 1950 and 1963. Chapter three considers Englishness and the reaction against ‘good taste’, and provides both data and analysis that chimed with my own study of English psychedelia. For example Seago describes the revival of archaic typefaces from the early 19th century in English advertising and poster design and uses this as an example of the English reaction against European modernism. Similar iconography would resurface a decade later during the flowering of English psychedelic pop.

In chapter four, *Dada, Dodo, and Doo-dah*, Seago delineates a previously undocumented oral history of the infiltration of post war art schools by ex-servicemen. The only pop musicians who appear in this section are members

of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, whose approach was, as their original name suggests, more influenced by Dada than postmodernism. The work of Gustav Metzger and John Latham are mentioned but it is acknowledged that the bulk of their activities and impact upon pop music lay outside of the book's time frame. Seago does though trace important lineage that connects RCA student William Green to the Who guitarist Pete Townshend, via his time teaching Townshend at Ealing College of Art, and whose "personal brand of *brut* expressionism" (54) was as influential upon the guitarist as the more commonly attributed auto-destructive tendencies championed by Metzger.

As I mentioned in my introduction, in Chapter Six, *Downtown Pop*, Seago offers a case study of life in post-war Soho, which again illuminates broader developments in popular culture; as for instance when the photographer Brian Duffy talks about the precursors to the teddy boy movement, the gay clique of Guards officers who first adopted the Saville Row Edwardian look which was later appropriated by working class youth in south London. There is an abundance of this kind of primary source material in the latter half of the book, empirical research which offers a rich hidden history of previously undocumented subcultural developments in the UK. It is in these latter chapters that *Burning The Box Of Beautiful Things* most valuably contributes to our understanding of contemporary artistic practices. It offers an abundance of valuable source material, and rich potential for further research.

Martin Harrison's *Transition: The London Art Scene In The Fifties* (55) covers some of the same ground as Seago's book, but with more emphasis on

artistic practice. Harrison is particularly good at making sense of the competing styles in English art in the 1950s, citing neo-Romanticism, social realism, geometric, painterly abstraction and pop art. He points out that “certain paintings incorporated elements of more than one of these idioms, or artists might begin by adhering to a currently fashionable style before finding their own direction.” (56) He is also very good on what he refers to as “the perceived crisis in figuration”, citing the crucial influence of Nicolas de Stael on those who were attempting to reconcile abstraction and figuration in their work. De Stael’s influence, which became more pronounced after a major London exhibition in 1952, is, as I have indicated, evident in Syd Barrett’s painting a decade later, as indeed is the attempt to reconcile abstraction and figuration. Harrison also examines the complex relationship between Englishness and continental and American influences in art. What is refreshing about his analysis is that he doesn’t make all-encompassing polemical judgements, or claim that one movement simply swept away another. Unlike some of the cruder social analysts he doesn’t adhere to the displacement theory of culture, recognising that a multiplicity of influences and tendencies learn to coalesce. Talking about British culture’s ambivalent relationship with Americana, Harrison notes the simultaneous impact of bebop and trad jazz both on the iconography of British painting and on the social life of British art students. But he gives equal credence to the influence of the Goons and a peculiarly British strand of Dadaism which has echoes in both the films and kinetic installations of Bruce Lacey and the work of the Bonzo Dog Band. Harrison’s research also reveals that light shows were being used as early as 1951 by the light-and-sound collective London Mobilux, who gave

“a demonstration of kinetic light and musique concrete” at an Independent Group meeting. (57)

The book which offers the best analysis of these competing and interlinking tendencies in all their complexity is the previously mentioned *Pop Design: Modernism To Mod* by Nigel Whiteley. (58) Published in the same year as Frith and Horne’s *Art Into Pop* and Walker’s *Crossovers*, Whiteley’s book eschews the broad brushstrokes that characterise those works and offers a more nuanced account, which examines the minutiae of a series of significant cultural shifts and developments in British art and design. The sheer range of themes that Whiteley tackles is formidable. After a brief introductory overview of British Society from 1918, Whiteley analyses in detail the development of modernism in art and architecture, and the impact of - and varying levels of resistance to - European strands of modernism on British art and cultural life. A consistent theme throughout the book is the way in which modernism and tradition learn to co-exist and hybridise. Like Harrison, Whiteley asserts that the two tendencies are not mutually exclusive. He notes, for example, how Pevsner re-evaluated his own initial championing of modernism in order to re-evaluate Victorian design aesthetics, subsequently promoting a synthesis of modernism and Victoriana (59) Whiteley sees many of these tendencies recurring in the 1951 Festival of Britain, where the Skylon and the Dome of Discovery happily rubbed alongside Barbara Jones’ folksy murals, the ‘urban beach’ and other traditional notions of Britishness. He cites Jones’ corresponding Black Eyes and Lemonade exhibition, which ran concurrently with the Festival of Britain at the Whitechapel Gallery, and traces the various

artistic developments that emerged from these events. He notes also the extent to which they impacted upon the dominant philosophies in art and design training in the post-war years. These pedagogical issues directly influenced post-war art students like Peter Blake, and had a direct and tangible influence on the design of the iconic sleeve to the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* LP in 1967.

Whiteley examines terms like Victoriana, Bohemianism, modernism, and postmodernism, not as static entities, but rather as complex amalgams of competing and co-existing ideas. Such fluidity informed my own assessment of Syd Barrett's cultural milieu and continues to have great bearing on my ongoing research into psychedelic music, enabling me to pinpoint, for instance, how notions of Victoriana have periodically been revived as stylistic traits throughout the 20th century. In *A Very Irregular Head* I examined the relevance of these traits to Syd Barrett's song writing, citing a lineage that goes back to the post-Great War revival in children's literature, but as both Whiteley and Seago make clear, Victoriana, in particular Victorian design and typography, resurface in the Shell Guides and other travel and tourism guides of the 1930s, as well as the Festival of Britain exhibits and promotional literature in the 1950s. The psychedelic music of the mid 1960s therefore can be seen as part of a wider tradition, which has antecedents throughout the 20th Century.

Several themes that Whiteley examines would appear to lie outside the immediate remit of my study, stylistic developments and competing ideologies

within architecture and interior design for instance, or the author's detailed outlining of the factionalism of the Independent Group or the Archigram movement, but even here Whiteley's findings have considerable relevance to wider ideological concerns and practises within art and music. Notions of utility and functionality versus the decorative, for instance, or permanence versus expendability and planned obsolescence. Whiteley also notes how Archigram's notion of Instant Cities found form in the pop festivals of the late 1960s. (60)

Whiteley's typology of 'Early Pop', 'High Pop' and 'Late and Post Pop' offers a working framework within which researchers can also examine parallel developments in popular music, and helps us make sense of a range of interlinking styles and practices. It is here in particular where Whiteley's insights and observations make the shortcomings of other works most apparent. His concluding thoughts on pop and design theory are instructive too. He notes how postmodernism hardens into orthodoxy, and how the 'plurality of hierarchies' that he cites throughout the book continue to inform our thinking, not just about art and design but about culture in its broadest sense.

