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**Making Scenes: Studying Local Independent Music in Canada**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis argues that a comprehensive understanding of Canadian popular music cannot be reached without taking into account local independent music scenes. Looking specifically at the genre of 'indie' music, I argue that such scenes reveal a surprising amount of cultural and entrepreneurial activity relative to economic investment. I suggest that such activity is stimulated simultaneously by the exclusivity of the scene's cultural capital and by the process of sharing common values, a process which I attempt to identify in the practices of the independent record store. Furthermore, I suggest that this activity does not remain contained within the scene, but overlaps with other non-musical practices common to living in a community. I attempt to show that such 'overlaps' create opportunities for participation outside of the scene. Local independent music scenes are thus important not only as sites of Canadian cultural production but as sites of social interaction in general.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Introduction**

### **Making Scenes: Studying Local Independent Music in Canada**

This thesis addresses the communication practices of 'indie' music scenes in Canada. This has been undertaken to a certain extent by Holly Kruse in the United States (2003), however, I hope to add something to this area of study by looking specifically at how cultural capital is circulated in local 'indie' scenes, and by taking Canadian scenes, rather than other international scenes, as my object of study. I believe this approach is worthwhile for three reasons. First, I think it may tell us something about how the production and consumption of music is tied to social experience. I will argue that local indie scenes are characterized by the investment of a large amount of cultural capital relative to economic capital. Participants within these scenes—musicians, record store owners, critics, fans—engage in the construction of approved knowledge which is circulated through formal (record reviews, staff picks, etc.) and informal pathways (conversations at the bar, school, hockey locker room, etc). Keeping abreast of the current field of cultural knowledge is thus a way for participants to affirm their belonging within a 'scene'. This practice also has the effect of providing a stimulus for bands and labels with little economic capital to become more widely celebrated and circulated. Second, this analysis suggests a broader approach to studying popular music in Canada, one which looks at the actual practices of musicians, music entrepreneurs and fans. As I hope to show, these practices are inextricably linked to other practices which have little to do with music. These musical and non-musical practices are bound together in the ways in which people situate themselves in their 'communities'; they are bound together by communication. Third, while this thesis is decidedly not focused on cultural policy, I

would suggest that this view of Canadian music has important ramifications for policymakers. If the recently publicized success of Canadian indie artists is to continue (see Wilson, 2005; Blue & Porter, 2005), a better understanding of these local communication practices seems necessary.

### *Some notes about terminology*

I have chosen to look at indie scenes rather than other locally-active scenes, such as the hip-hop scene, reggae scene, or metal scene, for example, because it is the scene with which I am most familiar. I imagine that much of what I suggest about how cultural capital is circulated might also apply to these other scenes, however, I think it is important to draw some specific conclusions about one scene and then see if they can be applied elsewhere.

The terms 'indie' and 'scene' will be used frequently in the following pages. I am using the term 'indie' to describe an attitude or ethic towards the production and consumption of music. This attitude can be best summarized as one which valorizes practices which are viewed as oppositional to the mainstream industry and mass audience. These practices have traditionally included a DIY<sup>1</sup> approach to music production, disdain for commercialism and commercial motives, the valuing of originality and authorship at the expense of technical proficiency, the minimizing of distance between musicians and audiences, a connoisseurist approach to music appreciation, a celebration of the local, and the belief in one's place within a community of others sharing the same attitude (Kruse, 2003). As Kruse points out, this audience also identifies with the common historical

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<sup>1</sup> DIY refers to "do-it-yourself". DIY has become a celebrated aspect of "underground" music since the late 1970s. See Michael Azerrad's *Our Band Could Be Your Life* (2001).

narrative of popular music in which ‘authentic’ music is ‘co-opted’ by the mainstream (2003, p. 14). The term ‘independent’ has been used to describe roughly the same scene by authors such as Azerrad (2001), however, I am using ‘indie’ because I want to imply that there is a distinction between the category of ‘independent’ music (any music that does not appear on a major label) and a narrower ‘indie’ scene which typically revolves around both independent labels and a certain set of practices. As Simon Frith has written, the label ‘indie’ “refers both to a means of production (music produced on an independent rather than a major label) and to an attitude, supposedly embodied in the music, in its listeners, and, perhaps most important in the relationship between them” (1996, p. 86).

I have also chosen to use the term ‘scene’ rather than ‘community’ when referring to local music formations. While I think there are reasons to continue to consider the ‘communal’ aspects of local music making, ‘scene’ is preferable as an analytic category because it allows us to concentrate on the music and music-related practices of a certain audience<sup>2</sup> without having to connect this audience to any historical tradition or stable local population.<sup>3</sup> This has also been Kruse’s approach, who draws on Straw’s argument for the preference of ‘scene’ to ‘community’ when describing local music formations. Straw writes that a scene is “that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-

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<sup>2</sup> Kruse has argued that one of the characteristics of indie scenes is that audiences also tend to be producers. I am using audience here to include not only fans, but also musicians and entrepreneurs involved in the indie scene (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Will Straw has argued that ‘community’ “presumes a population group whose composition is relatively stable . . . and whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted in a geographically specific historical heritage” (1991, p. 373).

fertilization” (1991, p. 373). Kruse goes on to argue that the musical practices mentioned by Straw should also include “the range of economic and social practices through which music is created and circulated within and across localities” (2003, p. 146).

By ‘indie scene’, therefore, I am referring to an overlapping set of music and music-related practices which tend to cohere around what I have described as an indie attitude or ethic. I should point out that I am not completely satisfied with the label ‘indie scene’. Kruse uses the term ‘indie’ to refer to the music and practices of a defined time period (the 80s and 90s) and as the term is used today it does tend to apply to a certain narrow style of music and fan. As such, the term ‘indie’ may connote an audience or sound which is more coherent than I think it is in practice. Likewise, the term ‘scene’ may suggest a set of practices that exist in isolation from the types of day-to-day social activities that one might characterize as part of living in a ‘community’. As far as I know, no one says that they live in a scene. One of the main points of this thesis is that the borders which mark off musical activity from other social activity within local music scenes are highly permeable. ‘Indie scene’, therefore, may suggest something more contained than I intend. I do not, however, have a better alternative. I think it is enough at this point to acknowledge that these are not perfect terms.

I now want to recount two short personal narratives which will introduce the type of musical experience in which I am interested, and also foreground my own personal involvement with this material. Obviously such an involvement compromises any ability to approach this topic in an objective fashion, however, I hope this failing will be made up for in other ways.

*Two personal musical narratives*

I moved to Ottawa six years ago after graduating from a degree in English Literature. I had managed to turn that degree into a full time job writing software manuals for a now non-existent Ottawa high-tech firm. Not a particularly lively occupation, but I had an entertaining diversion writing and playing music in small clubs, and the year before moving to Ottawa I had even released one recording on a 'micro indie' label.<sup>4</sup> So I was either a serious amateur or a not very serious semi-professional musician depending on how you look at it. Never having imagined Ottawa as a hub of live music, I was initially taken aback by the extent of activity within the rock 'n' roll scene. There were half a dozen clubs where one could find live music seven nights a week, more often than not performed by independent local and touring bands. I was also surprised at how easy it was to get involved. After playing a few solo shows, I was able to put together a band and we began playing with other local acts, some of whom eventually put out recordings on the same record label. After releasing a second recording, garnering some favourable reviews, and doing three or four tours between Windsor and Montreal, we were able to book larger shows in Ottawa and Toronto. The largest of these were the spring and summer festival shows, such as the Ottawa Tulip Festival at which—in an example of the type of spectrum of success typical of popular music production in Canada—well-known local bands opened for touring bands with a modest national following who in turn opened for bands with a large national fan base. In my involvement playing music, I realized that although none of us in the band actually made a living making music, we

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<sup>4</sup> By a micro-indie, I mean a label which does not have enough sales to support dedicated office-space or full-time employees. These labels are often run by artists themselves and typically operate out of a spare bedroom in the label owner's house. A recent Department of Canadian Heritage report seems to define 'micro' labels as any label which is not one of the four majors or twelve large independents which together account for approximately 97% of annual Canadian sales (2004).

were a part of an Ottawa music scene, and in some small, unsuccessful way, a part of a larger Canadian music scene. Furthermore, while the activity of recording and performing was integral to our participation in this scene, perhaps just as important were the social activities which sprung out of musical activities, but were not in themselves directly related to playing music. Such an activity is described in my second narrative.

A second thing which surprised me about the local music scene in Ottawa was how many musicians played hockey. Not having played since the age of 11 (and having grown up in a town where musicians and hockey players did not typically associate) I initially declined when invited to come out to the Wednesday night pick up games which were organized by the owner of a local recording studio. One night however, Rheostatics' member Dave Bidini<sup>5</sup> was visiting Ottawa in order to promote a book he had written about playing pick up hockey. After Bidini's reading at a bookstore, one of the musicians in attendance suggested a game at a local rink. Being new to the scene and enticed by the opportunity to hang out with a group of musicians I admired, I soon ended up wearing borrowed and apparently not recently-washed hockey gear. While the on-ice experience was what one might expect from a pick-up game, the locker room and post-game conversations, which covered topics from NHL standings to the travails of touring in Canada to who was getting married or having kids, suggested something both mundane and surprising about local music at a semi-professional level: it was simultaneously about music and much more than that. Indeed, James Carey's belief that "society is possible only in and through communication" (Pauly, 1997, p. 3) seemed somehow appropriate to what was happening in these conversations. The playing of hockey in this way also

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<sup>5</sup> Member of fairly well-known and critically-acclaimed Toronto band The Rheostatics

demonstrated the very interconnectedness of local scenes. While in no way a heralded occasion, the visit of Bidini to play hockey represented an opportunity for some Ottawa musicians to reinforce ties outside of the local, to talk about upcoming records or tours, recent successes of other musicians, and to reaffirm and contest values in music: e.g. ‘Dave’s studio is amazing.’ Or just as often: ‘So and so’s new record is terrible.’

### *So . . . ?*

I want to suggest two things about the types of music-related experiences described in these two scenarios. The first is that I think such experiences are worthy of consideration if we are to arrive at a better understanding of the variety of ways in which popular music is produced in Canada. The second is that while stories about local indie bands and related activities are frequently recounted in local weekly entertainment papers and magazines such as *Exclaim!*<sup>6</sup>, I have yet to come across such a study in Canadian academic writing. This is not that all that surprising considering the relatively small amount of academic writing which specifically concerns Canadian rock music. As Straw pointed out in 1996, “There is still no book-length study of the Canadian record industry, though a decade of public policy has left a paper trail of consultants’ documents and industry profiles” (1996a, p. 112). Despite the lack of comprehensive coverage, there are many notable contributions. Straw’s regular articles on the Canadian recording industry are extremely valuable, and I would argue that his most recent survey of the industry entitled “No Future? The Canadian Music Industries” (2003) is groundbreaking in the range of topics covered and breadth of music considered. Other writing on Canadian

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<sup>6</sup> A nationally-distributed monthly music magazine published out of Toronto, ON.

popular music tends to focus on two areas: either the attempt to identify a particular Canadian 'sound' or 'tradition' (see Grant, 1986; Brown, 1991; Wright, 1994)<sup>7</sup> or the position of the Canadian industry relative to the United States and the success or failure of certain cultural policy measures in that regard (see Berland, 1991; Garofalo, 1991; Wright, 1991; Straw & Berland, 2001).

While these studies have much to offer, they do tend to focus on a familiar cast of stars (Bryan Adams, Joni Mitchell, Rush, for example) and familiar issues (succeeding in a small market, getting Canadian music on the radio, the branch plant music industry, etc). I would argue that what this coverage tends to omit is the far more common scene that you can find on any given night in bars from St. John's to Victoria. Local and touring bands playing to a few dozen or hundred friends and fans; selling limited-run, often self-financed recordings released on small independent labels; networking with other bands to find new places to play; interacting with the audience after the show, many of whom are other musicians; finding a free place to stay, and a cheap place to have a greasy breakfast in the morning. What seems missing in the academic and governmental approaches to Canadian popular music is music as something which happens in pubs rather than arenas; on campus radio or specific programs on the CBC rather than Q107 or MuchMusic; as music which in a sense forms a type of civil society in which government and the major industry players are on the margins rather than at the centre; or as Ruth Finnegan wrote about her interest in local music, as music happening "on her own doorstep" (1988).

This thesis argues that gaining a complete picture of Canadian popular music requires expanding what is considered worthy of study to include these lesser known

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<sup>7</sup> This view of a Canadian national interpretation is critiqued by Testa and Shedden in "In the Great Midwestern Hardware Store" (2002) and Straw in "Dilemmas of Definition" (2002).

musicians, the small independent labels, record stores and venues on which they depend and the scenes in which they operate. I have already mentioned that Holly Kruse has studied U.S. indie scenes in some depth. While I think that many of Kruse's conclusions apply to Canadian indie scenes—indeed, our national borders seem quite permeable when it comes to musical taste and practice—there are unique characteristics of the Canadian situation, not the least of which is the existence of cultural policy measures to support the music industry. One of the outcomes of such an effort is the ongoing discussion of Canadian music within the context of sales figures and success relative to U.S. and international markets. The most recent economic report from the Department of Canadian Heritage provides a good example of such an approach:

Of the top 200 albums in Canada, accounting for around 25% of total annual album sales, Canadian artists' share of units sold has been on the rise since 1998, reaching 27.2% in 2003 with sales of 4.6 million units. Unit sales of albums in the top 200 by Canadian artists grew 36.8% between 2001 and 2003, while foreign artists have shown a steady decline, falling 34.8% in the same period. The proportion of albums by Canadian artists on Nielsen SoundScan's top 200 list has also increased, rising from 18% in 2001 to 26% in 2003 (2004, p. 13).

In contrast to those Canadian albums which appear in the top 200, gauging the success of Canada's small indie labels cannot usually be done in sales figures or gold, platinum and diamond certifications. The same report details the existence of around 300 independent labels which account for more than 80% of the Canadian releases each year. Taken as a group, these labels account for 15% of the market, however, 12 of the 300 independents account for 80% of the revenues or 12% of the market (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2004, 17). This means that the four majors (Universal, Warner, EMI, Sony-BMG) and 12 large independents account for 97% of the market while 290 small labels are left to carve

up 3% or about \$40 million in sales. While for a small independent label, selling 5,000 copies of one release may well be considered a huge triumph, this does not translate well into the traditional measures of success as described above. What is left in such an analysis is the minimal acknowledgement of the existence of these labels: “The reality of day-to-day business for the hundreds of Canadian “micro” labels is intense dedication by a small part-time staff working on a shoestring budget” (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2004, p. 17).

As writers like Frith have pointed out, we must recognize that the world of independent labels is not some sacred, creatively autonomous space which exists in isolation from the major labels (Frith, 1981). However, while the world of indies and the world of major labels are interrelated, I would argue that how these labels operate, the institutions which support them, and the criteria for success are quite different. Without an appreciation of either the extent of musical and entrepreneurial activity which occurs at the indie level or the specific cultural practices of these scenes, it would seem that accurate conclusions about the Canadian music industry as a whole cannot be drawn. More problematic still, policy decisions made without an understanding of these scenes risk ignoring possible areas which could be supported, or worse, dismantling institutions which have served these scenes in the past, such as the cancellation of CBC Radio’s program *Nightlines* or cuts to funding for *Brave New Waves* (see Barclay, et al., 2001). Neil Haverty’s article “Arts Funding for Whom” makes a similar point. Writing about the Department of Canadian Heritage’s recent Musical Entrepreneurship Program<sup>8</sup>, he says “the majority of companies that could really benefit from a program like MEP are not

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<sup>8</sup> A program meant to help Canadian independent labels become more stable and self-sufficient. Qualification for the first level of funding requires 25,000 records sold and three employees; the second level requires 100,000 records sold and five employees (see Haverty, 2002).

even close to meeting the qualifications put forth. Three Gut, Grenadine, Mint, Endearing, Stomp<sup>9</sup>—recognizable independent forces that could very well take their reputation even further given the means to do so—all find themselves way below MEP’s radar” (2002).

But in the absence of comparable numbers or even reliable sales data<sup>10</sup> how does one go about studying such scenes? One could undertake an anthropological or ethnographic study of music in a specific town much like Ruth Finnegan did in *The Hidden Musicians* or Sara Cohen in *Rock Culture in Liverpool*—books which will be discussed in more detail later—however, this thesis seeks to place local Canadian scenes within a larger cultural network; one that extends beyond Ottawa, Montreal, or even Toronto. What occurred to me in my day-to-day activities of talking to friends about music, visiting independent record stores, and reading small music publications (all of which involved talking about indie bands from Canada and abroad) was that perhaps an approach to studying these scenes could be fashioned out of this very activity of talking, of communicating about music. Indeed, the value of studying how we talk about music has been well demonstrated by Simon Frith in his book *Performing Rites* in which he argues that we must investigate how we make value judgements about music, and that such judgements only make sense as “social events” (1996, p. 95); as a historical process of who has had the authority to talk about music and how it has been talked about. In addressing the problem of value, Frith thus looked at how talk about music was structured depending on constraints such as who was talking about the music (musicians, consumers, or producers, for example) and the genre talked about.

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Micro’ labels whose acts have achieved critical success and influence within the indie scene.

<sup>10</sup> Indie bands often sell a significant amount of their recordings off the stage or in small stores which do not faithfully report to Nielsen SoundScan.

This thesis picks up Frith's lead in looking at how we talk or communicate about music, but focuses instead on how such communication constructs and maintains a scene rather than specific aesthetic values. By looking at how we talk about music (the sharing of opinions in the record store, the writing of the music critic, the conversations between musicians and fans, etc.) within the indie scene, I think we gain valuable insight into some of the paradoxical processes of local music production and consumption—that it is participatory and exclusive; economically self-sufficient and insufficient; about music and not about music; that it both alters and reaffirms values; and that it is invisible to most Canadians yet important to our national music culture.<sup>11</sup>

In his highly suggestive article “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music”, Straw writes that:

Clearly, the point is not that of designating particular cultural spaces as one or the other [scene or community], but of examining the ways in which particular musical practices ‘work’ to produce a sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music scenes (1991, p. 373).