Having looked at the most relevant studies by a range of theorists I want to conclude by looking at two key texts written by practising artists. These are Adrian Henri's *Environments and Happenings* (61) and Allan Kaprow's *Assemblages, Environments, & Happenings* (62). In *A Very Irregular Head* I was careful not to isolate Syd Barrett's music from broader cultural

manifestations. In particular I paid close attention to the multimedia nature of the English underground. Light shows, poetry, theatre, and art events all played their part in forming the cultural identity of the era, and it makes little sense to view the 1960s counter-culture simply as a music-centred movement. Henri and Kaprow's books help us make sense of the thinking behind the practice and the way these ideas impacted directly upon performance and the performing environment at the time.

Henri's book offers a detailed history of the origins of 'total art', tracing it back through pop art, surrealism, Dada, constructivism and futurism. He cites a range of crucial precursors including Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, and Allan Kaprow. Over four comprehensive chapters he traces the relationship between modernism and total art, art as environment, the Happening movement, and the artist as performer. The brevity of the text (180 illustration-packed pages) means that some entries are more descriptive than analytical, and there is little on conceptual art, but Henri's own fine art training and direct involvement with much of what he talks about, plus a useful appendix section, and detailed footnotes, ensures that *Environments and Happenings* remains useful to any research which attempts to make sense of multimedia or cross-media art. He makes direct links between art and theatre, and between art and technology. He also documents several lesser-known practitioners who tend to get left out of the inevitable canonisation of important artists. For this reason alone *Environments and Happenings* is an important historical document.

Two of Henri's appendices (*A Partial Chronology to 1963* and *Happenings* by Allan Kaprow) construct historical timelines (1952-63 and 1958-72 respectively) that correspond not only with Syd Barrett's own development as an artist, but also the wider development of the counterculture. The latter is traced in chapter three, *Happenings*, where Henri devotes a significant portion of his study to developments in Britain. (63) Here he makes explicit the vibrant cultural alliance that briefly existed between art and rock music in the 1960s, and notes the centrality of Mark Boyle, John Latham and Jeff Nuttall to these developments, as well as the entry into the pop scene of "art-school drop outs from Stuart Sutcliffe and John Lennon onwards." (64) Henri also highlights the importance of provincial developments, particularly (but not exclusively) in Liverpool, where he draws upon his own experience as a painter, poet and singer.

Henri cites Allan Kaprow as an important influence on his own work and Kaprow's own collection *Assemblages, Environments, & Happenings* is included in Henri's bibliography as essential further reading. Unlike Henri's book, which is traditionally laid out in linear fashion, Kaprow at times takes an experimental approach to typography similar to the one that John Cage adopts in his two volumes *Silence* and *A Year of Mondays*. *Assemblages, Environments, & Happenings* is book-ended by extensive illustrations of Kaprow's own work and those of colleagues and kindred spirits. The middle section (65) is devoted to Kaprow's essay 'Art and Architecture', an extended treatise on the background and theory of experimental art, which is rounded off with some consideration of current developments, as Kaprow saw them at

the time of writing. His preface (66) contains the caveat that these developments are fluid and ever changing, and this viewpoint is reinforced in an introduction where Kaprow states that “the differences that were once so clear between graphic art and painting have practically been eliminated, similarly the distinctions between painting and collage, between collage and construction, between construction and sculpture and between some large constructions and a quasi architecture”. (67) Kaprow traces the break up of form (and formal definition) back to collage in 1912-13, and talks in detail about painting’s subsequent attempt to break away from the “closed flat rectangle” of the canvas. These are precisely the same concerns that Keith Rowe and Lawrence Sheaff of the group AMM talk of at great length in *A Very Irregular Head*. (68) Syd Barrett’s pursuit of experimentation, in particular his utilisation of ‘table-top’ techniques in his guitar playing, was directly influenced by Rowe and Sheaff’s ideas and I was careful to include lengthy exposition from both members of AMM, in order to illustrate the extent to which ideas were taken from fine art philosophy and practice and adapted to avant-garde music making.

I suggest in *A Very Irregular Head* that fine artists are used to working at a far more rigorous analytical and conceptual level than most rock musicians. This is echoed throughout Kaprow’s essay. He asks important questions about the confines of the canvas and the gallery, the room as environment (69) what constitutes the field in painting (70) and how assemblages and environments provide alternatives to the latter (71). These were abiding concerns to any questioning and questing artist in the 1960s. Tendencies that would

automatically have labelled a rock musician as avant-garde were commonplace activities to a practising artist at the time. Kaprow offers his own theoretical overview of the evolution and function of the 'readymade' but he is not simply descriptive or schematic. He notes for instance how 'readymades' often utilise 'a fairly limited iconography' and how artists have to become "alert to what is becoming worn out through too much usage, or to what has become downright cliché". (72.) It could be argued that is only really in the jazz world and among the exacting performance criteria of free form and improv musicians that such considerations of the idiomatic are commonplace. Rock musicians don't tend to think about such matters, and even if they do they rarely articulate them as precisely as Kaprow has done. Kaprow thinks about these issues all the time and his central essay in *Assemblages, Environments, & Happenings* constantly challenges conformity and convention.

Kaprow also embarks upon an extended polemic on the use of chance in environmental art. Citing Aristotle's 'Four Causes', he examines four areas. These are: the creator or creators of the art form, the materials used, form, and function. In a section on composition Kaprow mentions that if chance is allowed to utilise its logical determinants then "the 'artist' as such is no longer a real entity. He has eliminated himself". (73) This has considerable relevance to the work and life of Syd Barrett who also negated himself artistically and psychologically. Kaprow's thoughts here constitute part of a wider philosophical debate about artistic negation that I have only touched upon briefly here.

Kaprow also talks about how a lot of the material used in Assemblages and Environments is “intended to last only a short time and is destroyed immediately after exhibition”. At the height of his creative development in the mid-1960s Syd Barrett was greatly influenced by John Latham’s notion of the ‘least-event’, and his one second spray paintings. Later in life Barrett routinely destroyed paintings and sketches after completion. Within the context of the rock and roll mythology about Barrett this is seen as symptomatic of a deeper psychological malaise. I make it clear in *A Very Irregular Head* that such tendencies form part of a wider tradition of artistic practice. Kaprow examines both the conceptual and normative aspects of these practices in detail.

In a concluding section on ‘The Event’ (74) Kaprow offers a scathing critique on the conformity of most so-called experimental art, including the very Happenings that he helped originate. He states that “standard performance conventions... tend to truncate the implications of the art” and defines these conventions as “a static audience” a room or gallery space to “enframe the event”, and a “history of cultural expectations attached to theatrical productions”. He advocates that Happenings should only be performed once, and that the desire for repeat performance was driven by “a rationalisation of the wish to hold on to theatrical customs”. Kaprow constantly rails against the orthodoxy and stylistic clichés of a form that he effectively invented. It is sobering to think that he was writing in such terms in 1966, at a time when rock culture was only just beginning to embrace the experimental, and the counterculture was still in its infancy.

Central to my own thesis was Syd Barrett's rapid disenchantment and disillusion with the limitations of the rock underground. Much of that disillusion (and eventual disengagement) stems from the very problems that Kaprow articulates so concisely in *Assemblages, Environments, & Happenings*. It is only when one considers these wider philosophical issues in depth, about performance, about permanence, about the very nature of the art object itself, and its ability to resist or willingness to embrace commodification, that certain key aspects of Syd Barrett's own artistic quest can be put into their proper context.

IV

PSYCHEDELIA

Most histories of psychedelia concentrate on the years 1966-1968, the period when the form was arguably in its creative zenith. However, many of these accounts seem to assume that psychedelic music emerged fully formed, without historical or cultural precedent during these years. In *A Very Irregular Head* I take the 'long history' view of psychedelia. I clearly trace the antecedents of the form and its consequences and legacy. This gives the work both historical credence and contemporary relevance.

Taking the artistic activity in Cambridge as a microcosm of wider cultural tendencies I trace a genealogy that emerges in the 1950s. This involves what might loosely be termed 'the grammar school revolt' that took place in the town among Syd Barrett and his peers, centring chiefly on the two schools which Barrett and his friends attended, the Cambridgeshire High School For Boys (known colloquially as 'the County') and the Perse, the local Common Entrance Private School. I precisely trace the radical middle class cultural milieu that arose from this environment in the post war years, and place equal importance upon the generational transmission of cultural values via the equally radicalised parents of Barrett and his friends who were largely drawn from the intelligentsia and had progressive-liberal or far left of centre politics. This peculiarly English form of middle class dissent, birthed as I suggest, "in an atmosphere of benign tolerance" was being enacted in several other cities

and towns throughout the UK and was the inspiration for the entire psychedelic movement ten years later. Much of the sociological work on educational subcultures from that period (eg A. Cohen, *Delinquent boys*. 1958. D. Downes, *The delinquent solution*. 1966. D. Hargreaves, *Social relations in a secondary school*. 1967. D. Matza *Delinquency and drift*. 1964) concentrates on delinquency and other aspects of anti-school culture. By offering a class variant on how an anti-school culture might develop, my work brings fresh insight to the institutional and environmental elements, which informed the cultural innovations of the 1960s.

As well as centring on the years 1966-1968 most histories of psychedelia concentrate almost entirely on psychedelic music at the expense of other equally relevant cultural forces. By emphasising a wide range of other influences that lie outside of music; multi-media happenings, art installations, light shows, the poetry underground, the London free school, the Arts Lab movement, avant-garde cinema and theatre etc, I give a much more rounded picture of the cultural manifestations that preceded and anticipated psychedelia. Indeed I would suggest that it is impossible to fully understand what occurred in the mid 1960s if one does not have a comparable understanding of these wider developments. My Syd Barrett biography, unlike many contemporary accounts, for the first time puts psychedelia into this wider cultural context.

As well as tracing the cultural tendencies that preceded and influenced psychedelia it is equally important to understand its legacy. In too many

accounts the reader is simply invited to view the activities of a privileged coterie of initiates in London in the mid-sixties without any understanding of how the innovations they were responsible for were adapted or reconfigured by subsequent generations. It is easy to form the opinion from such accounts that once this select few had enjoyed their first flush of youth and departed the scene then the sub-culture they developed effectively departed with them. The dominant tendency in most accounts is to see the mid-1960s as a gilded age, without historical precedent or specific cultural resonance. I completely reject this perspective and address its assumptions on several levels. I make it very clear in *A Very Irregular Head*, how LSD use for instance was far more widespread in the 1970s (and indeed in subsequent decades) than it was in the 1960s. LSD use was effectively democratised in the 1970s and this has massive implications for the way in which subsequent manifestations of psychedelic music can be evaluated. I note in *A Very Irregular Head* how stripped of its more outré stylistic trappings psychedelic music has continued to inform a wide variety of musical genres, from German space-rock to post punk, Brit-pop and myriad other forms of art-rock and contemporary Improv. I cite the personal testimony of Blur guitarist Graham Coxon, Robyn Hitchcock of the Cambridge based band Soft Boys, and avant-garde guitarist Keith Rowe to back up this assertion, drawing both on their initial encounters with the music of Syd Barrett and Pink Floyd, and more importantly how they all adapted particular aspects of Barrett's intuitive philosophy and modus operandi into their own development as practitioners.

In order to do this one has to reject the notion of decade-ism, the idea that ideas and events can be partitioned off into neat epochs. Decade-ism has become a debilitating factor in much populist historical analysis and while it might be a convenient device for forging (and contriving) what Roland Barthes calls 'the super-ego of historical continuity' it tends to promote fixity, a static worldview and clichéd historical shorthand. The 'black and white' 1950s are counteracted by the colourful 1960s. The idealistic 1960s are contrasted by the cynical 1970s and so on. Ideological forces and cultural formations cannot be so easily reduced to their attendant iconography. Culture is more fluid than that.

Much of my work by its very nature entails a deliberate and concerted revision of such lazy history. I have an instinctive scepticism about rock mythology and have spent a great deal of my active cultural life challenging rock music's more convenient foundation myths. Evidence of this can be found throughout *A Very Irregular Head*. I draw attention throughout this critical review to specific instances where I have challenged received wisdom and entrenched orthodoxy, but it should always be remembered that the most telling evidence of this approach is embedded in the methodology itself. It runs as an undercurrent through everything I do.