This thesis takes a small step towards looking at how “particular music practices ‘work’ to produce a sense of community” in Canadian indie scenes. It does so by focusing on indie musicians and fans as a taste group, bound largely by the sharing of specific forms of cultural capital. Indeed, in the same article, Straw argued that ‘alternative’ music culture<sup>12</sup> as it has developed, is now characterized by a form of connoisseurship which is “involved in the construction of a relatively stable canon of earlier musical forms” (1991, p. 378); and rather than being tied specifically to one locality, this culture is reproduced

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<sup>11</sup> See for example Carl Wilson's recent article in the *Globe and Mail* where he complains that the Juno's ‘alternative’ music category—which includes nominations for bands which are creating huge international waves among critics and indie fans (e.g. Montreal's the Arcade Fire, Toronto's Broken Social Scene)—is not featured on the televised broadcast (Wilson, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> I am taking ‘alternative’ to mean something approximate to what I mean by ‘indie’.

across various cosmopolitan areas. This thesis applies Bourdieu's concepts of *distinction* and *cultural capital* to examine how such forms of connoisseurship are constructed locally in the space of the independent record store and interlocally through publications such as *Exclaim!* magazine. An examination of these practices seems to support Straw's assertion that 'indie' scenes in different localities share "a particularly stable set of musical languages and relationships" (1991, p. 379). Such practices of connoisseurship, however, also explain how local bands and styles become valued at the local level (appreciated in tandem with other 'legitimate' musics). If successful, these local bands may then migrate to other scenes, eventually updating the tastes of other localities so that they again reproduce one another. Finally, I want to suggest that these operations of taste and 'community' do not occur exclusively within the spaces one might expect (the record store, rock venue, music magazine), but leak into social spaces such as the hockey rink.

Before continuing, it is worth considering the following comment from Straw:

Basing a politics of local or Canadian music on the search for musical forms whose relationship to musical communities is that of a long-term and evolving expressivity will lead us to overlook ways in which the making and remaking of alliances between communities are the crucial political processes within popular music (1991, p. 372).

The examination of an 'indie' scene which coheres around practices such as record collecting and the playing of hockey seems fraught with the risk of idealizing a stereotypical Canadian vision. It is my hope, however, that such a study will actually show the fluidity of styles and type of "making and remaking of alliances" which occur at the level of local Canadian popular music. Indeed, Paul Rutten, in arguing for the usefulness of studying local music practices such as "the playing of music and its live

performance on stage” writes that “conceiving of the politics of local, popular music in this way links it to issues having to do with mass communication, culture and democracy, and away from the politics of narrow-minded cultural nationalism” (1991, p. 295).

### *Who talks about music?*

A final note concerning how this thesis talks about music. At the beginning of *Performing Rites*, Frith describes having dinner with friends (also academics) and how as the night progressed the talk turned to the “dialectic of liking things. We ate, we talked, and at least some of the time (this wasn’t an obsessive boys’ night in, rock critics pouring over the runes) we argued about music” (1996, p. 3). Frith goes on to describe this situation as entirely unexceptional.

Such conversations are the common currency of friendship, and the essence of popular culture. We may have been a group of intellectuals, used to talking, to arguing publicly for our prejudices, but similar talk can be heard every day in bars and on buses, on football terraces and in schoolyards [etc.] (1996, p. 4).

Frith here characterizes a particular type of conversation (talk amongst friends) about music. As he shows later, however, in separating the process of determining value between three groups of participants in popular music—musicians, producers and consumers—each group not only values different aspects of music differently, but also engages in different ways of talking. It may work just as well, therefore, to separate such conversations by *types of talk*: fan talk, musician talk, critic talk, industry talk, policy talk, and academic talk. Types of talk may work better than dividing things up by audience because any member of these groups (musicians, critics, industry types, policy makers

and academics) also engages in fan talk at some point. Critics are also often musicians, policy makers can be academics, musicians become A&R reps, etc.

In each of these situations the talkers have different goals and require a different language or code to participate with others. The fan expresses his enjoyment of the music and signals affiliation with other fans. The musician talks about the gig, the practice, the tour, the equipment, obtaining information but also signaling (by likes for venues, bands and gear) inclusion within a certain scene. The critic talks about the band within the context of other bands, of historical developments, and production values, often mixing a fan's enjoyment with a demonstration of knowledge and symbolic capital that confers authority and justifies her position as a critic. Those in the industry talk about how to market certain acts to audiences, how acts fit within genres, how to capitalize on technology, sales figures, development of artists, etc. The policy maker talks about the efficacy of certain policy decisions, the potential outcome of funding decisions, and assesses risk versus benefits; specific likes and dislikes should not come into play (although they likely do). The academic places her research within the context of other research, attempts to replace the fan's inclination to claim value objectively with the foregrounding of subjectivity and models of analysis, hoping to add something to a body of knowledge.

While the goals of each of these types of talk seem to be fairly consistent, if we were to examine each closely we would see that the language or codes of these types vary according to discipline, genre or scene. The professor of music composition talks about music in different language and likely with different assumptions than the sociology professor who researches music. The pre-teen fan of Britney Spears talks differently

about Britney Spears than does the indie fan who has recently been enjoying Spears' dance club hit 'Toxic'. The metal musician values technical proficiency and the highest caliber instruments while the indie musician favours the 'sincerity' of mistakes and the cheap used guitar. Frith has described the basis for some of these differences in terms of genre rules, that each genre (metal versus indie for example) embodies a specific set of aesthetic criteria which, although always in a process of evolution, allow for the making of value judgements at a specific time about the music being heard: "Genre discourse depends, in other words, on a certain sort of shared musical knowledge and experience" (1996, p. 87).

One might suggest that the idea of certain shared cultural knowledge and experience has some connection to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*; that our particular taste for one type of culture or another, and our approach to the appreciation of cultural products, is shaped by a complicated process of socialization which leads to such dispositions. Furthermore, these dispositions are frequently the basis for alignment not only between musicians and fans, but between musicians and critics, and musicians and those in the industry. As Bourdieu has shown, in an example used by Kruse, "authors target certain publishers with their manuscripts, based on their perceptions of their own writings and on their images of publishers. . . The dispositions of the habitus of the author therefore lead him/her to a publishing house which is the product of a similar habitus and which should be most amenable to publishing his/her work" (Kruse, 2003, p. 151). When looking for a record label, bands engage in the same sort of practice, envisioning what type of music they play and what type of label might suit their music and attitude. The same is true when a record is being sent to magazines for review—indie bands often

focus on a number of small niche-oriented magazines and zines rather than sending their records to the more mainstream *Rolling Stone* or *Spin*.

Our talk about music therefore exists on a type of axis in which the type of talk we are involved in (fan, critic, industry, musician, academic etc.) intersects with what type of music we are talking about and our specific knowledge of that genre and how it is talked about. This process is further coloured by our own set of conscious and unconscious dispositions towards music and cultural value in general.

The type of talk in which this thesis is engaged is hopefully that of the academic variety. As such, it attempts to encompass all other types of talk within a theoretical framework. Fan talk, critic talk, musician talk, industry talk, etc. are all fair game in terms of analysis. As I am also, from time to time, involved in fan talk and musician talk, I will attempt to treat these in as self-reflexive a manner as possible.

## Chapter 2

### Hidden in Canada?: The Study of Local Popular Music

In 1989, Ruth Finnegan published *The Hidden Musicians*. Its subtitle “Music-making in an English Town”, provides a concise description of the book’s subject matter; it is a book about the quotidian and often mundane nature of local “amateur” music-making. Less ordinary, however, is Finnegan’s conclusion, which is that this type of music making is far more prevalent, organized and socially important than previously given credit. Indeed, these groupings of amateur or semi-professional musicians and the connected fans, entrepreneurs, organizers, families and friends (and as Finnegan importantly points out, these categories can be quite blurry) provide the “social pathways” for a wide range of interaction, communication, and general meaning-making within different “worlds” in her town of Milton Keynes. This was a far different picture of music than that painted by the studies of music for the masses of the kind spearheaded by Adorno, and the first of its kind in terms of its focus on local music.

Within five years of Finnegan’s work came two other ‘town-centric’ studies of musical practice: Sara Cohen’s 1991 book *Rock Culture in Liverpool* and Barry Shank’s *Dissonant Identities: The Rock ‘n’ Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*, published in 1994. Both of these works shared similarities with what Finnegan had done in that the authors concerned themselves with local music-making ‘on the ground’, admitted their subjective position within the study, challenged distinctions between amateur/professional musicians, and focused on the everyday production and consumption of local music and the institutions which facilitated or hindered the existence of that music. What was different about Cohen and Shank’s approach, however, was that they were specifically

concerned with the production of rock 'n' roll rather than the variety of music Finnegan studied (brass bands, orchestras, country and western, rock, etc.). Cohen and Shank's focus on local rock music will continue in this thesis, but within the specific indie rock scene. While both Cohen and Shank look at bands which would likely fall into the definition of 'indie' music, they are not concerned with mapping the practices of the genre so much as the practices of a specific locality. Indie rock or indie music would be given its most in-depth and theoretical treatment ten years later in Holly Kruse's 2003 work, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes*.

It seems reasonable to argue that the work of Finnegan, Cohen and Shank in the late 1980s and early 90s established a new tradition which served to assign value for the first time to local popular music-making practices within Western industrialized countries, as opposed to the anthropological tradition of studying local indigenous music-making in various non-Western settings. This tradition was then carried on and, in my opinion, furthered by Kruse's theoretical application of Bourdieu to the specific genre of 'indie rock,' an undertaking which helped to better define various practices within the genre. I would argue, however, that as of yet, this approach to studying local popular music has not been picked up in Canada; Finnegan and Cohen focused their attention on the British towns of Milton Keynes and Liverpool, and Shank and Kruse concerned themselves with American scenes including San Francisco, Austin, Champagne and Athens. While much of value has been written about Canadian popular music and its supporting industrial/cultural institutions, it seems to me that there is much to be gained by looking at the practices of music-making at the amateur and semi-professional level, and specifically within the genre of 'indie rock', a genre which manages to remain intensely

local in its practices but resolutely national (even international) in its ambition and implications. In the rest of this chapter I will take a more in depth look at the ‘tradition’ established by Finnegan, Cohen, Shank and Kruse, followed by a survey and comparison of Canadian writing which specifically concerns Canadian popular music. This comparison should point to a gap in Canadian academic coverage, one which I will then attempt to make a small contribution to filling over the remainder of this thesis.

It should be noted that an arguable exception to the lack of Canadian coverage of indie rock is the extensive survey of Canadian rock music *Have Not Been the Same: The CanRock Renaissance from 1985-1995* (2001). While a journalistic rather than academic treatment, the depth of research undertaken by its three authors—Jason Schneider, Michael Barclay and Ian Jack—is impressive and the methodological approach which focuses on letting the artists tell much of the story themselves shares something with the work of Cohen, Shank and Kruse. It shares even more in common with the U.S.-focused ‘rock journalism’ work by Michael Azerrad, *This Band Could Be Your Life: Stories from the American Underground 1981-1991* (2002). In telling the stories of musicians, critics, entrepreneurs and fans during a certain era of music both of these books suggest an often coherent set of music practices common to the time period and rock ‘n’ roll scene. The authors of these works do not theorize the practices described (and for the reader interested in learning about music history, not to mention an entertaining read, this is likely a good thing); however, there is much evidence that is open to the kind of work undertaken by Kruse in *Site and Sound*. In short, the work of Barclay, Schneider and Jack does much to contribute to the mapping of Canadian rock music landscape, but does not quite fill the gap in the academic study of local Canadian music-making—it should,

however, provide no shortage of excellent source material for that and future studies of Canadian music.

*A New Tradition: The Study of Local Popular Music in the West*

To better illustrate the new direction of Finnegan, Shank and Cohen, I want to briefly consider Simon Frith's much-cited book *Sound Effects*, published first in 1978 as *The Sociology of Rock* and then in its current title in 1981. Indeed, it is hard to look far into the study of popular music without running into Frith's sociological approach—first developed in *Sound Effects* and extending to later work such as *Performing Rites* (1996)—to studying how meaning and value are produced and consumed in rock music, and why it is a worthwhile subject of sociological study. An important similarity in the work of Frith and Finnegan is the belief in the social nature of the production and consumption of music. However, each approaches the study with different motivation and focus. Struggling with the question of whether rock music could be a topic of serious sociological inquiry, Frith writes:

My belief in the social importance of rock was sustained by the sales statistics. By the mid 1970s well over \$4 billion was being spent annually in the world on musical products, and in America music had become the most popular form of entertainment—the sales of records and tapes easily outgrossed the returns of movies or sports (1981, p. 4).

Frith finds the evidence, at least at first, for the importance of rock from its commercial output and ubiquity as “the most popular form of entertainment”, as a mass form of leisure. And while part of his project would be to complicate this question—to ask for example, whether records as a medium were always meant for mass consumption (1981, p. 6) and to highlight the contradictory nature of rock (that the ideology of rock depends

on a critique of its own status as a mass media)—his overarching concern was rooted not within music at a local level, but in the unique amalgam of a creative/industrial process which was primarily driven (and whose practices were influenced) by large amounts of capital and directed at and consumed by a mass youth market. Finnegan’s curiosity on the other hand was roused by the ubiquity of music being made around her, and by the lack of attention paid to this activity in serious scholarship.

My sensitivity to the artistic activities on my own doorstep was not much aroused by the standard works on British popular culture with their focus on sport or the mass media rather than the local arts, or by press discussion of music in terms of national professional activities or centralized funding and its problems (1989, p. xi).

While concerned with two different ‘levels’ of music, in *Sound Effects*, Frith introduced themes and questions about popular music which would reappear in the work of Finnegan and others. Perhaps the most important of these was Frith’s questioning of the dominant critique of mass culture levelled by Theodor Adorno and other Marxist critics. The power of Adorno’s critique of popular music, and the “culture industries” in general (a term he coined with Max Horkheimer), is perhaps best illustrated in its continued prominence in discourse about commercial pop music. Those who spend any time around people who collect music should recognize this critique in the condemnation of commercial pop as formulaic pap produced only for profit and devoured by a mass audience looking for easy gratification. Indeed, such critiques frequently appear as part of the celebration of indie rock, as can be seen in the following description of indie musician Conor Oberst: “Where most of our pop stars spring fully formed from the heads of their handlers, Oberst remains a DI(mostly)Y, friends-over-money, fuck-the-man independent

musician” (Dahlen, 2005). In such discourse, pop stars are ‘manufactured’ by the ‘industry’ whereas indie musicians remain ‘autonomous’.

For Adorno, the problem with the products of the culture industry is their substitution of immediate happiness for the long-term utopian inspiration which causes one to “struggle for social change” (Frith, 1981, p. 45). Unlike ‘art’ which challenges the present and looks to the future, popular culture, under the culture industry, becomes a standardized commodity, recognizable primarily for its ability to meet an immediate need to consume. Under this system, the individual becomes but a market category to be targeted by a corporation or by a category of song which he or she will always find appealing. The ease of meeting the needs of this audience, thus allows for the manufacture of generic pop stars. The problem which Frith identifies in Adorno’s critiques is the assumed passivity of the audience. Indeed, Adorno, writes that the effect of standardization is that the “the composition hears for the listener” (1941, p. 22). Frith, however, argues that in these types of critiques “the actual use of music by pop fans is scarcely examined—passivity is assumed” (1981, p. 45). Frith, and later Finnegan, approaches the study of music by looking at what producers and consumers do with music, what meanings they make from it, and how music becomes a source of social activity between other producers and listeners. As Finnegan writes about the evidence she accumulated studying local music practices:

Perhaps the most striking point is how far the evidence here runs counter to the influential ‘mass society’ interpretations, particularly the extreme view which envisages a passive and deluded population lulled by the mass media and generating nothing themselves (1989, p. 5).

By studying music in local towns and scenes, the work of Finnegan, Cohen, Shank and Kruse picks up on Frith's critique of Adorno, providing actual evidence of how localized musicians and audiences generate their own music and meanings.

A second critical aspect of Frith's work is his complex treatment of the concept of 'authenticity' in rock music. Frith's approach is important because it recognizes both the role which 'authenticity' plays in terms of determinations of value for rock audiences while also recognizing the impossibility of a truly 'authentic' experience from culture which is enmeshed within a capitalist industrial mode of production. Frith associates the concept of 'authenticity' with the Leavisite critique of mass culture. "Leavisites, indeed, celebrate the values of 'popular' art; they argue that mass culture is a 'corruption' of such art. . . a culture created for commercial profit must lack a 'certain authenticity' even if it 'dramatizes authentic feelings'" (Frith, 1981, p. 42). Rock, viewed as the pursuit of rebellious youth, who, with little or no formal musical training, choose music to express certain feelings of frustration or alienation, is thus ideologically tied to popular art. Today, however, Frith argues that such art can only exist on a continuum with the record industry. "Rock, in contrast to pop, carries intimations of sincerity, authenticity, art—non-commercial concerns. These intimations have been muffled since rock became the record industry, but it is the possibilities, the promises, that matter" (1981, p. 11).

The study of local music is thus an interesting companion to Frith's treatment of authenticity, as it is at the local independent level that musicians and audiences often feel most removed from this industry. Such feelings are not without basis; local indie music, especially when practiced in localities distant from the major centres of music production, does usually operate with some amount of autonomy from the industry. Jeff Farley has

argued, for example, that the ideology of the local Austin scene is an example of Jacques Attali's concept of "Composition" (described in *Noise*, 1985) in which "playing for one's own pleasure" replaces commercial motivation. Farley compares the experience of local Austin musicians to Susan McClary's argument in the afterword to *Noise* that the New Wave and garage bands of the late 1970s provide an example of "Composition" (Farley 1995, p. 81). However, McClary herself argues that the "grass roots ideology of the New Wave movement has been hard to sustain, as the market has continually sought to acquire its products for mass reproduction" (1985, p.157). What seems clear is that most local popular music which succeeds in reaching an audience is also eventually recorded and mass-produced, even if that means the limited production of 500 or 1000 records or compact discs. As such, local indie music cannot remain entirely separate from the music industry (indie music is also reproduced for sale); rather it operates—often creatively, even subversively<sup>13</sup>—within the structure of that industry.