Perhaps the most significant and original example of my 'long-history' approach to psychedelia, and certainly the one where I have made my most significant and original contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this field occurs in my cross-disciplinary negotiation of the lyrical content of

psychedelic songs. In my Syd Barrett biography I attempted to establish thematic links between the lyrical content of English psychedelia and associated themes and concerns in Victorian and Edwardian childhood literature. (1) In particular I placed great emphasis on 'the potent strain of nostalgia', which informed much English pop during the mid-1960s. In making a comparison between Syd Barrett's lyrics and these literary antecedents I precisely located a number of themes, which reoccur in the work of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, Kenneth Grahame and Hilaire Belloc. I list these as,

"Disembodied identity, a dream-like sense of the self in limbo without place or purpose, rootlessness, restlessness, rejection, detachment, escapism, retreat into imaginary worlds, the past recounted in reverie, the lost grandeur of classicism and antiquity, faded or unreachable arcadia, protracted childhood and the potency of myth." (2)

This attempt to connect the music of the 1960s with literature that was up to a century earlier is an ongoing part of a research interest in "the first hundred years of psychedelia". Such connections lie at the heart of my own intellectual enquiry into the roots (and routes) of English psychedelic music and my work in *A Very Irregular Head* represents, I believe, an original and distinctive contribution to the existing body of literature on the topic. I would expect that there will be more exploratory work undertaken in this cross-disciplinary area, and had hoped, when I was conducting my own doctoral literature search, that there would already be an extant and substantive body of knowledge for future researchers to draw upon. Unfortunately I have been able to find very little work that explores the similarities and interlinking themes between English psychedelic music and Victorian and Edwardian literature. There is a rich body of work which critically engages with the thematic linkage between

Victorian and contemporary literature (3) but very little interdisciplinary study at all, particularly in the potentially rich convergence between literary studies, cultural studies and musicology.

An exemplary study of the kind I had envisaged is Emilia Barna's *'There are places I'll remember ...': A Sense of Past and Locality in the Songs of the Beatles and the Kinks*. (4) Barna organises her work under five headings.

These are:

1. *Longing, escape and the idyllic*
- 2., *Nostalgia as a reconstructive process*
3. *Myths of the rural and urban*
4. *Nature and the idyll*
5. *The road and memories.*

Barna draws upon a wide range of sources to illustrate her themes, applying Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to the pop songs under consideration in her study, and citing Svetlana Boym's differentiation between 'restorative' and 'reflective' types of nostalgia in her mapping of pop's dialogue with the past. In addition to Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1996) and Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) Barna also cites Fred Davis's *Yearning For Yesterday* (1979) Lipsitz's *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (1990) Lovell's *Locality of Belonging* (1998) and Roskill's *The Language of Landscape* (1997) as well as drawing upon other relevant works in urban geography, interpretive anthropology and environmental studies.

Barna takes her sub-cultural and musicological references from sources such

as Simon Frith's *The Sociology of Rock* (1978), and *Sound Effects* (1983), Ian MacDonald's *Revolution In The Head* (1998) and George Melly's *Revolt Into Style* (1989).

The Future of Nostalgia, (5) Svetlana Boym's own study of time, loss and longing, offers rich material for anyone who wishes to construct a more universally applicable typography of nostalgia. Although two thirds of *The Future of Nostalgia* is given over to examples drawn from Boym's own diasporic experience of the Eastern Bloc, part one of the book, *Hypochondria of the heart: Nostalgia History and Memory* offers a substantial theoretical framework that future researchers can build on. In this introductory section she traces the history of nostalgia from the coining of the term in 1688 and the original psychological locating of the 'condition' among soldiers fighting away from their native lands, and then widens her field of enquiry into a more all-embracing contemporary examination of the phenomenon, which she describes as "not merely an individual sickness, but a symptom of our age. A historical emotion." (6) In fact she does far more than this, locating nostalgia, and its associative emotions, not just in specific cultural experiences, but at the very heart of the human condition.

Although Emilia Barna foregrounds Boym's categorisation of restorative and reflective nostalgia, this forms just part of the more expansive and complex discourse that *The Future of Nostalgia* develops. Boym acknowledges that nostalgia first came to prominence during the Romantic period, and later with the birth of mass culture. She then offers a close reading of the works and

contemporary relevance of Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Walter Benjamin. Boym coins the term 'off-modern' to account for this tradition of critical reflection on the modern condition, which is neither strictly modernist nor postmodern.

Boym offers restorative and reflective nostalgia not as "absolute types, but rather tendencies, ways of giving shape and meaning to longing". (7) Such flexibility shapes her working model of nostalgia and she rarely lapses into dogmatic or overly prescriptive schemata. The one area where a certain rigidity does creep into her working definition is in the assertion that "restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future, reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory". (8) I would contend that restorative nostalgia, even under the criteria that Boym establishes (e.g. "rebuilding the lost home and patching up the memory gaps", or signifying "a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment") (9) has just as much applicability to the individual response as it does to the privileging of shared national archetypes. Similarly, reflective nostalgia may be, as Boym puts it, "ironic and humorous" but it can also be argued that it has exactly the same propensity towards myth creation.

Ultimately, Boym contends, "nostalgia remains an intermediary between collective and individual memory." (10) Her book has implications for all research that examines the relationship between personal memory and the public and institutional constructions of nostalgia. It also has great bearing on the construction (and deconstruction) of cultural myth. The intermediate

territory of which she speaks can of course be a site of contention as much as shared beliefs, but it is rich thematic territory for historians, biographers, and cultural analysts alike. “The past opens up a multitude of potentialities,” she says, “effective nostalgia has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness.” (11)

Where Emilia Barna applies the relationship between the past and sense of place to pop song, Russell Reising examines the notion of temporality in psychedelic music. Taking its title from a phrase used by novelist Tom Robbins, *Melting Clocks and The Hallways of Always* (12) looks at the ways in which timelessness impacts upon the structure and coding of psychedelia. Reising divided his findings into six categories. These are:

1. *Psychedelic awakenings*
2. *Psychedelic saturations*
3. *Psychedelic carpe diem*
4. *Psychedelic separation*
5. *Psychedelic nostalgia*
6. *Psychedelic apocalypse*

These categories are Reising’s starting point for a wider discussion on what he describes as LSD’s ‘aural synesthesia’. In the section on Psychedelic Carpe Diem (13) he takes the Grass Roots song *Let’s Live for Today* and the Chambers Brothers *Time Has Come Today* as examples of seizing the moment and notes that “whether merely rejecting an ethos of deferred

gratification, or announcing a new agenda for the so-called 'Age of Aquarius' such songs bring our relationship to time and history to a critical point and demand a new orientation to the world ... the psychedelic carpe diem crystallizes the intensity and insistence of an entire cultural movement." (14)

On the theme of Psychedelic Separation (15) he writes with insight about George Harrison's *Long Long Long* noting that the song "accepts the convention of the 'we've been apart too long tradition', only to displace with divine reunion the overt physicality of that tradition". (16) In my own account I was keen to examine the sea change, which occurred in the subject matter of pop songs between 1965 and 1967. I note the "peculiarly English type of character vignette" (17) that Syd Barrett was an exponent of and how many groups evolved from their R&B roots into psychedelic spirituality (or in some cases faux-spirituality) during this period.

Reising's examples might occasionally have benefited from a little broader contextualisation, as when he cites the Chambers Brothers' *Time has Come Today* without noting the band's ethnic make up or the song's afrocentric echoes of other politicised black engagements with temporal urgency such as Charlie Parker's *Now's The Time* and Ornette Coleman's *Shape of Jazz To Come*. The theme of afrocentricity might also have been usefully engaged when he considers Jimi Hendrix, Reising's portrayal being far too reliant on the stock archetype of the cosmic minstrel. At times the examples Reising uses seem to lie outside of any meaningful psychedelic frame of reference, (e.g. Joni Mitchell's *Ladies of the Canyon*, Yes's *The Gates of Delirium*) but

elsewhere he makes new and interesting connections. In the section on Psychedelic Nostalgia, for example, he utilises the hybridisation of psychedelia and folk music in order to examine psychedelia's re-contextualisation of literary arcadia and the rural idyll. This corresponds very closely with my own thematic concerns in *A Very Irregular Head* where I examine the amalgam of evocation and loss and pastoral sensibility which underpins many of Syd Barrett's lyrics.

The Hallways of Always is only sullied when Reising lapses into some of the less savoury snobberies of rock journalism. An example of this is when he uses the phrase 'pseudo-psychedelic nuggets', with its underlying assumption that there is such a thing as 'authentic psychedelia.' Similarly, after making a perfectly plausible case for the ways in which the blues lends itself to psychedelic improvisation by making a feature of long jams, he cannot resist adding "thereby banishing what Jefferson Airplane referred to as 'logic and proportion' and relegating such jejune concerns to the likes of Henry Mancini or Lawrence Welk" (18) Such glib 'hey man let's laugh at the squares' editorialising and similar unnecessary stylistic tics characterise the worst aspects of elitist rock writing and have no place in serious analysis. And in a world in which Cary Grant and Andy Williams both took acid - Grant reputedly over sixty times (19) - while Ian Anderson and Roger Waters (who the author cites as psychedelic pioneers) were both fervently anti-hallucinogens, Reising should at the very least reassess the veracity of his archetypes.

Grunenberg and Harris's anthology *Summer of Love* (20) was timed to coincide with the 2005 Tate Liverpool exhibition, *Summer of Love: Art in the Psychedelic Era*. The collection takes a broad based approach to its theme and acknowledges that 'psychedelia was not a project or movement'. This allows the editors a considerable amount of flexibility, which is both the collection's strength and weakness. As with many anthologies of this kind the scope and quality of the commissioned pieces varies greatly. I will concentrate on five chapters, which have direct bearing on my own interests. Andrew Wilson's chapter, *Spontaneous Underground: An Introduction to London Psychedelic Scenes* provides an overview of countercultural activity in Britain in the mid 1960s. Its timeline chronicles broadly the same events and cultural formations that I cover in chapter three of *A Very Irregular Head*. These include Timothy Leary's Castalia Foundation at Milbrook and Michael Hollingshead's World Psychedelic Centre in London, the International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall, Alexander Trocchi's Project Sigma, Michael Horowitz's *New Departures* magazine, the formation of the Vietnam Solidarity Committee, the Notting Hill Free School, the Dialectics of Liberation conference, the foundation of the Anti-University, the underground press, the Arts Lab movement, Better Books, the Marquee Club Spontaneous Underground events, the launch of the Roundhouse and UFO, the 14 Hour Technicolor Dream, and the student occupations of the LSE and Hornsey Art College. Wilson provides 69 footnotes, many of which are extensively notated, and makes considerable use of the *IT* magazine archive, which, since the book's publication, is now available in its entirety online. (21) It is to be hoped that other underground magazines such as *Oz*, *Friends*, *Frendz*, and *Ink* will

be similarly made available online, as they can provide invaluable primary source material for future researchers in this area.

Two further chapters are of considerable relevance to my own study. Edwin Pouncey's chapter *Laboratories of Light : Psychedelic Light Shows* traces the evolution of the British light show and draws heavily on the work and archive of UFO light show pioneer Mark Boyle. Barbara Kienscherf's, *From the 'Ocular Harpsichord' to the 'Sonchromatoscope': The Idea of Colour Music and Attempts to Realize it* examines the relationship between synaesthesia and creativity, and maps out an alternative history of music (and instrumentation) which stretches from Scriabin at the turn of the 20th century to the psychedelic era of the mid 1960s.

Considerations of the role of light shows in psychedelia, play an integral role in my own research. Light shows make 16 separate index entries in *A Very Irregular Head* (22) ranging from the work of individual exponents such as Mike Leonard, Mark Boyle, Joel and Tony Brown, and Peter Jenner and Andrew King, to the function of lighting effects in the environmental stimulus and musical development of Pink Floyd.

Successive chapters by Carlo McCormick and Branden W. Joseph highlight the central role New York played in the development of psychedelia. Joseph's chapter *'My Mind Split Open': Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable'* situates the Velvet Underground within the wider intellectual and technological context of New York art, film, and art music. McCormick's contribution, *The*

Urban Trip: New York's Psychedelic Movement, is particularly good on psychogeography and intellectual heritage. McCormick describes New York's "layers of progressive Jewish thinking, avant-garde strategies, interventionist street theatrics, as well as the literary and lifestyle threads woven over a century of bohemianism". (23) He also talks of how "New York was imbued with a degree of theatrical sophistication, perceptual theory and late modernist strategies" (24) and illustrates this by drawing on a conceptual lineage that simultaneously embraces Walt Whitman, Dada and The Fugs. He also explores the techniques utilised by the experimental film underground, as well as the activities of avant-garde music innovators such as Tony Conrad, La Monte Young and Angus MacLise. McCormick notes a divergence from the west coast psychedelic norm when he emphasises the use of monochrome rather than multi-colour in New York film projections and light shows. This preference for black and white was applied by avant-garde film exponents such as Kenneth Anger and Ken Jacobs. It also characterised much of Gerard Malanga and Paul Morrissey's early work at Warhol's Factory.