Frith's definition of rock as "a mass-produced music that carries a critique of its own means of production; it is a mass-consumed music that constructs its own 'authentic' audience" (1981, p. 10) thus provides an appropriately complex description of rock's paradoxical position. Such paradoxes abound in indie rock. Brendan Canning, leader of Toronto indie rock band Broken Social Scene recently wrote in a *Time* article entitled "The Insider's Guide to Indie Rock"(2005) that "There is an essential truth and honesty to Canada's indie music, created by bands that operate free of the onerous pressure applied by the big record labels and their need for fat profit margins." A few sentences later, however, Canning extols the commercial potential of Canadian indie music: "There

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<sup>13</sup> Independent musicians' use of digital networks as "alternative distribution networks" (see Théberge, 2001) and openness to web users posting their music on web logs without compensation (see Shulgan, 2005) demonstrates a different attitude than that of the RIAA for example.

is now a worldwide audience hungry for the latest independent Canadian exports” (Canning, 2005, p. 50). Canning’s article provides a perfect illustration of Frith’s definition of rock. The music’s ‘truth’ is a function of its separation from the machinery of mass production, yet the music itself is mass produced (albeit in thousands or tens of thousands rather than millions) and the artist *is* interested in selling it to mass audiences. Finally, in Canning’s title “The Insider’s Guide to Indie Rock” we see evidence of what Frith called the construction of an ‘authentic’ audience. As much of the ‘authenticity’ of indie rock is derived from its position as separate from the mainstream, its authentic audience is that of ‘outsiders’ who are also paradoxically ‘insiders’—those who recognize the ‘authenticity’ of a certain type of experience or music. ‘Authenticity’ thus also becomes a marker of group belonging within certain scenes.

Frith’s response to Adorno’s critique of popular music and its ‘passive’ audience, and his treatment of the concept of ‘authenticity’ in rock music, thus provide two key lines of thought to which the study of local popular music would then provide further elaboration.

### The Hidden Musicians

To begin, it should be noted that Finnegan’s questions are not just localized versions of Frith’s. In *Sound Effects*, Frith was concerned exclusively with rock and pop, whereas it was not a particular genre which caught Finnegan’s attention, but rather the music’s location: she was struck by all types of music occurring “on her own doorstep.” She recognized that such local music was familiar in the sense that it was happening all around her, and that she was also involved in some aspects of that music (1989, p. xi), but that:

Despite its familiarity there are real questions to be investigated about local music in this country. What exactly does it consist of? How is it sustained and by whom? . . . . And what, finally, is the significance of local music-making for the way people manage and make sense of modern urban life or, more widely, for our experience as active and creative human beings (p. 2).

While both Frith and Finnegan are concerned in some sense with the generation of meaning, Finnegan's questions are of a different character than those posed by Frith. For one thing, her first two questions appear banal, as if answering them would take no more than a cursory survey of the concert halls and pubs in the town. However, Finnegan's questions are accompanied by a key assertion that the practices and people involved in local music-making are 'hidden', making their study both more involved and more important than might otherwise appear. According to Finnegan (1989) local music has been hidden for two reasons. First, "there has been little work in this country on the 'micro-sociology' of amateur music" (p. 4). Indeed, Finnegan asserts that hers will be the "first detailed book on local music in a contemporary English town" (p. 5). And second, "the system of local music-making is partially veiled not just from outsiders but even from the musicians themselves and their supporters" (p. 4). Finnegan then goes on to present and challenge three assumptions common to studies of music which she says have contributed to the concealment of the importance of local music. These assumptions include a musicological approach to music which has been concerned with establishing "what kinds of music are 'best' or 'highest'" (p. 6); a tendency to look at works rather than to "concentrate on the *practice* of music: on what people actually *do* on the ground" (p. 7); and finally the assumption that the proper object of study in music are "professionals" (p. 8).

Finnegan's study seems to mark the beginning of a new line of inquiry in the non-musicological or sociological study of Western music. In this Finnegan appears to follow Alan Merriam's argument for broadening the definition of ethnomusicology "not as the study of extra-European music, but as the 'the study of music in culture'" (1960, p. 109). While many ethnographic or anthropological studies of local non-Western music had been conducted (see, for example, the collection edited by K. K. Shelemay, 1990) this was the first time that the academic gaze had been focused towards local, 'amateur' music within a Western community, a subject which may have been 'obvious' to some and 'invisible' to others. In so doing, Finnegan raised issues which continue to be important to studies of local music. I have mentioned one of these in the context of Frith's findings, which is that Finnegan rejected a simplistic reading of the mass media creating a passive audience.

A second important contribution was Finnegan's questioning of the assumed distinction between amateur and professional musicians. In looking closely for the first time at the work of amateur musicians, Finnegan found a considerable amount of overlap between the amateur and professional worlds: "the at first sight 'obvious' amateur/professional distinction turns out to be a complex continuum with many different possible variations" (p. 14). Indeed, Finnegan found that many 'amateurs' frequently had paying gigs, that former 'professionals' continued to play in non-paying situations for fun, and that 'professional' musicians would sit in with 'amateur' orchestras, etc. What was clear was not only that different people had different ideas about what defined a musician as a professional or an amateur, but that there were many different locations along the

amateur/professional continuum between the extremes of an amateur practicing in his or her living room and a professional playing with the national orchestra.

The division between amateur and professional was not the only boundary that Finnegan found to be flexible: “to imply that local musical practitioners move, or ought to move, in some high rarefied atmosphere would be a laughable travesty” (p. 327). Indeed, what Finnegan discovered was that the musical activities of the people that lived in Milton Keynes were “embedded in a whole series of other interests and commitments” (p. 328); that musical activities involved “people in a series of cumulatively overlapping and criss-crossing social relationships” (p. 329). Finnegan’s work thus suggests both fluidity and sociability as defining characteristics of local musical practice. In attempting to theorize her findings, Finnegan considers the concepts of ‘art world’<sup>14</sup> and ‘community’ before settling on the concept of ‘social pathways’ as the most appropriate way to describe the ‘underlying structure’ of local music. Finnegan argues that both ‘world’ and ‘community’ suggest a far more ‘bounded’ space than that which actually exists. So, while Finnegan would write that “the plurality of equally authentic local musics is thus one major conclusion of this book” (p. 181), she would also complicate the picture of these separate worlds by writing that “the musical worlds were thus in practice more relative, changing and subject to their participants’ individual pressures than the earlier exposition might have implied” (p. 182). Finnegan also argued that viewing local music as an extension of ‘community’ was misleading as many members of the groups studied did not live in the same area of the town or even know much about the personal

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<sup>14</sup> Her concept of art world is borrowed from Howard Becker: “Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art. . . . The interaction of all the involved parties produces a shared sense of the worth of what they collectively produce” (Becker quoted in Finnegan, p. 31).

lives of other members of the group: “As far as local music making goes, then, looking to small neighbourhood ‘communities’ for its generation or setting would be misleading.

Local music is not produced by some traditional ‘communal’ culture, nor does it fit the romantic *Gemeinschaft* model of the amateur arts” (p. 301). Her response to the inadequacy of these two terms is then to propose the idea of ‘social pathways’:

Local musicians are linked not just by shared views or emotions but by social *practices*. People may or may not feel a sense of closure or separation from others in specific situations, but what does define their habitual musical pathways are their shared and purposive collective *actions*. . . . No term is perfect, but the idea of ‘pathways’ seemed to me a better one to capture and summarize aspects of musical practice missed in other approaches (p. 305).

In contemporary Western urban society then, Finnegan suggests that local music can be understood as a set of social pathways which have been established by prior musical practice, and must be repeatedly trodden in order to be kept alive. These practices thus make up a type of underlying structure which influences participation. Interestingly, unlike the structural concept of *habitus* proposed by Bourdieu, according to Finnegan these pathways tend not to run along class lines. Instead, motivating factors for participation are primarily family involvement with music (and to a lesser degree age and gender)<sup>15</sup>: “one of the striking features of local music was thus the overall *mixture* of people practicing it” (p. 312).

In the *Hidden Musicians*, Finnegan took a serious look at local music practice in a Western town and in doing so challenged many of the assumptions that previously guided musicological and mass media approaches to studying culture. While a strength in many

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<sup>15</sup> Other than family involvement Finnegan suggests that the motivating factors for why someone would choose to take a musical pathway were either mysterious or random.

ways, one potential weakness to Finnegan's approach is the breadth of music covered: classical, brass bands, folk music, theatre, jazz, country and western, and rock and pop music. Even within one genre such as rock and pop, Finnegan was determined to cover all of the bands operating within Milton Keynes. While this has the advantage of showing overall patterns of music-making within the town, I would argue that it also means that practices specific to sub-genres may be overlooked. In her examination of 'rock', Finnegan, for example, included bands from genres such as punk, post-punk pop ('indie'), classic rock, and folk rock. Drawing conclusions from this survey, Finnegan found that some of the common assumptions about rock music—that it was practiced predominantly by male, working-class, rebellious youth, for example—did not hold up. Her conclusion was that the people who practiced rock music and the motivations for its practice were 'varied'. As Sarah Cohen shows in her study of a certain group of rock musicians in Liverpool, however, specific motivations and practices emerge when a sub-genre of rock is studied rather than 'rock' or 'local music' as a whole.

### Rock Culture in Liverpool

Published only two years later, Sara Cohen's *Rock Culture in Liverpool* (1991) can almost be looked at as a companion piece to *The Hidden Musicians* in which one specific genre is studied in depth. Like Finnegan, Cohen points to the lack of "ethnographic data and microsociological detail" in the current literature on music, and adds that "two other important features have been omitted: the grass roots of the industry—the countless, as yet unknown bands struggling for success at a local level—and the actual process of music-making by rock bands" (p. 5). These omissions form the subject matter of Cohen's book.

Cohen's approach is to follow the regular activities (gigs, practices, recording sessions, trips to record labels in London etc.) of two local, unsigned Liverpool rock bands over the course of one year.<sup>16</sup> Like Finnegan's, Cohen's approach is ethnographic, describing in detail the often mundane practices and conversations of the bands. However, Cohen's focus on two bands which might be described as belonging to the 'alternative' rock genre<sup>17</sup> (rather than all of the bands playing rock and pop music in Liverpool) led Cohen to identify practices which contrasted in some ways with Finnegan's findings of a relatively open and varied (in terms of age and gender) rock scene. Three themes which emerge more fully in Cohen's work are, the importance which judgements of 'authenticity' play in the bands' aesthetic and career decisions; the role of communal feelings as a motivating factor for participation; and the exclusion of women from much rock experience.

As Frith argued in *Sound Effects*, 'authenticity' is a critical aspect in understanding value judgements by rock musicians and audiences. Building on Frith's work, Keightley has written that "authenticity can be thought of as the compass that orients rock culture in its navigation of the mainstream" (2001, p. 131). 'Authenticity' thus positions certain values such as the connection with roots, originality, community, etc., against an 'inauthentic' mainstream. The concept of 'authenticity' is thus particularly strong in certain genres which position themselves against the mainstream (folk and alternative for example) and with musicians and genres that "take popular music seriously, as something 'more' than mere entertainment" (Keightley, 2001, p.

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<sup>16</sup> The names of the two bands she follows are The Jaktars and Crikey it's the Cromptons.

<sup>17</sup> Cohen does not seem concerned with identifying the bands as belonging to a specific sub-genre of rock, however, she does point out that the bands identified "themselves with a category of bands they admired and respected which some might label 'indie' or 'alternative' (p. 171).

130).<sup>18</sup> Finnegan's inclusion of rock bands made up of older musicians who played 'just for fun' and other bands who did not take their pursuit of music too 'seriously' can thus be contrasted with the bands studied by Cohen for whom being 'original' and 'making it' were both taken very seriously.

The diversity of bands considered by Finnegan compared to the two 'alternative' bands studied by Cohen, likely explains to a large extent why the concept of 'authenticity' is far more prevalent in Cohen's examination of local rock music practices. In Cohen's study, 'authenticity' appears as both an aesthetic and an ethical concern. For example, Cohen identifies four main themes in the music making of the two bands: "emphasis on natural talent, simple and clean sounds, originality and musical incompetence and style" (p. 169). These characteristics are set in opposition to other bands who were seen as less 'authentic'. For example, 'musical incompetence' and the spontaneity and originality thought to come out of playing by 'feel' was preferred above technical ability; they "contrasted bands like themselves to the 'musos', i.e. those particularly concerned with musical techniques and skills" (p. 139). Ethically, 'authenticity' was viewed in terms of career decisions and the degree of compromise involved in achieving commercial success. For example, the Jaktars and Crikey it's the Cromptons were critical of bands "producing 'commercial' music aimed at major companies." (p. 106) Cohen writes that a typical comment made by the bands about more 'commercial' acts was "'They're all on their bloody knees to London'" (p. 106). The Jaktars and Crikey' it's the Cromptons thus negotiated their desire to make a living making music with their desire to not 'sell out' (and thus remain 'authentic') by aiming to

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<sup>18</sup> Keightley argues that this attitude of 'seriousness' is what separates rock from pop. Authenticity is the "over-arching value" that unites "rock's various nations of seriousness" (p. 130).

efforts to get a record deal at 'independent' companies who were viewed as having more 'street credibility'.

Also in contrast to Finnegan, Cohen found the practices of rock bands to be both more communal and more exclusive. For example, Cohen found that among the strongest reasons to join a band in a town like Liverpool was the sense of camaraderie it offered:

A band offered an active social life, enabling its members to establish, maintain, enrich, and deepen friendships by putting them in touch with new people and by consolidating already existing relationships . . . The sense of camaraderie and enjoyment involved was exhibited in the way in which musicians tended to fondly discuss and reminisce about past exploits with their band or with previous bands. (p. 36-38).

This sociability was highlighted by the fact that Cohen found that band members tended to spend a lot of time together outside of musical activities. The camaraderie and sense of belonging that participating in a rock band fostered was, however, often reinforced by divisions within the rock scene at large. As I have already mentioned, the Jaktars and Crikey it's the Cromptons often defined the originality of their band against the practices of other bands in the city.

The rock 'scene' in Liverpool was thus divided by cliques, factions, feuds, and rivalries, yet at the same time united by age, gender, a common ideology, mythology, and gossip grapevine, and a web of interlinking networks and band genealogies as its members moved between bands and music-related occupations. They generally faced a common predicament: trapped between creativity and commerce and confronted by the same industry with its familiar 'gatekeepers'. They therefore formed, in a sense, a 'community' (p. 225).

This 'community' however, was also one largely reserved for men. Indeed, as Cohen found in her study, women were frequently perceived as a threat to the unity of the band and often blamed for the break up of bands. In contrast to the findings of Finnegan,

therefore, which suggested that women had a significant role to play in the rock scene, Cohen “was astonished to find an overwhelming absence of women in the rock music scene on Merseyside, not only in the bands themselves but in their audiences and many of their social activities” (p. 202). Indeed, viewed as a threat to the solidarity of the rock groups, Cohen found that women were not only absent, but “actively excluded”; band members’ girlfriends were often “barred from membership of bands or from the band’s rehearsals recordings, performances, and other social activities” (p. 208).

While Cohen found that participation in a rock band was frequently motivated by the desire for sociability and that being in a band fostered a sense of ‘community’, this ‘community’ was also broken down along lines of gender and genre. By demonstrating how certain, specific practices emerge when the object of study is narrowed by genre, Cohen’s study of rock bands in Liverpool thus makes a significant contribution to the work started by Finnegan.

### Dissonant Identities

Barry Shank’s *Dissonant Identities: The Rock ‘n’ Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (1994), made yet another important contribution to the nascent tradition of studying local Western rock music. Like Cohen, Shank focused, for the most part, on local unsigned rock ‘n’ roll bands. He took, however, a less ethnographically intensive approach than either Cohen or Finnegan, employing instead historical analysis of Austin’s honky tonks and progressive country to highlight certain historical conditions in the formation of the Austin rock scene at a specific moment in time. Even more important, however, was Shank’s attempt to theorize the development of these scenes:

A scene itself can be defined as an overproductive signifying community; that is, far more semiotic information is produced than can be rationally parsed. Such scenes remain a necessary condition for the production of exciting rock music capable of moving past the mere expression of locally significant cultural values and generic development. . . toward an interrogation of dominant structures of identification, and potential cultural transformation (p. 122).

In Shank's model, participants are drawn to this "overproductive signifying community" through a desire to perform new identities—identities which challenge the "dominant structures" of society, but which are also framed within a new community to which one can belong. Using Lacan as his primary theoretical source, Shank argues that it is the anxiety produced by "momentary identifications" with the scene which feeds its continuation: "Fed by momentary pleasures of sensual overstimulation and the occasional linkage that promises completion, this anxiety provides the psychic impetus required to maintain a regularity of contact, a constant participation in the scene." Or as one of his interviewees from the Austin scene put it more plainly: "There was always that pressure that if you didn't go out, you were missing something" (p. 131); a feeling that I can say I have had frequently in my own experience of local music scenes.

This illustrates one of the nice things about Shank's approach, which is that (like Cohen) he describes the 'on the ground' music practices of the local rock scene in Austin—the gigs, visits to independent record stores, practices in dingy 'rock houses', attendance at the SXSW music conference<sup>19</sup>—and suggests both a historical and theoretical framework for understanding these practices. While one might contest Shank's specific theoretical focus, the overall picture of the scene in Austin appears more

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<sup>19</sup> South by Southwest has become a major conference for the showcasing and signing of new bands. The conference has led to the establishment of other similarly-themed festivals such as Toronto's NXNE (North by Northeast).

richly textured because of his use of overlapping history, theory, narrative and ethnography.

As in Cohen's study, the ideology of 'authenticity' appears as an organizing aspect of the rock scene. Shank writes that "the cultural function to which local musical performance is put (that is, the construction of identity and community) results in a musical aesthetic organized around a postmodern concept of sincerity. Sincerity becomes a value that can only be signified through an evident resistance to the disciplinary constraints of the dominant culture" (p. xi). As Keightley has shown (2001), 'sincerity' is one of the many possible expressions of 'authenticity', one which has grown out of the folk principle of making a direct connection between the performer and audience (p. 137). The new music of the Austin scene was thus valued by its audiences for communicating something 'real', 'honest', 'unmediated', and this was in turn represented by an aesthetic approach which valued unpolished, raw, even amateur-sounding performances.