The other significant chapter in *Summer Of Love* is Mathieu Poirier's *Hyper-optical and Kinetic Stimulation, Happenings and Films in France*. Although this chapter is, as the title indicates, primarily concerned with cultural and political developments in France, centring on the events of May 1968, it also offers a pertinent parallel line of development in the art world, stressing the importance of op art and kinetic art to the visual environment of psychedelia. Poirier offers a much more rigorous critique of the notion of psychedelic art than is to be found in some of the more celebratory accounts of the era. Citing

Jean Clay's comments on the vulgarisation and commercialisation of Op-Art Poirier states "Psychedelic art would therefore become a misappropriated and diminished realization of an avant-garde intention" (25) the only function of which was to replicate and enhance the experience of those who had taken psychotropic drugs. Syd Barrett's own subsequent disillusion with the English underground is couched in very similar terms. The interviews he gave, particularly in the latter stages of his short recording career reveal a certain distancing from the aims and achievements of the counterculture. I examine this disenchantment in detail in Chapter Eight of *A Very Irregular Head*. (26)

Carlo McCormick asserts in the introductory paragraph to his chapter that "we have libraries on what happened in London and San Francisco, but nary a volume on the immense visual, radical, social and cultural tapestry of events and ideas in New York". (27) This is borne out by the number of books that focus primarily on the importance of the West Coast in the development of American psychedelic music. I will briefly examine some of these accounts. None of them are academic in nature but they highlight many of the points I made in my introduction about the strictures that rock literature operates under when analysing cultural phenomena. The books I want to look at are *San Francisco Nights* by Gene Sculatti and Davin Seay,(28) *Summer of Love* by Joel Selvin, (29) *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s* by Nick Bromell, (30) *Turn On Your Mind: Four Decades of Great Psychedelic Rock* by Jim DeRogatis (31) and *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* by Charles Perry. (32)

Sculatti and Seay's book concentrates mostly on events in the Bay Area between 1965 and 1968, but also offers snapshots of countercultural developments in other major American cities, and, in its least convincing chapter, the UK. The most successful chapters make some attempt to frame the San Francisco scene and the gestation of the hippie underground within a wider historical and artistic context. There is, for example, some useful, but under-developed information about the appropriation of Wild West iconography in the fashion and song lyrics of the early West Coast groups. Multimedia happenings and light shows are also touched upon, as is the West Coast scene's brief engagement with Ken Kesey and The Merry Pranksters. But the tone is largely anecdotal and the focus is mostly upon music so these crucial subcultural connections are rarely developed and their importance is underplayed.

Summer of Love by Joel Selvin covers almost exactly the same time frame and chronology that Sculatti and Seay depict in *San Francisco Nights*, albeit in more detail and depth. What is interesting when comparing the two books is how they both adhere to the standard narrative framework of rock literature. An assumed historical trajectory is observed, which divides epochs into what might be conveniently termed pre-history, fruition, hubris and fallout. Although this gives both books conventional narrative shape, it also means that a rigid critical orthodoxy of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' is established very quickly. This, as in much rock literature, has the effect of closing off whole avenues of useful enquiry.

The Haight-Ashbury: A History by Charles Perry attempts a broader examination of the origins of the counterculture and embraces key developments outside of the West Coast music scene. Perry traces a cultural lineage, which embraces experimental theatre (particularly street theatre) dance, light shows, radical politics, communal living, the appropriation of cultural space, and what later became known as hip capitalism. He stresses the importance of such organisations as the San Francisco Mime Troupe, The Open Theatre, The Family Dog, The Diggers, the Free City Collective, the Merry Pranksters and the Hells Angels. He is not shy of examining the conflicts and contradictions that went into the development of the Haight-Ashbury scene, noting, for example, the incipient racial tensions that emerged when hippie entrepreneurs moved in to what had previously been a black ghetto. Perry inverts the priorities displayed in Selvin and Sculatti and Seay's books by putting wider cultural and socio-political developments at the centre of his narrative. While music is by no means relegated to the fringes of this activity (Perry is very insightful about the power politics of the Monterey Pop Festival for example) he makes it clear that rock bands are just one strand in a rich cultural tapestry.

The most negative aspect of Perry's book is its sexism. This is a man's world, and apart from the singer Janis Joplin and Open Theatre co-founder Rain Jacopetti, women are hardly mentioned at all; indeed most of them don't appear to have names. For example "an Englishwoman" is credited with revolutionising multi-coloured typography at the underground magazine *The Oracle*. (33) We learn nothing more about this "Englishwoman," but a lot more

about the men who put her techniques into practice. Similarly, Perry mentions that the free form radio station KPMX begins hiring female engineers after one of its DJs falls in love with “a waitress at a North Beach vegetarian restaurant.” (34) “The waitress got her third class licence in May and on June 5th the station hired a second female engineer” notes Perry. Editor Allan Cohen’s internet reminiscences on the history of the *San Francisco Oracle* names the innovative designer as “Hetti McGee, originally from Liverpool, England.” (35) Susan Krieger’s history of KMPX, *Hip Capitalism* (36) names the engineers as Katie Johnson and Dusty Street and gives a fulsome account of the role they played in the development of underground radio.

Nick Bromell’s *Tomorrow Never Knows* is a personal account of the writer’s own experience of the 1960s as a young man. This type of ‘rite of passage’ autobiographical approach to the 1960s needs careful unpicking and can be problematic on several levels. Bromell’s book is essentially an inner dialogue, the main subject of which appears to be not the decade in question but the writer himself. Despite the author’s own academic credentials (he is a professor of English and American Literature at the University of Massachusetts) there is little hard analysis of the 1960s, and Bromell is uncritical of some of the more debatable aspects of sixties mythology. Chief among these is the assumed - and conventionally canonized - centrality of the lyrical ‘messages’ of the Beatles and Bob Dylan. Rather than critique such assumptions, Bromell offers a thesis that takes the importance and cultural specificity of the decade largely for granted. This leads to some uneven

attempts to blend conjecture about 'what it all meant' with sketchy accounts of the taken for granted 'significance' of rock music's great and good.

As its sub-title '*Four Decades of Great Psychedelic Rock*' suggests, *Turn On Your Mind* by Jim DeRogatis covers a much wider time frame than the aforementioned books; DeRogatis has previously written an esteemed biography of the rock journalist Lester Bangs, and his writing here is mostly witty and informed, suffering from little of the introspective ponderousness that mars Bromell's account. He adopts an adventurous approach to style and presentation, breaking up the narrative with interviews and 'best of' lists. However the book is too broad-based and lacks consistency. At no point does DeRogatis offer a cohesive definition of the term psychedelia. At times (when talking about the music of the Velvet Underground for instance) his justification for inclusion in the psychedelic canon seems to be 'because I said so'. He frequently uses (and misuses) Stockhausen and Cage as shorthand for 'avant-garde' or 'experimental', and his similarly catch-all approach to subject matter has become meaningless long before he spends eleven lines outlining the psychedelic credentials of Culture Club's *Karma Chameleon!* (37)

The book which best combines rigorous academic analysis and informed enthusiasm is Michael Hicks *Sixties Rock: Garage Psychedelic and Other Satisfactions*. (38) 'Sixties Rock' is a thorough and invaluable source book, with copious informative sleeve notes and an extensive bibliography. Hicks does not attempt to write an exhaustive or definitive history. Instead he offers

seven short incisive chapters, which deal with crucial elements of psychedelia and garage rock. These are:

1. *The Against-the-Grain of the Voice* in which Hicks adopts and adapts criteria laid down in Roland Barthes' essay *The Grain of the Voice* in order to discuss a range of singers and singing styles.
2. *The Fuzz*. Here Hicks traces the evolution of guitar playing from secondary instrument in jazz bands to lead instrument in the modern era. He pinpoints amplification and in particular distortion as epochal moments in the technological development of the rock guitar.
3. *Avant-Garage* is an attempt to re-contextualise American garage rock by tracing its antecedents back to surf music and R&B, and rescuing it from dominant anglocentric readings and critical accounts which valorise its primitivism and lack of harmonic sophistication.
4. *The Not-So-Average "Joe"* traces the uncertain authorship and folk genealogy of the crime ballad *Hey Joe*, as performed by a variety of artists including The Byrds, Love, The Leaves, Jimi Hendrix and Deep Purple.
5. *Getting Psyched* examines the connection between psychedelia and LSD and continues and expands the themes introduced in chapter two by further analysing the technological innovations which gave garage rock and

psychedelia their distinctive styles, namely effects pedals, reverberation, phasing, and stereo panning.

6. *Playing With Fire*. As in chapter four, Hicks traces the evolution of one song, in this case The Doors' *Light My Fire*, and argues for its musicological and subcultural importance.

7. *Ends and Means*. The concluding section looks at the ways in which studio innovations during the psychedelic era transformed the notion of song endings, utilising such devices as lamination, delamination, resumption, substitution, and transition.

In Appendix 1, entitled *Sources*, Hicks embarks upon his own critical survey of the existing literature on rock and roll, and it seems fitting to end this section on rock writing by reflecting on these thoughts, as many of them echo the themes I outlined in my introduction. Hicks begins by taking issue with the standard bibliographical categorisation of academic writing, which he lists as “books, articles, theses, dissertations” (39) and makes a plea for a more inclusive approach to source material which, as my own research also illustrates, involves studying music available on a variety of formats, including bootlegs of live and studio recordings, unreleased tapes, outtakes and other unofficial sources. By acknowledging the usefulness of such material, Hicks offers a valid critique of the gatekeeping function of the music industry and the ‘official culture’ it approves and maintains. Furthermore he throws into sharp relief the hierarchical assumptions behind much academic engagement with

popular cultural sources. Although his concluding comments about record collectors being “the real archivists of the art of rock” (40) are fanciful and overly romanticised, he does make an important point about what constitutes valid research material for this kind of study, one which I feel is apposite to my own study.

Although Hicks makes a valid case for what constitutes a legitimate text, his own methodology is still predominantly text centred, the emphasis being on reading off ‘effects’ and ‘interpretations’ from records and scores. Mirroring the privileged and privileging hierarchical categorisations he scorns, Hicks operates his own aural hierarchy when stating that garage rock should preferably be experienced via the medium of vinyl - preferably in mono format. This is a curious assertion for a number of reasons, not least of which is the suspicion that such an undertaking might prove impractical for future generations of researchers! It is rather like claiming that pre-war jazz should only be listened to on shellac 78s or wax cylinders, or the music of Scott Joplin should be listened to on the original piano rolls. This plea for the authentic aural experience, and the privileging of the ‘true reading’ is flawed in other ways too. Hicks seems to be suggesting that what the listener hears is a true representation of what the band envisaged or wanted – this in itself assumes that the band played any significant part in the production process. This is very rarely the case even now, and would certainly not have been the norm with any of the garage bands that Hicks uses as examples. This proposing of the idea of a ‘true reading’ fails to take into account a multitude of other considerations which affect the outcome of recorded music, including

production norms and values (e.g. role demarcation, standard work practices) and the myriad filtering functions (both cultural and technological) of the recording process itself.

In outlining his critical criteria Hicks eschews the school of rock scholarship that makes lyrics the central focus of analysis. He is particularly wary of the notion that rock is essentially music with a message and that this message can simply be read off the semantic surface of the song. Interestingly Hicks, by the evidence of his own criteria, does not appear to have a problem reading off technological determinants and precepts from vinyl records, but he does make an invaluable point about a particular school of rock literature, which as he puts it “treats rock as a special form of poetry, polemic, or political discourse.” (41) Rather than see lyrical analysis as simply a device for unlocking semantic codes, and lyrical content as a lexicon of subcultural rebellion Hicks approach is partly textural and partly contextual. He makes the obvious but necessary point that not all rock lyrics mean anything and cites David Byrne’s youthful epiphany “It was the sound that really struck me ... the words were for the most part pretty stupid” (42) in his defence. He also takes several rock critics to task for misapplying Roland Barthes’ *Grain of The Voice* essay, stating:

“The writings spawned by it generally suffer from two problems. First they tend to use mere adjective-laden descriptions of a given voices special qualities in terms essentially no different from those of rock journalism.” (43)

He also takes issue with Simon Frith for his interpretation of Elvis Presley’s singing voice. Hicks critiques the kind of romantic constructions of ‘difference’ which inform not just Frith’s approach, but a whole school of rock writing

which predicated its analysis of Elvis Presley on the unshakeable notion that he was somehow unique. Hicks shows this not to be the case. Citing astute comments made by the country singer Charlie Hodge on Elvis Presley's very audible influences (which ranged from Billy Eckstine to Hank Snow) he coins the term 'the congregation of the voice' as a way of summarising the human repository of influences and inputs that help shape an artist. Hicks modestly admits that this is his "off the cuff term for the collection of personalities implied by a rock singer's delivery" (44) but as a working aesthetic it can be just as usefully be applied to musicianship too, and indeed to our wider understanding of era, epoch or subculture, all of which are similarly the sum of their learned and inherited parts.