Shank presented an example of this ideal in the figure of Daniel Johnston, a somewhat imbalanced individual who worked at the McDonald's in Austin, recorded songs on a cheap tape recorder, and gave away his cassettes to any musician who would listen. Soon other bands in Austin were covering Johnston's songs, valuing them for their honesty rather than the musicianship or recording quality. When MTV arrived in Austin to tape a show about the local music scene, they featured Johnston prominently—much to his delight. Perfectly representing the paradoxical nature of rock, Johnston aspired to a level of success, yet achieved recognition based on an apparent total naïveté about what being a rock star was supposed to involve. As the principle organizing value of the Austin scene was that of 'sincerity', it follows that Johnston became a symbolic figure of the

scene, and of the 'alternative' scene which was springing up in other locations such as Seattle and Athens. The rise of the 'alternative' or 'indie'<sup>20</sup> scene was itself a potent combination of this rejection of commercial success and attendant mainstream aesthetic values (which appealed to a niche but significant audience), a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic inherited from the punk era, and increasingly affordable recording techniques coupled with the acceptance of less than 'professional' recording quality.<sup>21</sup>

The 'alternative' movement in Austin appeared to usher in a more democratic and inclusive approach to music making. The scene welcomed marginal figures like Johnston, and through its championing of low production values and lack of technical ability, encouraged participation by those who were not 'professionals'. Furthermore, unlike in Cohen's account, there were female participants in the Austin scene, who filled both creative and organizational roles. What such a description obscures, however, is that inclusion within such a scene (and the related process of the construction of personal identity) was predicated on the existence of a position outside of the scene. This position was filled by those who continued to identify with the mainstream; those who, for example, would tend to read Johnston's recordings as the work of an 'amateur' rather than a 'genius'. Distinctions between insiders and outsiders were acknowledged and reinforced in the spaces and practices of the Austin scene. For example, Raul's was a venue in Austin which was symbolically aligned with the punk scene which evolved into the alternative scene. Shank writes:

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<sup>20</sup> What I am calling 'indie' was referred to primarily as 'alternative' at this time. Straw's use of 'alternative' from his 1991 article "Systems of Articulation" seems to correspond closely enough to what I am referring to as 'indie' to use the terms interchangeably in this historical context.

<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, Johnston has remained a relatively obscure artist, although some of the most influential and successful artists of the nineties (Nirvana and Beck for example) have cited his influence. A double album was released in 2004 featuring one CD of Johnston originals and one CD of various artists, such as Beck and Tom Waits, covering his songs.

Raul's was the first club that presented music designed to attract only a subgroup within the students [at the University of Texas]. One ritual of audience participation at Raul's marked this distinction. It involved screaming the names of hated popular musicians and requesting the most despised songs. Despised music was commercially successful music, hated because it was the music favored by the undifferentiated mass of college students. Punk at Raul's constituted pop culture elitism (p. 105).

Shank's study of the rock scene in Austin thus adds to the work begun by Finnegan and Cohen. Looking at the production of rock music on the ground, Cohen found that the genre's practices were more exclusive, specifically in terms of gender, than Finnegan had supposed. Shank on the other hand, suggests that in the process of fostering belonging, the Austin scene also acted as a site for the creation of in-groups and out-groups. In this case, however, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion hinged on an operation of taste—the recognition of 'sincere' creative expression against the commercial mainstream. Shank's description of the practices of the Austin scene supports Straw's argument that the emergence of the 'alternative' rock genre in the wake of punk enshrined "specific forms of connoisseurship as central to involvement in alternative musical culture" (1991, p. 377). A paradox of this culture, according to Straw, is that it privileges the local (the importance of local record stores and clubs for example, which was a feature of Shank's account) while actually following a "logic in which a particular pluralism of musical languages repeats itself from one community to another" (p. 378). It is not surprising, therefore, that at around the same time an 'alternative' scene organized around the concept of 'sincerity' and opposition to the mainstream was developing in Austin, similar scenes were emerging in other localities in the United States. Holly Kruse's *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* is a logical next step

here, as it combines the study of local music practices within the genre of 'indie' music with the recognition that similar sets of practices exist in various localities: Athens, Georgia or Champagne, Illinois or Austin, Texas.

### Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes

Kruse's *Site and Sound* (2003) marks a break with the works covered thus far in that Kruse seeks to define indie scenes as a separate enough genre (from rock for example) to warrant specific study. Furthermore in studying practices associated with indie music scenes, Kruse looks beyond the borders of a single town in her study, drawing comparisons between localities and arguing that indie scenes are both highly local and interlocal in nature. However, while connected through various networks of communication to other localities, Kruse makes clear that indie scenes can only be understood in conjunction with specific local sites of music production and consumption: "What is specifically important in studying independent pop/rock music scenes of the 1980s and 1990s is not *that* places are meaningful—places are prominent and meaningful in all personal histories—it is the particular places (certain clubs, record stores, coffee shops, houses, etc.) that are meaningful" (2003, p. 126). In Kruse's research these specific locations appear again and again in the personal narratives of musicians, entrepreneurs and others within the scene. Connecting these different narratives is the belief that the specific practices, associated locations and participants were unified locally and interlocally by an oppositional relationship to the mainstream: "Implicit in these identification and personal histories was the idea that they constituted a connection with an authentic musical form and set of musical practices" (p. 115).

Kruse's exploration of the difficulty in defining indie music is an appropriate beginning for her study. In arguing that indie music cannot be defined as 'alternative' (as there are many musics that are alternative to the mainstream); by the music's independence from major labels (some bands such as R.E.M were still considered independent after signing to a major); by reference to certain musical characteristics (jangly guitars, for example); or by a one particular demographic (college youth), Kruse presented indie music as a genre defined essentially by practices unified around an attitude which valued the small, local, communal, 'authentic', etc., as against the perceived inauthenticity of the mainstream. The importance of the opposition between indie scenes and the mainstream appears in one of the scene's main 'tropes': a historical trajectory of rise and fall, the scene's decline being tied to the "co-option" of authentic music by the mainstream (p. 14).

Of particular interest in *Site and Sound*, is Kruse's application of Bourdieu's notion of *field* to the practices of indie scenes. As Kruse explains "any social formation is made up of several 'fields' of practice—including the economic field, the political field, the education field, and the cultural field (where the practices of indie music scenes would be largely found) . . ." (p. 150). Each field has its own conditions of success which structure the practices of those operating within the field. Kruse further elaborates on the cultural field which consists of both a field of large scale production (mass culture) and restricted production ('high' art). Kruse successfully maps the practices of indie music scenes (such as producing for producers and the disavowal of the profit motive) onto the field of restricted production.

Kruse's study of independent music is important for the discussion of indie music. While less ethnographically intense than Finnegan or Cohen's approach, Kruse's use of narratives of musicians and entrepreneurs (record store owners, label owners, college radio djs) successfully traces an indie music culture which, while rooted in specific locations and localities, is comprised of practices which transcend the local. Kruse finds that the belief in the 'authenticity' of the music, feelings of community over competition, suspicion of the mainstream, and the desire to reach audiences without 'selling out' were all common narratives in indie scenes.

**Table 1: Comparison of approaches to the study of local music**

Authors	Genres	Approach	Formation	Theory
Finnegan	Brass Bands, Choirs, Orchestras, Rock etc.	Ethnography	Social Pathways	Becker (art worlds)
Cohen	Rock/Alternative	Ethnography	Culture	Becker (art worlds)
Shank	Rock/Alternative	History, Ethnography, Personal Narrative	Scene	Lacan (personal identity)
Kruse	Indie Rock	Personal Narrative	Scene	Bourdieu (field, habitus)

As a way of closing this short history of studies on local popular music in the United States and England, I want to note an article entitled "To Hell with Heteronomy: Liberalism, Rule-making and the Pursuit of Community in an Urban Rock Scene" (2003) by Matthew Stahl. Stahl argues that local indie rock offers a continuation of the narratives of 'authenticity' and 'opposition' in a musical environment dominated by 'bloated supergroups' such as U2. He writes that "practices of local indie rock are shaped in large part by the still-compelling rock scripts of autonomous artistic expression, opposition, and community" ( p.143). Within the group of friends (which included

musicians and non-musicians) he studied, Stahl found that the rituals of rock performance created an unwelcome hierarchy within the group between musicians and non-musicians:

What appeared to rankle many participants, particularly some female group members who were not in or between bands, however, was the routine division of this group of friends into performers and audience by the structure of the live music venues. The regular institutional ascription of status to performers and the more or less constant non-recognition of audience as anything other than those who pay admission, buy drinks, and stand in the dark before the illuminated performers impeded the “natural” development of this nascent social group (p. 149).

Efforts to mitigate this hierarchy (by putting non-musicians on the guest list, hanging out together in the band room after the show, etc.) were seen as only partially successful. To remedy this situation, the group instituted other practices such as a ‘soup night’ and an annual ‘Halloween talent show’ in which non-musician members were given the group’s attention and reverence, and so valorized. Indeed, an unspoken rule at these gatherings became the de-emphasis of the musicians “musical/cultural capital”; musicians could perform, but not what they would regularly perform at their rock performances. Stahl connects this development of non-music related social practice within the group to a drive for the egalitarian experience of community promised by Liberalism (p. 157). While the motivation for these non-musical practices is certainly worth more exploration, what I find most interesting about Stahl’s study, is that it is not about the production and consumption of music so much as about how musical and non-musical practices are bound up in the particular ways in which people live in a community. Such an approach rings true with my own experience of the Ottawa music scene, which is that local musical practices rarely exist in isolation from other elements of sociability. Moreover, rather

than devaluing such musical experience as non-professional or pedestrian, it would seem to me that the connections between musical and non-musical practices highlight the critical role of local music in creating the social world in which we live—the very point made by Finnegan in *The Hidden Musicians*.

### *Canadian Popular Music Scholarship*

When it is spoken of at all, the sound recording industry in Canada is discussed almost invariably in terms of those relationships (of subordination and interdependence) in which it finds itself vis-à-vis the international industry of multi-media conglomerates. There are good and clear reasons for this, rooted in the persistent Canadian impulse to link questions of institutional organization to those of a transformative public policy (Straw, 1993, p. 52).

The above quotation from Will Straw's 1993 survey of the Canadian recording industry introduces at least three important points in regards to popular music scholarship in Canada. The first, and perhaps most troublesome, is that the Canadian music industry is simply not often "spoken of" in academic scholarship. Straw is specifically referring to the recording industry, but this is arguably the case for Canadian popular music in general. The second point is that when Canadian music is considered, it is almost always done so in terms of its position with respect to the worldwide industry and in particular the United States. This automatically casts music as 'national' rather than generic, highlights the role of the famous, and defines statistics as its sole proof of success. This tendency obviously has the effect of neglecting some interesting aspects of the industry, however, it should not come as much of a surprise; indeed, it could be convincingly argued that all of our cultural industries have been in some sense defined by the "tension"

between the influence of the United States and the existence of a domestic Canadian industry.<sup>22</sup> The third point is that Straw connects this coverage to a “Canadian impulse” to link our cultural situation to the promises of public policy; an impulse which stems from an apparently weak civil society, but which may, ironically, have the effect of obscuring activity outside of industry and government channels.

Straw’s analysis seems reasonable. Studies specific to Canadian popular music have usually been conducted within fairly narrow boundaries: the position of the industry vis-à-vis the United States, the impact of cultural policy such as Canadian Content regulations, or whether we can identify a ‘Canadian’ sound. Good examples of writing concerning public policy and the Canadian music industry include articles by Straw (1993, 1996a, 2003), Berland (1991) and Audley’s influential “Cultural Industries Policy: Objectives, Formulation, and Evaluation” (1994), which while only partly concerned with music, argues strongly for the importance of policy in maintaining all forms of Canadian culture. A parallel and related line of questioning is the search for a uniquely Canadian sound. Indeed, perhaps if we could identify a specific ‘Canadian’ music then we would know exactly what type of culture must be protected. Various authors have weighed in on this subject, from Barry Grant who offered irony as the defining characteristic (1986) to Robert Wright who asserts that it is 1960s folk (Joni Mitchell, Neil Young) and its combination of “affinity” for the American roots tradition with “ambivalence” towards America which defines our music (1996, p. 260).

Perhaps the most ambitious and interesting treatment of Canadian popular music to date is Bart Testa and Jim Shedden’s “In the Great Midwestern Hardware Store: The

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Attallah makes this argument about Canadian television, and Testa & Shedden write that “Canadian rock must be seen in relationship to a hegemonic American music industry (2002, p. 187).

Seventies Triumph in English-Canadian Rock Music” (2002). Testa and Shedden’s essay is in many ways a response to the types of nationalist arguments forwarded by Wright and Grant. Tracing the success of hard rock Canadian bands BTO and Rush in the 1970s—success which was predicated on reaching industrial/suburban youth in and around the Great Lakes—Testa and Shedden argue “that Canadian rock is best understood in socio-economic and geographical rather than aesthetic terms, and we eschew the conventional Canadian nationalist-cultural interpretation” (p. 178). In their analysis, Testa and Shedden map out a six-phase history of Canadian popular music which begins with acts such as the Crew Cuts who went directly to the United States; details the introduction of Cancon and brief success of derivative acts such as Lighthouse; the subsequent sustained success of Rush; the rise of manager Bruce Allen and mega star Bryan Adams (and declining relevance of Cancon); and finally the current situation of fragmented audiences and ability of bands such as the Tragically Hip to achieve success solely in Canada. Of particular interest is Testa and Shedden’s explanation of the importance of geographically specific scenes in which audiences create *participation mystiques*<sup>23</sup> which can have the effect, following the cyclical nature of popular music, of translating local scenes into larger movements. This fragmentation of audiences is described as the “explosion of many points of ‘authenticity,’ experienced in so many simultaneous sub-generic movements and scenes of local origination . . . . Paradoxically, however, these multiplying sub-genres now achieve high degrees of commercial distribution earlier and with an unprecedented ease” (p. 209). Rather than

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<sup>23</sup> Testa and Shedden argue that there really is no “authenticity” in rock music as “the music’s hybrid nature makes its essence, or ‘roots,’ impossible to define” (p. 182). Rather than “authenticity” the authors use the term *participation mystique* which they define as “the passing moment of felt authenticity”. This *participation mystique* is cultivated in local scenes by “the fans who first hear and enthusiastically champion a band or group of bands at local clubs” (p. 183).

one “Canadian music tradition” what Testa and Shedden describe is a dispersed network of scenes, the music from which is just as likely to move north/south as east/west; but that unlike in the past, the move south is not a prerequisite for success (p. 210).

I would argue that the picture painted by Testa and Shedden of the state of Canadian music is somewhat more optimistic than that found in Will Straw’s writing on the Canadian recording industry. This may be because Straw typically focuses more specifically on the organization of the industry itself, rather than on specific artists or scenes. That being said, “The Great Midwestern Hardware Store” owes much to Straw, both for the information cited in the paper, and for an approach which combines aspects of history, policy and cultural analysis. Beginning with the 1993 article “The English Canadian Recording Industry Since 1970” and in periodic articles over the next decade,<sup>24</sup> Straw maps out the defining features of the Canadian music industry: the establishment of a branch plant system (motivated by tariffs) of production by the major multinational record labels; the decline of the vertically-integrated independent label, such as Quality Records, and rise of domestic independent labels reliant on the distribution systems of the majors, such as Attic Records; the putting in place of policy regulations and bodies to ensure both the existence and placement of content (FACTOR<sup>25</sup> and Cancon); and the tension with commercial outlets over the playing of that content. Straw also covers developments common to the industry as a whole and their impact on the Canadian situation, from the convergence of the major labels to the rise of the record superstore.

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<sup>24</sup> “The English Canadian Recording Industry Since 1970” (1993); “Getting Down To Business: Cultural Politics and Policies in Canada” (1995); “Sound Recording” (1996a); “In and Around Canadian Music” (2000); “Dilemmas of Definition” (2002); “No Future? The Canadian Music Industries” (2003).

<sup>25</sup> Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent on Records (FACTOR).

Running throughout is a sense of concern for what the future might hold for the domestic industry. In 1993 Straw wrote that:

It appears more and more likely that these firms [Canadian independent labels] will serve, within an internationalized industry, as repositories for a particular corpus of older Canadian recordings—most of which date from the 1970s and early 1980s—and their capacity to engage in the active discovery and development of newer performers will diminish. In this respect, such companies may become the latest in a long line of custodians of Canadian resources who witness the erosion of their value over time while innovation and change occur elsewhere (p. 63).

Most recently, in “No Future? The Canadian Music Industries” (2003), Straw details the demise of Canada’s only industry magazine *The Record*, the rise of the electronic superstore as retail outlet (and decline of historically important stores such as Sam’s) and perhaps most importantly (symbolically and literally) the failure of the Song Corporation, the short-lived attempt to form an integrated Canadian “major”. This is perhaps the most lamented development, as the bankruptcy of Song also meant the disappearance of Attic Records “which, since 1974, had marketed Canadian music within and outside Canada and distributed smaller labels from the United States and elsewhere” (p. 213). Straw concludes his timely and insightful article with the following prediction:

If there is to be no future for record companies—if, as some scenarios suggest, we will download music directly from performers—then the proximity to Canadian music sustained by our own industries will disappear, as musics from everywhere become available with equivalent ease (p. 220).

Here and elsewhere, Straw’s concern over the future of Canadian record companies seems primarily centered on the larger independent labels, such as the now defunct Attic—labels which have (or had) the capital and distribution (thanks to deals

with major labels) necessary to launch Canadian artists to the mass market.<sup>26</sup> This focus is appropriate if we are talking only about the ‘industry’ in Canada, as it is these labels who dominate market share, economic investment in Canadian artists and related infrastructure, and public visibility in commercial outlets. However, this view also seems at odds with Testa and Shedden’s description of the current state of Canadian popular music: of geographically dispersed sites of music production/consumption paired with greater levels of commercial distribution for local acts—a situation I recognize from my own experience in the Ottawa scene. This is not to say Straw ignores music at these more localized levels. Indeed, in 1995 Straw asserted that the government’s calculation of two hundred Canadian labels was much too low, as it omitted many small “artist-run” labels (p. 389), and in 2003 he noted the “growth of home computer-based music studios and of musical undergrounds, which span the world but remain small-scale even artisanal, in many of their activities” (p. 203). In this latest article Straw also names one of the best examples of a local, internationally-known, niche-oriented Canadian artist: Montreal’s Godspeed You Black Emperor, one of the many bands who “do not usually imagine themselves struggling toward a possible mainstream success” (2003, p. 219). The distinction which Straw seems to make between ‘industry’ and ‘scene’ is perhaps best explained in the article “In and Around Canadian Music” (2001):

Musical culture is almost always marked by an extraordinary abundance of activity, informally organized in fine gradations from amateurism through all possible levels of professionalism. . . . The significant forms of twentieth-century Western popular music . . . have all seemed to rest on informally organized bohemian “scenes” as much as on industrial structures, and a sense that such

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<sup>26</sup> Other Canadian labels which operate at this level would include DKD (Diana Krall) and Nettwerk (Sarah McLachlan). There are approximately one dozen labels of this size in Canada (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2004).

scenes continue to provide their foundations is central to the critical judgement of popular music (p. 177).

In this description, Straw presents a spectrum of music production and consumption on which musicians, entrepreneurs and audiences may land in between poles of amateurism/professionalism, bohemian/industrial, local/national. Tying such a spectrum to public policy, Straw presents two models of national music history: one in which “music works to nourish and transform collective, public discourse, creating or renewing forms of language and tradition”; and one in which “music is primarily a token of social and economic exchange – the pretext for small-scale commerce, regularized social interaction and new connections between actors in a wide range of industries and institutions” (p. 181). These two models seem to correspond roughly to different ends of the spectrum of music production and consumption: a mainstream industry which can “transform collective, public discourse” and the smaller scenes in which music functions as a “mediating moment (the point of connection and division between different activities and the populations who engage in them)” (p. 182). Likewise, Straw draws different implications for policy from these two models. The first model implies what we typically think of from cultural policy: artist grants, subsidies and awards shows, for example. From the second “more elusive” model, Straw suggests altogether different considerations: “the regulation of alcohol consumption and nightclub closing hours, neighbourhood gentrification, work-study schemes and student loans” (p. 182).

### *Conclusion*

I think we can relate Straw's model of music as a mediating moment to the type of work conducted by Finnegan, Cohen, Shank and Kruse. Indeed, when Straw writes of how "short-lived and forgotten musical practices might nevertheless, create the thick webs of interconnection through which a national culture acquires solidity" (2001, p. 181) it is not hard to imagine a connection to Finnegan's argument that without the "interaction, overlap, co-operation, cross-cutting links, and conflict between these many [musical] pathways, British culture would not continue as it now does" (1989, p. 330). What happens if we then add Testa and Shedden's assertion that Canadian popular music is now characterized by an "explosion of many points of authenticity"; of dispersed local scenes which may at any one time become the focus of national or international interest (e.g. Halifax and Sloan in the 1990s and Montreal and The Arcade Fire in 2005)? We may have to admit that the divisions between the national industry and the local scene are less stable than they have otherwise appeared in the literature on Canadian music. Kruse has perhaps given the best account of how local cultural practices tie into wider inter-local networks. Building on the work of Testa and Shedden and Will Straw, I would argue that a closer look at the actual practices of local Canadian music production and consumption is in order.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> One exception to the absence of such a study may be Deanna Robinson et al.'s *Music at the Margins* (1991) which includes Canada within a worldwide study of local music making. I would suggest, however, that the attempt to draw conclusions from the experiences of musicians working in different genres from around the world, leads to overly general conclusions about these practices.

### Chapter 3

#### Culture of Distinction/Communication: Bourdieu, Carey and Indie Rock Scenes

*Out on tour with the Smashing Pumpkins/Nature kids they don't have no function/ I don't understand what they say/ And I could really give a fuck.* (Pavement, 1994 "Range Life")

Pavement's 1994 album *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* marked the commercial high point for the influential Californian indie band. Following Nirvana's *Nevermind* (1991) and the success of the 'alternative' Lollapalooza tour, the 'underground' was officially on the radar of major labels and mass audiences; many thought Pavement would be the next band to break into the mainstream. *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* debuted at 121 on the Billboard chart, the 'single' "Cut Your Hair" made it into rotation on MTV, and the band made a short appearance on the 1995 Lollapalooza tour. Not bad, but not the success many had predicted. As the lyrics from "Range Life" suggest, however, Pavement was perhaps not all that keen on joining Smashing Pumpkins in the spotlight anyway. Indeed, singer Steve Malkmus seemed determined to make a point of highlighting the distinction between themselves and their more earnest (and more commercially successful) peers. In gaining a mainstream following, Nirvana (and others who followed such as Pearl Jam and the Smashing Pumpkins) had brought with them the expression of a certain type of 'authenticity' to MTV audiences. As if in direct response, Pavement lounged in irony, made no pretension to being 'authentic', and viewed 'nature kids' (the offspring of the folk world) with no small amount of condescension.<sup>28</sup> As if aware of Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production, and the loss of symbolic

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Coyle and Jon Dolan (1999) have described Nirvana and Pavement's different approaches to 'authenticity'.

capital that could (would) result from a crossover to the mainstream, Pavement would release the more 'difficult' and less successful *Wowee Zowee* as a follow up in 1995.

Following Kruse, I would suggest that those who have imagined themselves as part of indie scenes have traditionally defined themselves as "if not oppositional, at least alternative to mainstream popular culture" (Kruse, 2003, p. 157). This means that when indie bands such as Nirvana cross over to mainstream popularity, those who had defined themselves as part of that 'scene' find themselves in the predicament of their music no longer being 'alternative'. Indie scenes are therefore continually adopting new forms of music and ethical stances to maintain this distinction. I would argue that in Pavement's "Range Life" we find the public airing of such a stance, which functioned, whether consciously or unconsciously, as a response to the type of angst-filled 'authenticity' ushered into the mainstream by bands affiliated with the Seattle scene. What is worthy of further exploration here, however, is not so much the particular aesthetic characteristics of Nirvana or Pavement, but that such shifts in values and attitude occur not at the level of mass culture, but through the channels of independent record stores, word of mouth, fan zines, web logs (blogs), etc. This process is worthy of consideration from the standpoint of Canadian music, because it is often within these 'restricted' environments that local bands and scenes gain legitimacy, and against all odds, may in fact be propelled out of our 'small market' to a wider audience.

This chapter is comprised of three theoretical arguments that guide the case studies in the following chapters. The first is that the evolution of indie scenes can be best understood not as an ongoing search for 'authenticity' but rather as the continual construction of new forms of *distinction* by an elitist consumer group. The second

argument is that the need to continually construct and affirm values which separate indie scenes from the mainstream leads to highly participatory networks of communication. I suggest that such an argument can be supported by James Carey's ritual view of communication. Finally, I want to return to the concepts of 'scene' and 'community'. By overlaying the concept of 'scene' onto the concept of 'community', I want to suggest that we may locate gaps which act as spaces for broadening participation beyond the exclusive practices of the scene. Such gaps are perhaps most apparent not at the level of music practices but in the overlapping of music and non-music related activities.

### ***Indie Scenes: Culture of Distinction***

In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu describes the stratification of French society as a function of judgements over taste. In the choices about what is consumed (food, music, art, dress) and associated attitudes and behaviours ("ease or cultivated naturalness" e.g.), Bourdieu maps out a system of naturalized class differences. Contrasted with the practice of gaining status by making conspicuous displays of wealth described by Veblen (1899) such choices are all the more powerful for their apparent inconspicuousness or naturalness. This naturalness is the result of what Bourdieu calls *habitus*, "a generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification of these practices" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). The habitus thus describes a 'structure' (hidden, individual, always changing) for the generation of certain types of judgements and 'structure' for classifying the judgements of others. It has been more straightforwardly described as "a set of dispositions, created and reformulated through the conjuncture of objective structures and personal history" (Harker, 1990, p. 10). One's habitus is thus the

outcome of a complex process of socialization (from the earliest age) and exposure to structures such as the education system. By surveying thousands of people (grouped by criteria such as occupation, father's occupation, level of education etc.), Bourdieu uses this theory to explain, for example, the relatively coherent judgements within classes over what might qualify as the subject of a beautiful photograph (sunset vs. car crash), how many classical composers a person knows, or what type of singers a person prefers (Petula Clark vs. Brassens) (1984). Such choices, whether conscious or not, involve the use of *cultural capital* and create distinctions between groups, marking out some as 'working class,' others as 'petit-bourgeois,' 'bourgeois' or 'intellectuals.'

One of the most powerful aspects of Bourdieu's critique is the expansion of the concept of 'capital' to include 'symbolic capital' and 'cultural capital' in addition to the 'economic capital.' These types of capital confer power in different ways, but all, according to Bourdieu are involved in social domination. Bourdieu defines the accumulation of symbolic capital as "the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability" (1984, p. 291). While symbolic capital may be seen as the possession of authority, cultural capital can be viewed as the possession of approved taste. Cultural capital is the result of internalized dispositions (what Swartz calls the "embodied" state of cultural capital) which are reinforced through the educational system ("institutional" cultural capital) and tested through consumption of "objectified" cultural capital "such as books, works of art, and scientific instruments, that require specialized cultural abilities to use" (Swartz, 1997, p. 76). The recognition of the value of an abstract work of art, for example, requires a certain amount of cultural capital not available to all equally. Furthermore, as Swartz' distinction between "embodied" and

“institutionalized” forms imply, Bourdieu places a different and higher value on cultural capital acquired through the slow “natural” process of socialization than on that which is acquired only through study. There is the “competence of the ‘connoisseur’, [who demonstrates] an unconscious mastery of the instruments of appropriation which derives from slow familiarization” and there is cultural capital which is derived from “institutionalized learning [which ] presupposes a degree of rationalization” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 66). The ‘connoisseur’ demonstrates the ‘cultivated naturalness’ which is evidence of a ‘superior’ habitus. Through the practice of making ‘valued’ taste judgements and judging the tastes of others, the dominant class thus maintains a ‘legitimate’ “expression of social reality . . . which [is] arbitrary (but unrecognized as such)” (Bourdieu quoted in Harker, 1990, p. 94).

An interesting exercise might be to map such a theory onto the example which opens this chapter. For example, we might say that Pavement, as a critically-sanctioned, revered, and still underground band, possessed a certain amount of symbolic capital which they used to bracket off another ‘alternative’ band. In singer Malkmus’s “Nature kids they don’t have no function” we can identify “the power to name (activities, groups), the power to represent commonsense and above all the power to create the ‘official version of the social world’” (Harker, 1990, p. 13) which comes with *symbolic capital*. On the other hand, the consumers who bought Pavement instead of the Smashing Pumpkins (within a certain environment such as the independent record store) employed *cultural capital*, deploying, as far as those ‘in the know’ were concerned, a superior sense of taste. Finally, if this choice was made with a certain ‘disinterestedness,’ without rationalization or appeal to the guidance of critics or record store owners, it might be said

to demonstrate that this cultural capital is of the connoisseurship variety rather than simply acquired by “nerdish mastery of lists”.<sup>29</sup>

The application of such concepts to consumer decisions between indie rock bands is perhaps not quite what Bourdieu intended. Indeed, some have criticized the use of cultural capital to define such distinctions. Michèle Lamont and Annette Lareau (1998) have observed that there has been widespread interest in Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital, but that discussions around the concept have been dominated by confusion. As a way of clarifying this confusion, they suggest adopting a definition of cultural capital as “widely shared, legitimate culture made up of high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, behaviors, and goods) used in direct or indirect social and cultural exclusion” (p. 164). Such a definition would seem to exclude the example of Pavement. Not because some would not consider the choice of *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* a “higher status cultural signal” than *Siamese Dream* (the Smashing Pumpkins record of the previous year) but that because one could not reasonably argue that such a choice represents a “widely shared, legitimate culture.” Lamont and Lareau thus reinforce Bourdieu’s original concern in mapping out how the appreciation of ‘high’ culture maintains a ‘dominant’ class (rather than simply determining who is ‘cooler’). This is certainly a worthwhile project, however, it also seems to neglect the many social hierarchies which dot the contemporary cultural landscape and which are also used in “social and cultural exclusion”. Simon Frith writes of Bourdieu:

His interest is in the creation of a taste hierarchy in terms of high and low: the possession of cultural capital, he suggests, is what defines high culture in the first place. My point is

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<sup>29</sup> In “Sizing up Record Collections” (1997b), Straw’s description of how the performance of ‘hip’ which appears unforced is much more highly valued than that which is acquired through a “nerdish mastery of lists”.

that a similar use of accumulated knowledge and discriminatory skill is apparent in low cultural forms, and has the same hierarchical effect” (1996, p. 9).

Cultural capital thus becomes a way of understanding the process of discrimination as it operates on much smaller, but still socially important levels. A general question can be put forward: ‘What is the cultural capital required in order for the individual to be included as an equal member of the group/class/scene?’

I think that this flexible view of cultural capital is useful in understanding the communicative practices and social relations of the smaller groupings in which we spend much of our time. Indeed, I would guess that most of us can point to situations in our lives where we have been significantly affected by inclusion or exclusion within a group based on a form of cultural competency. These assertions of difference ultimately have implications for our social identity (Bourdieu, 1984). Or as Frith writes “if social relations are constituted in cultural practice, then our sense of identity and difference is established *in the processes of discrimination* [author’s emphasis]. And this is as important for popular as for bourgeois cultural activity . . .” (1996, p. 18). So while the preference for the Well-Tempered Clavier over Petula Clark may be quite relevant in explaining the distinction between the dominant and dominated classes in French society, so might a preference for The Gossip over The Strokes<sup>30</sup> be relevant in understanding discrimination within certain indie music communities, or a preference for Talib Kweli over 50 Cent<sup>31</sup> in inclusion within certain hip-hop subcultures. Indeed, such apparently minute distinctions between members of similar taste groups seem all the more relevant

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<sup>30</sup> The Gossip, a critically-acclaimed but underground ‘indie’ band. The Strokes, a critically-acclaimed but much-hyped ‘indie’ band.

<sup>31</sup> Kweli is thought of as a socially-conscious rapper, while 50 Cent is typically described predominantly as a ‘gangsta’ (and hence not socially-conscious) rapper.

considering Bourdieu's statement that "explicit aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom the competition is most direct and most immediate" (1984, p. 60). The indie connoisseur will thus put more effort in the attempt to distinguish himself from the 'poseur' indie fan (someone who has perhaps tried to buy cultural capital by reading magazines) than from the fan of Bryan Adams. Our musical preferences thus have a powerful ability to function as "a badge of identity—a means of showing others (and ourselves) to what group, or groups, we belong, or aspire to belong, as members" (Lewis, 1987, p. 199). Whether we are concerned with bourgeois or popular culture, the concept of cultural capital leads us to conclude that when it comes to success in social relations, 'taste' is a form of power.

I want to suggest that the concepts of *cultural capital* and *distinction* provide a particularly fruitful way of analyzing indie music scenes; and indeed that other characteristics of the indie scene, such as a preoccupation with 'authenticity', are easily subordinated to a continual reconfiguration of cultural capital with the purpose of maintaining distinction. As I have already pointed out, cultural capital is a concern in any type of cultural consumption where certain choices are seen as more legitimate than others. For example, Keightley (2001) argues that the preoccupation in rock culture of making distinctions between the "serious" and "trivial" began as early as the 1930s with big band music; Benny Goodman in this case was seen as more legitimate than Guy Lombardo. Keightley in "Rock Reconsidered" (2001) outlines both an important historical moment and a break with Bourdieu's use of cultural capital: "rock involves the making of distinctions *within* [my emphasis] mass culture, rather than the older problem of distinguishing mass from elite or vernacular cultures" (p. 110). Rock, as Keightley

points out, “was born *within* the popular mainstream” (p. 122). However, this does not, as Keightley notes, mean that the audience for rock looks fondly on the mainstream: “The newborn rock culture featured a massive youth audience which saw itself, nonetheless, as opposed to the mass mainstream and all that it stood for” (p. 122). It is this arrangement which has led to the making of distinctions within mass culture, and the labeling of some popular music as more ‘authentic’ than others.

Keightley’s analysis in “Rock Reconsidered” provides two main poles of distinction: “The distinctions made by rock culture effectively stratify the mainstream of popular music into ‘serious’ (rock) and ‘trivial’ (pop) components” (p. 111). I want to suggest that indie music scenes are particularly interesting in terms of cultural capital because they value neither rock or pop (seriousness or fun) exclusively, but rather configure each in ways that can provide a sense of distinction from the mainstream. The following statement from Kruse is interesting in this respect:

On one hand, indie music culture in the 1980s and 1990s posited its institutions, generic conventions, and, to a lesser degree, style as somehow ‘authentic,’ and, if not oppositional, then at least alternative to mainstream popular culture; but on the other hand, participants in indie music culture were aware of the numerous ways in which indie pop/rock music was implicated in hegemonic economic and cultural structures (Kruse, 2003, p. 157).

Key here is that those involved in indie culture thought of their practices as neither explicitly ‘authentic’ nor oppositional; there is not one absolute version of either authenticity or oppositionality being advanced. Rather they recognize, to a degree, that indie music, like all popular music, is “implicated in hegemonic economic and cultural structures.” It is perhaps this recognition which leads to the production and celebration of ironic and meta-musical stances within indie culture. For example, Keightley suggests

that the Ramones' "mindless fun" can be read as a commentary on the seriousness with which rock music was judged; that it is "self-consciously elevated into a kind of critical philosophy" (p. 130). Along the same lines, Coyle and Dolan (1999) have pointed out that Pavement refused to characterize their music as "a cultural moment" rejecting the idea that their music was somehow 'authentic'. And Butler (2003) has argued that the Pet Shop Boys covering of U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name" can also be read as a critique of the criterion of rock authenticity under which bands such as U2 were celebrated and synthesizer-based bands such as the Pet Shop Boys were criticized.