Just occasionally Hicks falls prey to the same fan enthusiasms he contests elsewhere (when lapsing into a conventional 'rock authenticity' versus 'showbiz commercialism' polarity when talking about Jose Feliciano's version of *Light My Fire* for instance.) In fact chapter six, on the Doors, is probably the book's least successful chapter for this reason alone. Claims are frequently made for the band's subcultural and musical importance, which are not sustained by the examples offered. Hicks also offers a humourless misreading of the parodic sleeve notes to the garage rock compilation Pebbles Volume 8, *The Boy Looked At Roky*, (by the Rev. and Mrs Tommy Parasite!) where he takes the satirical rewriting of rock history at face value, seemingly unaware that the notes are a pastiche of the speed polemic of Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill's book *The Boy Looked At Johnny*.

Hicks notes approvingly Sheila Whiteley's typology of six aspects of psychedelic music. (45) These are:

1. Manipulation of timbres (blurred/bright/overlapping)
2. Upward Movement (connoting "psychedelic flight")
3. Harmonies (oscillating/lurching)
4. Rhythms (regular/irregular)
5. Relationships (foreground/background)
6. Collages

He also shares Whiteley's belief that the use of hallucinogenic drugs inspired several key musical techniques, including extended guitar solos, which Whiteley says represent musical 'trips'. He does, though, erroneously suggest that because of this, "psychedelic music poses a unique case study," (46) claiming that no other form of music is so explicitly linked to drugs. This is clearly untrue. Rave music's symbiotic association with ecstasy use and the sacramental use of ganja in 'conscious' and dub reggae being just two obvious examples. A more problematic absence in Hicks methodology is revealed when he claims to demonstrate "how much one can learn about psychedelic music *by reading the literature* of psychedelic drugs". (47) (italics mine) For all their faults and limitations both DeRogatis and Bromell emphasise the experiential, and how their own use of hallucinogens informed (some might say clouded) their own analysis of subject matter. For someone who rightly stresses the need to 'get one's hands dirty' as a researcher and the necessity of engaging with primary non-academic sources such as

bootleg recordings and record collectors, Hicks stops shy of expanding the parameters of research further by immersing himself in the direct drug experience. Of course such activity would raise serious ethical questions, the kind of questions that various schools of Sociology and ethno-methodology have wrestled with for years. William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (48) Laud Humphreys' *Tea Room Trade* (49) and Jock Young's *The Drug Takers* (50) are just three groundbreaking studies which deal in depth with the issues raised by participant observation of, respectively, the social structure of Italian American street life, the ethnography of homosexual encounters in public toilets, and recreational drug users in Notting Hill in the late 1960s.

An examination of the relationship between the experiential and the analytical lies outside of the present doctoral thesis and it would be impractical here to attempt to deal in any depth with the vast literature that exists on the subject of psychedelic drugs, even though it is the Day-Glo elephant in the room as far as research into psychedelic music goes. So I will end where I began this section, with a plea for more interdisciplinary research. The extant literature on hallucinogenic drugs encompasses applied research done in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, neurobiology, psychopharmacology, religion, mysticism, and philosophy, as well as studies which examine the relationship between art, transcendentalism and creativity. Unfortunately, the ceasing of legal manufacture of LSD and withdrawal of permits and grants for medical research in the early 1960s followed by the outright banning of the drug in 1966 in America and Great Britain led to an almost immediate end to a whole body of fruitful enquiry into the uses and abuses of hallucinogens. This

happened precisely at a time when black market manufacture and self-experimentation were flourishing. As Grof (51) notes, “As a result LSD research was reduced to a minimum and, paradoxically, very little new scientific information was being generated at a time when it was most needed.” Sessa concurs, stating, “Common to all these drugs there exists a rich wealth of anecdotal studies from 40 years ago that were abandoned prematurely before their full therapeutic potential was either adequately reported or discounted”. (52)

Sessa’s paper, *Is it time to revisit the role of psychedelic drugs in enhancing human creativity* is an attempt to revive a valuable and pertinent line of enquiry regarding the relationship between LSD and the arts, a line of enquiry that has indeed been left largely to the anecdotalists these past 40 years. As Novak notes “tensions between physicians and intellectuals in defining LSD’s meaning” had already occurred well before the legal clampdown, and it was, as he puts it “the shift of LSD research from a scientific investigation into a cultural crusade... which led to the government passage of tighter regulation of psychedelic drugs.” (53) Arguably this research has been in limbo ever since. Limbo, as a source of creative disjuncture and dislocation, is where I began this section, and ironically limbo, as a source of ethical and methodological disruption, is where I have to end it. In conclusion I feel compelled to return to the plea that I commenced with, when talking about the lack of research into the connections between English psychedelic music and Victorian and Edwardian childhood literature. I wish to reiterate my initial point that we need more comprehensive interdisciplinary research, in this case in

order to fully understand the relationship between hallucinogenic drug use and wider social, subcultural, and creative factors. I would hope, like Sessa, Grof, et al, that in time there might be more studies that explore the fascinating but as yet uncharted academic hinterland where literary studies, musicology, pharmacology and neurobiology meet. At present there is occasional sporadic research in a number of unrelated fields, cultural, historical, legal, and medical. Each of these would benefit greatly from engagement with the others.

This concludes my review of literature associated with the themes I developed in my Syd Barrett biography. I have attempted, wherever possible, to draw direct correlation between my own research and the research findings of others. This has clearly been possible when examining certain aspects of Syd Barrett's creativity. The techniques he adopted, and adapted, from his fine art training, and then applied to his guitar playing and lyric writing, for instance, have rich antecedents in both mainstream and avant-garde culture. In other areas I have widened the field of enquiry in order to undertake a broader examination of the cultural changes that were occurring during the 1950s and 1960s. I have done this in order to make sense of the creative environment that Syd Barrett operated within, and the cultural context that informed his work, both practically and philosophically.

Where direct linkage is possible I have at all times endeavoured to make these links specific. Where Barrett's own practices serve as a microcosm of wider artistic, social and cultural forces I hope that the depth of my research

allows Barrett himself to be seen as a significant figure within a complex and varied landscape, and that the relevance of his work to these wider themes is evident.

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I

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12. Guardian. March 12th 2011
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14. See for instance Palacios' transcription of Hans Keller interviewing Syd Barrett and Roger Waters on The Look Of The Week (which Palacios refers to as 'Look Of The Week') *Lost In The Woods* pp149-150. 48 lines of dialogue reveal 61 instances of paraphrase, words omitted or words or whole phrases incorrectly transcribed.
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16. Chapman pp. 62-65
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 28. See for instance *Ray* (2004) a biopic based on the life of Ray Charles, or the Johnny Cash biopic *Walk The Line* (2005)
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APPENDIX

SYD BARRETT : A VERY IRREGULAR HEAD

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