The prevalence of irony in indie music does not mean, however, that indie scenes have abandoned 'authenticity' as a value. As Warren Zanes (1999) has argued, ironic approaches can also be 'authentic': "the ironic hero is not infected, is not overcome by the machinery of commerce as s/he moves through it, and thus acts as a kind of double agent whose true self can be appreciated by those in the know" (p. 53). Indeed, Zanes' argument brings to mind Keightley's two dimensional model of authenticity: a Romantic dimension which values community, sincerity, naturalness, the roots tradition (the values we typically think of as 'authenticity'); and a Modernist dimension which values experimentation, avant gardes, elitism, irony, etc. As Keightley points out, both Romantic and Modernist authenticity serves to "position rock *against* the mass pop mainstream *and* to create and organize internal differences within rock culture" (2001, p. 137). Whether or not the distinction between indie music culture and general rock culture is an *internal* difference, or whether indie rock functions to some extent outside this infrastructure, it is interesting that in positioning itself as 'other,' indie music culture easily shifts between both types of authenticity; valuing simultaneously music by the Pet Shop Boys and the

less ironic, less ‘mediated’, more ‘sincere’ music such as the bedroom tapes of Daniel Johnston.

An interesting question in terms of indie music culture might be, therefore, not how certain music or music practices relate to authenticity, but what are the practices by which an evolving and overlapping set of tastes are labeled as ‘legitimate’ at any one point in time. Following Kruse, I would suggest that such practices tend to be constructed within a restricted field of production; by small groups of producers and consumers which are positioned not only against pop, but to a certain extent against all large-scale production. This does not mean that the products of mass culture cannot be valued within these scenes, but that they are valued only in certain ‘legitimate’ ways. Distinction is therefore a way of demonstrating mastery over a certain field of knowledge.

Keightley’s suggestion that distinction as it functions within rock music is no longer about distinguishing mass from elite culture may, therefore, not be entirely accurate. Holly Kruse’s application of Bourdieu’s concept of the field of restricted production to indie music scenes would appear to support this critique. Bourdieu divides the field of cultural production into a restricted field and a large-scale field, each with specific types of practices and criteria for judging value. Bourdieu had intended the restricted field to refer to the production of ‘high art’, however, Kruse feels that the concept of “production for producers . . . is applicable to many areas of cultural production, including indie music” (2003, p. 152). Kruse points out the similarity between indie scenes and the restricted field of cultural production where artists disavow economic profit and gain symbolic capital by being seen as being involved in pursuing ‘art for art’s sake’:

Individuals involved in the underground of small 'micro-indie' labels certainly saw themselves as part of a field of restricted cultural production. They catered to very small audiences of highly knowledgeable consumers, many of whom were themselves producers of sorts (e.g. musicians, fanzine editors, small label and record storeowners, college radio staffers)" (Kruse, 2003, p. 153).

Local indie scenes raise the question of just how separate or restricted they are from the overall music industry. As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, there has been the attempt to link local indie scenes to Attali's concept of "Composition" (Farley, p. 1995) in which the music is "produced by each individual for himself, for pleasure outside of meaning, usage and exchange" (Attali, 1985, p. 137). However, as Kruse herself makes clear, indie scenes are not as autonomous from either the large-scale field or the economic field as Bourdieu's theory suggests. Indeed, indie scenes do not operate free of commercial considerations and their activities frequently overlap with larger scale businesses (such as with distribution deals with major labels). This qualification to Bourdieu's theory, however, arguably makes Kruse's application of the field of restricted production all the more interesting. So described, the spaces and practices of indie scenes can be better understood as ones which are frequently caught between commercial potential and the sacrifice of symbolic capital; as scenes which require specialized cultural capital in order to participate, which foster identity through the affirmation of members' cultural capital, but which on the other hand may be more viable if such financial capital were more widely available.

A crucial question here, and unfortunately one which I am not in a position to answer due to lack of empirical data, is whether like Bourdieu's field of restricted production a similar habitus can be identified among participants of indie music scenes.

Straw's assertion that the "overlapping of alternative-rock culture and the cultural space of record collectors and historical archivists should scarcely be surprising, given the predictable setting of both within the sociological limits of largely white bohemia" (1991, p. 378) maps well onto the historical white upper middle-class audience for 'oppositional' popular music. For example, in his history of rock 'n' roll, Charlie Gillet describes the transition of rhythm and blues out of a purely 'race' market as beginning with white college students who cultivated an R&B cult much like other white students had done with jazz before. Gillet quotes sociologist David Reisman who describes the white audience for popular music in terms of a majority group and minority group which:

Tends to dislike name bands, most vocalists (except Negro blues singers), and radio commercials. The rebelliousness of this minority group might be indicated in some of the following attitudes toward popular music: an insistence on rigorous standards of judgment and taste in a relativist culture; a preference for the uncommercialized, unadvertised small bands rather than name bands; the development of a private language and then a flight from it when the private language (and the same is true of other aspects of private style) are taken over by the majority group (Reisman quoted in Gillet, 1996, p. 11).

The attitudes of this audience seem surprisingly familiar to those described in accounts of indie music or underground music scenes today. One of the most in depth books on the U.S. independent scene is Michael Azerrad's *Our Band Could Be Your Life*. A cursory overview of the artists profiled in this book also suggests the affiliation between white bohemia and 'indie' music. Indeed, many of the influential indie musicians of the 1980s and 1990s came out of college-educated, white, upper-middle class backgrounds (e.g. Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth, or J. Mascis of Dinosaur Jr.). Cotten Seiler (2001), describing the rise of a certain indie rock sound in Louisville, Kentucky, connects class

privilege to indie rock more explicitly: “The overwhelming majority of the musicians producing the Louisville Sound come from the affluent and largely white east end, were educated at private or well-funded public ‘magnet’ high schools, and were at least expected to attend college, preferably elsewhere” (p. 195). Seiler contrasts the more bohemian, intellectual indie rock scene to the punk scene which “grew from Louisville’s largely working-class south end” (p. 195).

Not having done any extensive research in this area, all I can say is that indie rock in Canada also appears to be predominantly (although not exclusively) the domain of middle or upper-middle class white culture. While Bourdieu might argue that this is evidence of how judgements of taste disguise class-based domination in North America, Frith writes that such judgements are not a matter of conflict between social classes:

The crucial high/low conflict is not that between social classes but that produced by the commercial process itself at all levels of cultural expression. High/low thus describes the emergence of consumer elites or cults, on the one hand (bohemian vs. conformist) and the tension between artists and their audiences (modernist and avant garde vs. orthodox and mainstream) on the other (1996, p. 35).

Whatever the case, Frith and Bourdieu should agree that such judgements of ‘high’ and ‘low’ act as strategies of distinction between social groups within our culture, whether based on class or on elective affinities, and that such distinctions thus play an important role both in determining the criteria of ‘belonging’ to such groups, and in defining the routes along which certain cultural products travel.

I have attempted to argue that Bourdieu’s concepts of *distinction* and *cultural capital* provide a useful focus for the study of indie music. While cultural capital also plays a role in the practices of other musical styles, I would argue that it plays an

especially prevalent role in the case of indie music. One reason for this has been suggested by Kruse's mapping of the field of restricted production and its specialized forms of cultural and symbolic capital onto indie music culture. Like the rarified domain of high art or literature on which Bourdieu based the concept of the restricted field, indie rock also caters to small niche audiences which value specific types of musical knowledge not available from mainstream media outlets. Furthermore, much of the music celebrated in indie circles requires prior knowledge of aesthetic codes in order to make 'proper' judgements—for example, to revere rather than scorn the out-of-tune warblings of a songwriter such as Daniel Johnston. Another reason why cultural capital is a useful concept in analyzing indie music is that the genre, unlike perhaps all other musical genres, has little coherence outside of a certain attitude towards making and valuing music. For example, as Kruse has pointed out (2003) indie music is difficult to define musicologically. There are literally dozens of styles from alt-country to electroclash to certain hip-hop styles which might all be considered at any given time part of indie music culture. Moreover, while the genre's name is taken from 'independent,' indie music cannot be defined explicitly by reference to whether an act is on an independent label. Michael Azerrad (2002) has suggested tightening the definition so that only bands on independent labels not distributed by major labels should be called 'independent', however, this does not work for two reasons: first there are such labels that we would not consider part of indie music culture (labels catering to specific genres such as Gospel or Latin music for example) and second, there are bands on major labels that we would include in our definition (Death Cab for Cutie or Le Tigre are two indie bands who have

recently signed with major labels). Understanding what counts as ‘indie’ is therefore already a matter of cultural capital.

### *Indie Scenes: Culture of Communication*

The first four chapters in Simon Frith’s *Performance Rites* are grouped together under the general heading “Music Talk”. In these chapters Frith sketches a “sociological response” to the problem of value judgements in popular music. As the heading suggests, this response has much (or perhaps everything) to do with how we talk about music and who we talk about music with. Similar in some ways to Raymond Williams’ assertion that doing art is a social practice (Shepherd & Wieke, 1997, p. 32), Frith concludes that finding “meaning” in music is “not just an interpretive but a social process: musical meaning is not inherent . . . in the text” (Frith, 1996, p. 250). Even the most musicological interpretation of a classical work then—an approach that suggests the meaning is somehow contained within the very structure of the piece—is bound up in our previous social experience valuing/interpreting music through talk. The evidence of this social exercise is all around us—both “high” and “low”—from the most intellectual academic journal articles to home-photocopied fanzines to discussions at the bar or club. Frith suggests therefore that the value of the music does not exist objectively within the music itself but in the many discourses (originality, authenticity, technical skill etc.) enacted in different communities (musicians, critics, audiences), genres and subgenres.

As I note in the introduction to this thesis, how we talk about music is of importance to my argument. Frith, however, takes the question of talking about music a step further in the last chapter of *Performing Rites*. Critiquing the approach of “Marxist

and Weberian musicologists,” Frith writes that their “homological argument . . . too often attempts to relate musical forms *to* social processes [ignoring] the ways in which music is *itself* a social process” (Frith, 1996, p. 270). Music is, therefore, not just a reflection of a certain social structure—mass culture/pop music, for example, reflecting the alienation of the worker—but is an ongoing social experience consisting of interactions between musicians, listeners, critics, etc.

I think that Frith’s description of music itself as a social process provides an interesting way to introduce James Carey’s description of a ritual view of communication, a view that sees communication as “directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs”— a view that Carey feels has been largely neglected in the discipline of communication studies (Carey, 1988, p. 18). In *Communication as Culture*, Carey compares this ritual view to the dominant view of communication as a transmission of information from sender to receiver: “a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people” (1988, p. 15). As Carey explains, understood through the transmission view, reading a newspaper is simply a means of receiving information. In contrast, the ritual view looks at news as a kind of drama that “invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it” (p. 21). Perhaps it is Carey’s focus on matters such as news journalism and democracy that finds him infrequently cited in writing on music, however, to this reader it would seem that his distinction between the transmission and ritual views of communication provides an appropriate harmony to Frith’s distinction between the view that music is a reflection of social processes and the

view of music as a social process itself. Indeed, Carey's emphasis on "sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith" (1988, p. 18); his argument that communication is a "collective activity . . . [and] the product of that activity—meaning—establishes a common and shared world" (Carey, 1997a, 68); and his frequent citation of Cavell's statement that communication is "wording the world together" (1997a, p. 69) strike a familiar chord when played along with Frith's lines that "music gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it. . . The critical issue, in other words, is not meaning and its interpretation . . . but experience and collusion" (Frith, 1996, p. 272). Carey and Frith thus both view communication/music not as something done to us, something that one can step outside of, but as a collective activity in which we are implicitly involved and that is inextricably tied up with how we construct our social world. Furthermore, the sociological nature of this process must foreground language (linguistic, musical, visual etc.) as "the one collective and sharable phenomenon we have: not something created and then shared but only created in the act of sharing" (Carey, 1997a, p. 69).

While this type of "experience and collusion" is no doubt common to all music scenes—as Finnegan showed in the *Hidden Musicians* the experience of participating in music provides the social pathways along which much social interaction occurs—what Shank in *Dissonant Identities* and Kruse in *Site and Sound* have ably demonstrated is the extent to which indie music scenes construct themselves as 'communities' of difference through communication practices. As Kruse points out, both communal values and differences are articulated through "personal narrative histories of involvement with the genre. Implicit in these identification and personal histories was the idea that they

constituted a connection with an authentic musical form and set of musical practices, and that these identities were constituted both locally and interlocally” (2003, p. 115). Calling on Carey’s ritual view of communication, I would suggest that in these personal narratives the subjects viewed themselves as actors in an unfolding drama in which a particular way of life and its values are championed.

I want to suggest that Carey’s ritual view of communication may provide a useful balance to Bourdieu’s theories in analyzing indie music scenes. As outlined in the previous sections, indie scenes consist of relatively small groups of musicians, entrepreneurs and fans which tend to construct and circulate specialized cultural capital in order to affirm the values of the scene and position the scene as distinct from the large scale production and consumption of popular music. In other words, these scenes are continually involved in the construction of in and out groups, a process in which cultural capital is used in, as Lamont and Lareau (1998) have described, direct and indirect exclusion. However, following Carey, one can also analyze such a process as the affirmation of common bonds, of “sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith” (Carey, 1988, p. 18). Furthermore, Carey argues that such exchanges, such sharing of culture, and participation in ‘conversation’ is at the heart of creating a public sphere which forms the basis for democratic life (1997b, p. 217). So on the one hand, we need to recognize how indie scenes can and do function as relatively elitist systems which often exclude participation of those who do not have the requisite cultural capital, or do not feel they do. While on the other hand, it seems important to recognize that such scenes are also sites of incredibly active, focused, resourceful and creative participation in local public life. Furthermore this activity contradicts some of

the traditional readings of Canadian culture which suggest that without government intervention there would be little homegrown cultural production.

The complex reading of local indie scenes provided by Matthew Stahl in his article “To Hell with Heteronomy” (2003) seems to provide support for this combination of Bourdieu and Carey. Stahl writes that “local indie rock is a bounded social space . . . Entry into this social space is not equally easy for all aspirants, but a certain amount of recognition can be more or less assured by following in the grooves laid out by normative tales of cooperation and community building” (p. 145). While Bourdieu’s notion of habitus might actually preclude the coming of an ‘aspirant’ to the scene (and therefore Stahl may be overly optimistic about how one might enter a local scene), he recognizes that ease of participation is not equally distributed. Stahl then, in response to Straw’s assertion that ‘alternative’ scenes are (as shown by their canonization of musical works) conservative, writes that:

It is precisely the conservatism and “unity of purpose” (not to mention homogeneity in ethnic, class, and gender terms) in indie rock culture that attract musicians and fans seeking a stable collectivity in modernity; yet the unity one finds in that world depends on the place at which one enters it. The indie rock terrain, particularly at the interstices between professional plateaus, is riven by competition and struggle for position (p. 147).

This is an interesting statement, as it seems to both support Bourdieu’s notion of class-based habitus and Carey’s argument about the drive for ‘collective’ experience. However, Stahl also suggests here that the ‘unity’ of the indie scene is partly imaginary. This is important, as it is through rifts within such scenes and connections with other scenes (both indie scenes in other locales and those of other genres) that we might identify the

larger process of “the making and remaking of alliances between communities” which Straw writes “are the crucial political processes within popular music” (1991, p. 370).

In the work of Bourdieu and Carey we thus see two sides of the collective experience. On the one hand, Bourdieu demonstrates how the manifestation of this collective experience is also a manifestation of class differences. On the other, Carey argues that the practice of affirming common values through the ritual of communication, whether through reading a newspaper, chatting at a record store, or listening to music, is at the heart of society itself—that we need such common bonds. I think that both Bourdieu and Carey are right. Our lives would be rather depressing if there were not others with whom we felt we shared common values. Indeed, it is in acts of sharing and affirming these values through music, writing, conversation—through communication—which provide many of life’s most pleasurable moments. However, we must also recognize that these values serve to separate others for whom they are not common. Furthermore, one of the dangers of talking about ‘common’ culture is the taking of such commonalities as representative of national culture (a danger which is sometimes all too prevalent in Canadian debates). As Stuart Hall asked of Raymond Williams’s emphasis “on culture and community as a ‘whole way of life’. Whose *way*? Which *life*? . . . Isn’t it the case that, in the modern world, the more we examine ‘whole ways of life’ the more internally diversified, the more cut through by complex patterns of similarity and difference, they appear to be?” (Hall, 1993, p. 359). I would argue that applying Carey and Bourdieu not to the question of a common national culture, but to these patterns of similarity and difference which characterize modern life, allows us to identify the critically important social formations through which people gain a sense of belonging and

purpose while also recognizing that such formations are not the outcome of chance, but may reaffirm social divisions such as class, race, sexuality or gender.

### *Making a scene in the community*

The introduction of Carey and his concern with the connection between ‘communication’ and ‘community’ makes it difficult to ignore the question: ‘To what extent do local music scenes constitute a community?’ As I have already mentioned, there has been some general agreement (Straw, 1991; Kruse, 2003) that the term ‘scene’ is preferable to ‘community’ in studying local popular music, as such formations tend to lack the long-term participation or geographic rootedness typically associated with traditional interpretations of ‘community’. While I agree with this approach, one of the disadvantages of using the term ‘scene’ is that it obscures two important aspects of local music scenes: first, participants often *do* feel as though they are part of a music community; and second, the practices of local music scenes do not exist in isolation from their geographic location or neighbourhood, but overlap to a great extent with the day to day rituals of working, going to school, shopping, eating, socializing, etc. In other words, ‘community’ is an important aspect of local music practice. As Straw has argued, however, the use of ‘scene’ does not mean that we must also refrain from discussing how local music contributes to ‘community’:

Clearly, the point is not that of designating particular cultural spaces as one or the other [scene or community], but of examining the ways in which particular musical practices ‘work’ to produce a sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music scenes (1991, p. 373).

Straw thus suggests a way for discussing ‘community’ (as a sense of community) through the practices of a local music scene. Furthermore, I would argue that this examination should be broadened to look, not only at the ways in which ‘community’ is produced *within* music scenes, but the often symbiotic relationship between local music scenes and the community at large.

John D. Jackson (1988) describes a potentially useful distinction for understanding this intersection of ‘scene’ and ‘community’. Jackson argues that there are two basic ideas embedded in the concept of “community”: “community” and “the community”.<sup>32</sup> He writes that “the first denotes shared values, interests and a common sense of identity; the second denotes places and the activities therein, or locale” (p. 642). Jackson notes that there has been a tendency by some sociologists to reduce “community” in the first sense (shared values, common identity, etc.) to “a definition of communities as settlements, thereby associating a particular quality of human relations, which may or may not be present in any given group, with human settlements as such” (p. 643). This is problematic according to Jackson, because no settlement would be able to meet the criterion of a conformity of values. Reminiscent of Hall’s statement about the “patterns of similarity and dissimilarity”, Jackson writes that “any given locale is as likely as not to exhibit within its boundaries harmony and disharmony, conflict and consensus, order and disorder.” He thus recommends that the idea of “community” be “retained as an empirical question in relation to particular communities as locale” (p. 642).

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<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that the use of these two very similar terms to represent different concepts does not do much to simplify what is already a somewhat complex idea.

Jackson's argument that the term "community" be reserved to questions of locale seems to support the view of Straw and Kruse that 'community' is not an appropriate term for local popular music scenes which cohere around shared practices and values but are frequently transitory and interlocal in character. Kruse argues, for example, that as a label for the practices of indie scenes, "community is inappropriate: although communal feelings and shared musical practices exist within music scenes, they do not necessarily constitute a community" (2003, p. 146). Kruse's argument is tied to Straw's characterization of the two terms. Straw writes that the term "musical community",

Presumes a population group whose composition is relatively stable—according to a wide range of sociological variables—and whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage (1991, p. 373).

This view of community (one which is firmly rooted in locale and history), Kruse argues, is at odds with "indie music formations, which tend to be fragmented along lines of genre, age, gender and so on, and in which individual participation is often transient" (2003, p. 146). Kruse argues that Straw's description of "scene" as a "cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization" (Straw, 1991, p. 373) accommodates "the range of economic and social practices through which music is created and circulated within and across localities" (Kruse, 2003, p. 146).

Following these arguments, we might ask how the practices of music scenes may 'work' to create a sense of 'community', rather than attempting to define scenes as communities. For example, Paul Théberge (1991) has written that with the rise of

musicians' magazines in the 1980s, internationally dispersed musicians gained a sense of a 'community' through the practice of engaging with specialized consumer magazines, which were "not only a link between the musicians and the industry, but, as well, an essential mediating factor in musician-musician interactions" (1991, p. 290). Such a description follows Jackson's first conceptualization of 'community' as that of shared interests with little if any connection with locality. Taking this further, some, such as Wellman, suggest that "aspatial personal networks . . . provide the very communal resources and experiences that local neighbourhoods do not" (Barney, 2004, p. 54). Barney (2004), however, has argued that a sense of 'community' is enhanced by interaction with "a common world comprised of concrete material things" (p. 57). If this is the case, then the strong communal feelings which local musicians often feel towards their particular scenes can be better understood; not only do they share common interests, but they share common spaces in which those interests are pursued, and common friends which pursue those interests with them. As one Ottawa musician wrote about his preference for the terms 'scene' or 'community':

I'm not a fan of the term 'scene'. It is used to describe something that is fleeting; something that is fake and has a limited shelf-life. Scene means posing, employing a certain look, acting a certain way in a struggle to be a part of something. Kind of like high school. Community is completely different. By definition, it's a support system that reaches out to include, regardless of who you are.<sup>33</sup>

Or the owner of a local record label:

I like community better. Scene sounds like a New York or Toronto word, and we definitely have a community here. Community also implies that people are helping each other, and contributing to the success of a group rather than themselves, and that's what we do in Ottawa.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Chris Page interview.

<sup>34</sup> Jon Bartlett interview.

It is interesting that these statements imply a certain longevity and inclusiveness to the Ottawa ‘community’ and position the ‘community’ against trends (in the first statement) and other music scenes (in the second).<sup>35</sup> What both statements also suggest is that the practices which contribute to a ‘sense of community’ are those which are seen as supporting others in the scene—practices which are viewed as not primarily about succeeding in music, but in contributing to some form of group identity. Many such practices might be identified within the Ottawa indie music scene, such as attending other musicians’ shows, performing at benefit concerts, sharing tour or press contacts, designing posters or web sites free of charge, or lending rehearsal space or recording equipment. Furthermore, there are many practices which are not directly related to music but which also serve to consolidate a sense of community among musicians and other participants in the scene, such as shopping at related or supportive businesses (record stores, bars, etc.), helping other musicians find employment, even getting together to play hockey or poker on a semi-regular basis. Such practices suggest the role which a ‘sense of community’ plays in the continued participation within music scenes like that in Ottawa, as well as the fluidity between the concept of ‘scene’ as a set of practices organized around genre, and ‘community’ as locale. Indeed, as musicians age, buy homes, have families, pursue more stable full-time employment and perhaps relegate musical

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<sup>35</sup> While both of the above statements suggest a certain inclusiveness within an Ottawa ‘community,’ the reality is that the social group of which both of these participants speak is relatively exclusive. It is defined in terms of musical genre (indie/alternative), age (between 25 – 40), level of recognition (most have achieved some limited success), taste/cultural capital (indie, bohemian), race (mostly white), class (mostly middle) and gender (mostly male). There are simultaneously other Ottawa scenes organized around different musical genres (world music, hip-hop, dance, hardcore, metal, etc.) which might likewise consider themselves a community and might also share characteristics such as age, race, gender and cultural capital. Talking about any one of these as ‘*the* Ottawa music community’ is thus problematic, although, there is no question that within any one of these scenes members may consider themselves a community.

activities to more and more part-time status, the connection to 'community' likely begins to take precedence over a commitment to the 'scene'.

While perhaps a mundane observation, I think that recognizing the interrelatedness of music scenes and community is important for at least two reasons. First, it provides a potentially interesting line of analysis in which the practices of music scenes are examined as they intersect with 'community' in ways not usually associated with the 'scene'. Such intersections might include musicians' places of employment (especially employment not related to music) or leisure activities which include musicians and non-musicians (poker, hockey, craft nights, dinner parties, etc.). I would suggest that these intersections may reveal opportunities for those without the requisite cultural capital (or inclination), to participate in the music scene, as well as opportunities for different musical scenes to overlap and 'cross-fertilize'. Second, an analysis of the intersection(s) of 'scene' and 'community' might provide evidence that local music scenes help create more interesting and vibrant communities as a whole, even for those who may not be aware that such a scene even exists. This analysis would be useful in arguing for municipal policy initiatives (noise by-laws for example) which make it easier rather than more difficult for local music scenes to flourish.

### *Introduction to Case Studies*

I have suggested that studies of Canadian communications/popular music may benefit from an analysis of local music practices. While this has been undertaken in the United States and England, relatively little has been written on the subject in Canada. I would argue, however, that such a study is perhaps especially important in Canada, as the quantity of local music produced and related activity in local economic and social networks may in some ways contradict the perception that there is little Canadian culture produced outside of government intervention which is not unduly influenced the hegemonic force of U.S. 'cultural imperialism'. Indeed, the current heralding of Canadian indie music (and specifically the Montreal scene) as the 'next big thing' seems to suggest that independent Canadian music can be an international force of its own.<sup>36</sup>

As a way of beginning the study of such local popular music at the ground level, I have proposed an analysis of some of the local practices of indie music scenes. As already mentioned, I have chosen indie music scenes because it is the genre of local music with which I am most familiar. Additionally, I have argued, following Kruse, that indie scenes tend to cohere around certain ethical and aesthetic values which are constructed in opposition to the mainstream, rather than in any particular musicological characteristics. This makes indie scenes interesting from the point of view of communication studies because as certain forms of music and style cross over to the mainstream or become ubiquitous within the scene itself, participants reconfigure or update their tastes in order to create new forms of opposition or distinction. The affirmation and reaffirmation of the scene's borders and of one's position within those

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, the February 2005 issue of *Spin*, or the April 4, 2005 issue of the Canadian edition of *Time* for stories about the Canadian indie scene.

borders is a communicative process, which takes place primarily in local spaces such as the record store, rock venue, drinking hole, hockey rink, etc. This combination of common interests and common spaces may in turn suggest to these participants that they in some sense form a 'community'. I have argued, following Kruse and Straw, that while such formations may inspire a sense of community, they are perhaps better referred to as a 'scene'. The overlapping of local musical practices with other non-music activities may suggest ways for understanding how 'scenes', as exclusive as they often are, do exist within a community and not in isolation. Indeed, the high level of activity fostered by such scenes frequently spills over, forming networks with other groups within the local setting and with similar scenes in other localities.

The following two case studies attempt to provide some evidence to support these arguments. The first case study presents a comparison of local independent record stores with chain stores. It suggests that local indie stores are much more intensely invested in the aesthetic judgements involved in the music and in connecting these judgements to the local scene. While the cultural capital required to feel at home in the indie store has the power to create in and out groups, it also provides the venue for the circulation of new types of capital (new styles, genres, labels, bands) which affirms belonging within the scene and encourages participation whether as a musician, entrepreneur or fan. The second case study considers the Canadian national music magazine *Exclaim!* and the annual hockey tournament it sponsors. Starting as a match between two teams comprised of local Hamilton and Toronto musicians, the *Exclaim! Cup* has grown to include twenty-four 'arts-focused' teams from across the Canada. The *Exclaim! Cup* demonstrates the extent to which local music scenes are connected across the country, and to which

musical and non-musical practices are integrated. Furthermore, it might be argued that the *Exclaim! Cup* provides an example of the intersection of scene and community; an intersection which presents opportunities for the cross-fertilization of scenes and for the participation of those who perhaps do not possess the same level of cultural capital.

## Chapter 4

### **‘Totally Essential’: The Cultural Capital of Independent Record Stores**

*Social identity is defined and asserted through difference*” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 172).

*“What matters is what you like, not what you are like”* (Hornby, 1995, p. 117).

*“Yes you putz. Totally & fucking essential buy!”* (Sticker review at Birdman Sound)<sup>37</sup>.

Travel south on Bank Street in Ottawa and just past the highway on the east side of the street you’ll find two small independent record shops positioned side by side, owned by different people, but sharing the surname “Sound”: Organized Sound and Birdman Sound. Clientele and catalogue overlap somewhat, yet each serves a distinct niche of record buyers, Organized Sound focusing on indie-rock, electronica, world beat and experimental; Birdman Sound taking up the mantle of 60s garage and 70s rock and their contemporary offspring. Both stores carry a large number of vinyl LPs (new releases, used and reissues) along with CDs and are staffed by the owners themselves or ubiquitous friends who seem synonymous with each store.<sup>38</sup> Everyone who works at the two stores is involved in the local music scene in some way or another, whether by hosting a local radio show, playing in bands, or promoting live shows. None are below the age of 25. Uniforms, unless one counts jeans and t-shirts, are definitely not required.

The point of this short description is to introduce the idea that while their target audiences and content may differ somewhat, Organized Sound and Birdman Sound have more in common than the word “Sound” over their doors. Indeed, taken as a group, I

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<sup>37</sup> Records at Birdman Sound are frequently adorned with stickers on which mini-reviews such as the one above are hand written.

<sup>38</sup> For example, staff members are frequently referred to in conversations as “Andy from Organized” or “Tony from Organized” etc.

would suggest that we can make an important distinction between independent record stores—stores such as Birdman Sound or Organized Sound in Ottawa, Sonic Unyon in Hamilton, Soundscapes in Toronto, or Scratch Records in Vancouver—and national chain stores, such as HMV and MusicWorld and various other large scale outlets that carry music such as Wal-Mart, FutureShop and BestBuy.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, I would argue that perhaps the most telling way of viewing this distinction is in the level and specificity of cultural knowledge assumed by the stores and in how that knowledge is valued, performed and shared among shoppers and staff. This distinction may in fact be growing more pronounced, as chain and superstores seek pluralistic solutions to recapturing fragmented audiences—audiences intimidated by the “uneven knowledge” of the record store (Straw, 1997a, p. 59)—while independents pursue just the opposite strategy, revelling in the niches of popular music taste and exploiting the hierarchization of knowledge implicit in the awareness of music not featured in mainstream media outlets—knowledge implicit in what Will Straw (1997b) has called “indie rock obscurantism” (p. 12).<sup>40</sup> While such “obscurantism” obviously provides enjoyment for those with the appropriate knowledge, providing ways to demonstrate belonging, it also serves to exclude audiences.

In the following case study I intend to explore differences in how cultural knowledge is valued and performed in independent and chain record stores using

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<sup>39</sup> Holly Kruse (2003) makes the same distinction between independent and chain stores. She writes: “Mall chain stores . . . do not serve the same function [as social spaces in independent music scenes]: they are generally located farther away from other sites of scene activity, their employees are often not participants in local music scenes, and the employees also have less input into artists who are promoted via in-store displays” (p. 95).

<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, it appears as though the strategy of focusing on niche and knowledge is not equal to commercial suicide. Leah McLaren (2003) wrote in the *Globe & Mail* that Soundscapes, her small local independent record shop, has experienced growth of 20-30% compared to an industry decline of about 10% (p. L3).

Bourdieu's concepts of *distinction* and *cultural capital*. I hope to show that the way musical knowledge is presented in independent record stores suggests a version of legitimate culture that is constructed in opposition to the pluralism found in "mainstream" record outlets, and that the legitimacy of this culture is maintained through a form of cultural capital that is both cultivated and tested within the domain of the store. Like the cultural capital of Bourdieu's dominant and intellectual class, it would seem that that found in independent record stores is not wholly an innocent source of pleasure, but also functions as a force for exclusion. This capital is similarly nurtured through a system of education consisting of genre-categorization, references to musical influences, the opinions of store employees, etc. While it is unclear whether we can identify a *habitus* common to those disposed to listen to independent rather than 'mainstream' music, it is clear that independent stores function as social spaces where the acquisition of cultural capital is frequently encouraged in the organization and communicative practices of the store. Paradoxically one finds both exclusion and invitation within these social spaces. Combined with Bourdieu, Carey's ritual view of communication, and its emphasis on sharing, fellowship and the affirmation of common values, thus seems like an appropriate model for how this cultural capital is constructed, sustained and changed.

### ***Cultural Capital in the Domain of the Record Store***

That cultural capital in the form of a demonstration of appropriate knowledge and aesthetic preference is tested within the record store is made fairly clear in one of the most memorable scenes from Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity* (1995). In the following citation Barry, (the stereotypical example of an elitist record store employee) denigrates

an unsuspecting customer who wants to buy Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You" for his daughter. When the customer asks whether he can purchase the record (Barry has lied and said that they carry it), he responds:

[Barry] "No, I'm sorry, but you can't."

[Customer] "Why not?"

[Barry] "Why not? Because it's sentimental tacky crap, that's why not. Do we look like the sort of shop that sells fucking 'I Just Called to Say I Love You,' eh? Now, be off with you, and don't waste our time" (p. 53).

When Rob (the owner of Championship Vinyl) asks Barry what harm the customer had caused him (never taking issue with Barry's aesthetic judgement) Barry responds: "You know what harm he's done me. He offended me with his terrible taste" (p. 54).

While perhaps extreme, this scene nevertheless illustrates several interesting features of cultural capital at work in the record store. First of all, there is the initial distinction based on aesthetic preference. The customer thinks "I Just Called to Say I Love You" is good music or at least something innocuous to buy for his daughter. Barry, the clerk, from the position of someone 'schooled' in the history of rock 'n' roll, thinks that such a song is an abomination and actually does some form of harm. Second, and this is where things get interesting, Barry assumes the authority to claim his values as legitimate. And yet Barry has also just made a mixed-tape that includes "Walking on Sunshine" by Katrina and the Waves, a more respectable choice perhaps, but definitely no obscure B-side. Once qualified as having the requisite cultural capital to comfortably operate in the environment, it seems one is free to choose from a much wider catalogue than the uninitiated. Cultural capital allows the 'learned' individual to make the same

choice (“Walking on Sunshine” for example) as the ‘unlearned’ and have that choice count as something more. Cultural capital is thus not only about the choice of object, but how it is chosen (e.g. ironically, thematically, educationally, etc.). It also allows for disagreements on taste among the members of the ‘legitimate’ culture not permitted to those outside. Third, the location where this legitimacy is asserted is an independent record store, a place that Barry feels should be recognizable as the “sort of shop” where you don’t buy “sentimental tacky crap”. The distinction between good and bad taste is thus translated into a distinction between the sorts of stores where such taste is prohibited and the sort where it is either endorsed or tolerated. Fourth, one gets the impression that these distinctions are of a much more serious character for Barry than for the unwitting customer. Indeed, throughout *High Fidelity*, Rob, Barry and Dick (the three characters who work at Championship Vinyl) continuously construct their identities as distinct from each other and from the public through their preferences and knowledge about popular music. However, while they may disagree among themselves, they all nevertheless accept each other as having the requisite capital to engage in a conversation about these differences. A luxury obviously not afforded to the casual customer who asks for music from the ‘wrong’ era of Stevie Wonder’s catalogue.

While *High Fidelity* is a fictional account, and the above scene is suitably dramatic, I think there is plenty of evidence to suggest that such distinctions are very much the stuff of real-life record shopping. For example, consider the following description from *Billboard* of Rhythm Records in Camden, England, a shop specializing in vinyl records for the collector set:

The likes of Luke Vibert and Cypress Hill<sup>41</sup> come to the store for its selection of hand-picked second-hand vinyl in the basement, says that department's manager, Allie Allerton. "Beck also dropped by for weird things while he was here," Allerton says. On the ground floor, the weekend mix is split between visitors who seek out the place for its big beat, trip-hop, drum'n'bass, and techno wares on CD "and those who ask for the Queen album," says floor manager Robin Sumpton. "We don't sell Queen," he says pointedly (Pride, 1997, p. 77).

A similar sense of distinction is at work in the above description of Rhythm Records as that used by Barry at Championship Vinyl. The managers contrast several respected artists who stop by the store to look over "hand-picked" vinyl and customers looking for music from specific sub genres (e.g. big beat) with those people just looking for Queen, an example of mainstream and thus uninformed taste. Such customers are not only singled out in this description as not being 'in the know', they are also out of luck in terms of finding what they want. What is interesting is that Queen is obviously a popular request, so one would think that carrying it would serve the store's economic interests. What is clear, however, is that doing so would come at a cost of some of Rhythm Records' symbolic capital as a place where discriminating fans (those who listen to Luke Vibert) are set apart from those who want to hear "Under Pressure".

*'So where can I get some Queen already?'*

The preceding two examples suggest that there is the perception, at the very least among those who work in the stores, of a significant distinction between the 'sort' of record shop that carries 'mainstream' popular music and the sort that carries 'alternative'

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<sup>41</sup> Luke Vibert, a renowned British DJ. Cypress Hill, an influential U.S. rap group.

popular music. These terms are obviously problematic, especially in a musical terrain where so-called 'alternative bands' often find themselves on national top ten lists. To remedy this problem of definition, at least one person has suggested that the term alternative music be understood simply as music that is not featured in mainstream media outlets (Kruse, 1993, p. 35). This definition may also steer us in the right direction in terms of looking at distinctions between stores, where stores such as Rhythm Records can be viewed as alternative outlets to large chains such as HMV or MusicWorld, as well as 'big box' stores such as FutureShop, BestBuy, Wal-Mart, etc. which carry music along with other non-music related products. I am suggesting therefore that in the interests of this paper, the easiest line to draw is between stores which are part of a national chain (e.g. HMV, BestBuy) and locally-based independents (e.g. Organized Sound, Birdman Sound).

To explore this division further, I will briefly examine five aspects of record stores: music catalogue, content of the store, genre divisions, demonstrations of staff opinion, and promotion of local events and artists within the space of the store. I will suggest that based on these five aspects, we can conclude not only that there is a significant difference between chain and independent stores, but that independent stores promote this distinction, emphasizing the legitimacy of their catalogues as opposed to the mainstream, and providing informal avenues for acquiring approved taste. I would further suggest that each of these five aspects has cultural capital implications for shoppers, with independent stores requiring far greater shared and approved knowledge. However, it is also in the communicative practices with which this cultural capital is acquired, shared and demonstrated that shoppers are transformed from merely consumers

into participants within a local scene. Like Carey's ritual view of communication, rather than just being receivers of information, the consumers and the store owners are participants in a scene in which certain values are tested and affirmed.<sup>42</sup>

### Catalogues: Niche vs. Breadth

*"If I had the money, I could carry ten times this much stock and still not carry anything shitty."*<sup>43</sup>

In many ways, the approach to catalogue seems the most important distinction between independent and chain record stores. Independents, with some exceptions such as San Francisco-based Amoeba Records which has tens of thousands of square feet of space (Garrity, 2002), have much more limited budgets and thus must be extremely selective in what records they bring into the store. For the independent, the effect of this limited budget is often a move towards a niche specialty, one which corresponds to the owner's taste and expertise, and in which the independent can build a more thorough catalogue than that offered by the chain store. For example, one independent record store owner suggested that one of the differences between his store and the nearby HMV is that Compact Music makes a point to carry every single Bob Dylan release.<sup>44</sup> While new superstores do carry great depth of catalogue (Straw, 1997a), it seems that typical chain stores have difficulty competing with the depth offered by the niche-focused indies

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<sup>42</sup> The following sections are based on a mix of personal observation and interviews supplemented by information from journal and *Billboard* articles. The majority of personal observation stems from visits to two HMVs and two Music Worlds, and the independent record stores Organized Sound, Birdman Sound and Compact Music all of which are located in Ottawa. Because Ottawa has no music superstores of the kind described by Straw in his paper "Organized Disorder", this paper concerns itself primarily with chain stores. This paper would benefit hugely from an extensive survey of independent and chain stores as well as an in-depth ethnographic study of record store clerks and customer interactions of the sort done by Gary Alan Fine in his work on restaurants. An ethnographic study would be particularly useful in making conclusions about 'hipness' as a form of cultural capital.

<sup>43</sup> Jon Westhaver, owner of Birdman Sound, interview.

<sup>44</sup> Ryan Kerr, manager of Compact Music, interview.

(Garrity, 2002). Birdman Sound for example carries predominantly 60s garage, 70s rock, and modern offshoots of these genres, and mostly all on vinyl record. A cursory comparison of featured releases suggests that the overlap between Birdman's catalogue and all the chain stores in Ottawa is less than 25%. This specialized selection is one of the factors identified by *Billboard* recently as a key factor in independent record stores' survival (Borzillo, 1996). Contrast this to shoppers at Wal-Mart of whom only 13% said selection was most important in choosing where to buy music (Don, 1998).

One of the important effects of the selection and specialization arising out of the small-budgets of independents is that every record in the catalogue carries with it some form of aesthetic endorsement. For example, when I asked Jon Westhaver if he ever had to put a sticker on a record saying "Don't buy" he scoffed and said, "I don't order crappy music."<sup>45</sup> The catalogue of the independent store is thus highly reflective of the cultural capital and related preferences of the staff. Of course, these preferences must ultimately translate into sales. While this may result in a couple of more mainstream catalogue choices (for example Organized Sound carrying The Strokes<sup>46</sup>) it would be rare for a catalogue to conflict wholesale with the staff's tastes or the owners'. Indeed, these stores develop loyal clientele because a community of shoppers is served by the staff's specific taste preferences.

While I have little concrete data indicating how chain stores develop their catalogues, an incident in 1996 where Wal-Mart decided not to re-stock a Goo Goo Dolls album suggests that personal aesthetic preferences have little to do with the process of

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<sup>45</sup> One of Westhaver's marketing tactics is to place hand-written stickers on most albums in the store with some kind of personal endorsement. The text of one of these opens this case study.

<sup>46</sup> A band which would appeal to some of the store's shoppers, but which is generally looked down upon by this consumer group because the band received what is perceived as an unwarranted amount of hype.

large scale ordering practices. In this case, the Goo Goo Dolls claimed that Wal-Mart was not re-ordering its album because of customer complaints over the album cover, while Wal-Mart claimed that it was not re-ordering the album because of poor sales: the record has sold 51,000 copies at Wal-Mart stores (Reese, 1996). Whatever the reason, either cover art or sales record, the staff of Wal-Mart's aesthetic judgement of the music had nothing to do with the decision.

The limited and niche-oriented nature of the catalogues of independent stores immediately poses a dilemma for the uninitiated shopper. How does one know whether the store carries what one is looking for? How does one know whether what one is looking for corresponds with the aesthetic preferences of the staff which are highly-invested within the catalogue? Clearly a measure of cultural capital is required to 'read' the signs of the store, one of which is the catalogue itself, and conclude whether one's preferences are aligned with those of the store.

#### The (Un)Changing Content of Record Stores: Vinyl vs. DVDs

One of the first things that one notices on walking into Birdman Sound is that the store is almost completely filled with vinyl records. Vinyl records cover the walls and fill the majority of shelf space in the store. A smaller section of compact discs is located behind the front desk and at the back of the store. Next door, Organized Sound devotes approximately half the store to vinyl, and features a turntable listening station along with its CD listening station. Rotate This in Toronto does the same. In the article "Unable to Compete with Chains, Indies Offer Alternatives" (Borzillo, 1996), several of the featured U.S.-based independent stores not only carry vinyl but also sell used record players, and needles for record players. Back in Ottawa, Compact Music, while carrying few vinyl

records, positions them up front in what I would suggest is an attempt at a symbolic demonstration of independent credibility.<sup>47</sup>

Of the two HMVs and two MusicWorlds I visited in Ottawa, none carried vinyl records, but all carried a large selection of DVDs. In both of the MusicWorlds the amount of shelf space devoted to DVD movies was as large if not larger than that allocated to music titles. While music still seemed to be the major focus of HMV, about 30% of each store was devoted to DVD titles. It would seem that in a market of declining music sales, DVDs offer a way to recapture revenue. Indeed, recently Straw (2003) noted that by 2001 “full-service music stores, like those in the HMV chain, were shifting emphasis to DVDs or other high-margin items [such as video games] which seemed to generate higher levels of excitement for customers” (p. 216). In the U.K., HMV has reported explosive DVD and video game sales against “solid” sales in their music titles (Ferguson, 2002).

I would suggest that the difference between vinyl records and DVDs is significant for two reasons. The first is that the consumption of vinyl records is an exclusive type of practice. As compact discs replaced vinyl records as the dominant medium of music consumption, the practice of tracking down LPs (as described in the quote about Rhythm Records) became increasingly associated with DJs, ‘serious’ collectors, and those attempting to maintain a link to musical tradition and notions of ‘authenticity’. Only specific labels, typically independent labels carried by independent stores, continue to release vinyl LPs and the technology for playing vinyl is scarce (explaining why some independent stores carry old record players and accessories).

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<sup>47</sup> While Birdman Sound and Organized Sound target the specific indie and punk rock scenes in Ottawa, Compact Music appeals to a much broader audience and this is reflected in a catalogue which features many ‘mainstream’ releases. Compact Music is thus seen as less ‘credible’ than Birdman or Organized Sound by certain consumers.

Kruse writes that “undoubtedly part of vinyl’s appeal to independent companies . . . is that the major labels’ effort to make the format obsolete makes whatever appears on vinyl. . . more oppositional to the mainstream. The format caters to a rather narrow audience: those who still own, or are willing to purchase, the obsolete turntable technology” (Kruse, 1995, p. 192). Indeed, today you can buy a DVD player at Wal-Mart for less than the price of a decent record needle.

The second reason why I believe the difference between vinyl and DVD content is significant is because the introduction of large numbers of film titles within the music store provides the alienated record buyer described in Straw’s “Organized Disorder” with a non-threatening avenue for returning to the music store. Entering the chain music store no longer requires any knowledge about bands, or understanding of the “distinct norms and values in matters of clothing, hair styles, attitudes, and modes of behaviour” related to various musical subcultures (Roe quoted in Lewis, 1987, p. 201). One need only have the cultural capital required to visit the local Blockbuster.

#### Genre Rules: Organizing the Music

Frith (1996) argues that labeling by genre “lies, in practice, at the heart of pop value judgements” (p. 75). Each genre comes with certain expectations against which music slotted into that category is judged. Musical genres are thus both a way of locating music that fits one’s taste and understanding what set of aesthetic standards, and what music traditions, should be applied when judging or discussing the music. I would argue that understanding what a genre ‘means’ is therefore a type of cultural capital that enables listeners to approach conversations about the music. For example, the genre of ‘lo-fi’ or ‘indie-rock’ carries with it not only a set of musical references (Guided by Voices,

Sebadoh, Beat Happening, etc.<sup>48</sup>) which are frequently alluded to in conversations about the genre, but also a set of aesthetic references; for example, that records which sound poorly recorded are not discussed in terms of poor recording but in terms of ‘authenticity’.<sup>49</sup> In general, it would seem that the more specific the genre, the more specific the cultural knowledge required to engage with the music.

Viewed in this way, the independent store and its niche-oriented catalogue demand more cultural capital than that required to negotiate the broad genres of the chain store. For example, rather than the genres “Electronica” and “World Music” found in HMV, Organized Sound splits the selections located in those genres into finer divisions such as “Electronic Beats”, “Brazilian Beats”, “Jazzy Beats”, “Afro Beats”, as well as specific sections for “North Africa”, “Middle East”, “Latin America”, etc. Further contrasting this distinction is HMV’s practice of taking its top 75 titles, which include selections from all genres (from rock to country to rap), and cross-listing them within their most-browsed “Rock and Pop” genre, in a sense suggesting there is but one genre that matters: popular.<sup>50</sup> The willingness of the chain stores to disregard genre divisions is followed through in both Music World and HMV’s practice of giving prominent front-of-store placement to thematic racks such as “New Releases”, “Gift Ideas”, and “Chart Toppers” which feature releases from a wide array of genres. Indeed, one of the most popular ways of organizing music in these chain stores is based on price. Whole racks or

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<sup>48</sup> Bands associated with the ‘lo-fi’ sounds.

<sup>49</sup> The “return to musical authenticity” of the “lo-fi” genre is discussed by Tony Grajeda in his article “The ‘Feminization’ of Rock” (2003).

<sup>50</sup> Information from an interview with the manager at one HMV location. This manager also indicated that head office, which dictates in which genre each selection is placed, frequently listed titles in genres that he felt were incorrect.

sections of wall space are devoted to releases that are all "\$12.99", with no genre distinctions made between the releases.

Will Straw has written that the "endless subdivision of tastes and genres" found in the music superstore "suggests an endless set of knowledges not yet mastered." However, Straw also points out that the "archival inclusiveness" of the superstore creates a "flattened sense of equivalency" and therefore comforts at the same time it intimidates (1997a, p. 62). In contrast, I would argue that the independent store, with its narrow catalogue and niche-specific divisions of genre, creates a daunting musical map when compared with either the superstore's inclusiveness or chain store's pluralism.

#### Staff Picks: Opine or Die

DASHBOARD CONFSSIONAL - Hands Down 7"  
(Vagrant) \$7.99. Yeah, fucking great. I really, REALLY  
want to hear your emo-laden drivl right now you whiny  
Potsy. [More sarcastic insults] . . . This generation's  
Richard Marx?

(Scratch Email List, #357, Nov, 23, 2003).

Scratch Records, an independent Vancouver record store and distribution company, frequently sends out newsletters alerting buyers (record stores and individuals) to new releases available for order. Each release comes with a short description, which, for the reasons I stated in the section on Catalogues, are typically positive. However, as the above review for the band Dashboard Confessional attests, they can also be quite critical.<sup>51</sup> The reason I include this is to highlight the highly opinionated nature of the space in an independent store. Whether stickers on the records in Birdman Sound (which carry recommendations such as "Geez what a smolderin' hot follow-up to one of my

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<sup>51</sup> Scratch may be carrying this release because of a distribution arrangement with the label Vagrant, or because it knows many stores it distributes to will want to carry it.

favorite albums of last year”), or the “Recent Favourites” board at Organized Sound, which lists recent picks by each staff member, a common feature of independent stores is the endorsement (and occasionally dismissal) of the titles they carry. Indeed, for these stores the expression of opinion and guidance of their customers is a key feature of their business. After asking Linus Booth, one of the owners of Organized Sound, whether shoppers frequently ask him for recommendations, he replied “If we didn’t offer people some guidance picking records, we’d go out of business.” When I asked the same question of an employee at HMV the response was quite different: “Not really. The only time people ever ask me to recommend something is when they need help finding something up tempo to work out to.” Indeed, in contrast to the independent store, the chain stores I visited were almost completely free of any trace of opinion, the exception being stickers containing laudatory reviews placed on CDs by the record companies themselves. When I asked two MusicWorld employees if they ever thought of having a “Staff Picks” section they replied “We wanted to, but that idea got shot down.” This is in line with Kruse’s finding (2003) that in contrast to independent stores, chain stores’ employees “have less input into the artists who are promoted via in-store displays” (p. 95).

I would suggest that the foregrounding of opinion found in the independents fulfills a dual function in terms of cultural capital: it makes the shopper aware that aesthetic judgements are a matter of importance in the location (there is definitely a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ opinion) and thus may prove intimidating in terms of a fear of making ‘incorrect’ judgements that may lead to exclusion. More positively, these opinions serve to educate the shoppers as to what is valued and how it is valued, and thus

provide some of the tools necessary for participation in that environment. A second review from the Scratch email newsletter demonstrates this educational function:

BUZZCOCKS-Singles Going Steady - 180g LP \$20.50  
 Finally available, punk pop genius. If you think Never Mind the Bollocks and London Calling are punk masterpieces, then there's no question that you have to buy Singles Going Steady. Manchester's legendary Buzzcocks were one of the best, most influential punk bands. Pete Shelley & co. combined full-blast guitars, ear-catching melodies and social/romantic contents. This essential collection originally released in 1979 contains their masterpiece "Ever Fallen In Love?". Original artwork, gatefold sleeve, 180 gram vinyl.

(Scratch Email List, #357, Nov, 23, 2003).

Such a review provides the reader a way of choosing a record which he or she knows will be valued in that location. Furthermore, the review gives the reader information and language with which to discuss the record with others. It features the name of the main songwriter of the band (Pete Shelley), describes the sound ("full-blast guitars"), the album's most important 'single' ("Ever Fallen in Love?"), and gives a more familiar musical context in which the album can be understood by the reader (alongside The Sex Pistol's "Never Mind the Bollocks" and the Clash's "London Calling"). In other words, having received this email, the reader may now enter the store more confident about what to choose and how to enter into a discussion with staff or other shoppers about that choice.

#### The Presence of the Local: An Invitation to Participate?

The final distinction I want to make between chain and independent record stores is what I am calling the presence of the local, by which I simply mean evidence of the local music scene within the store. In Nick Hornby's *High-Fidelity* (1995) this presence is felt in what I think are three of the most uplifting moments of the novel. The first is the

successful performance of the songwriter Marie LaSalle within the store space. The second is the response to Barry's poster in the store advertising himself as a singer, which eventually leads to his long-wished for participation in a band. And the third is Rob's return to deejaying at a local club at the end of the novel. In each of these events, Rob and Barry's tendency towards taste-based exclusionism seems balanced by the pleasure of participating in a community of those enjoying music. While it would be naïve to suggest that the cultural capital inherent in shopping in independent shops does not also apply to participation in local scenes, I think the fact that the independent stores serve as a site for making connections (through posters, flyers and conversations within the store) between listeners and musicians, and thus fostering participation at a local level, is important.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, music scholars Charles Keil and Stephen Feld (1994) seem to suggest that participation—"grooving" to use their term— provides an important balance to the intellectualization of music: "Participation is crucial. That's why it's really important to me that you're a trombone player [Keil talking to Feld], participating in making those grooves, too, and keeping that in a creative tension with your scholarship" (p. 30).

None of the chain music stores I visited contained posters or flyers for local music events and few employees could point me in the direction of a local band in their catalogue. In contrast, every single independent record store I visited contained extensive evidence of the local, whether posters for local events and/or high visibility of local

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<sup>52</sup> This is a point also made by Sara Cohen (1997), however, she problematizes the important social aspects of independent stores in Liverpool with the claim that they are staffed almost exclusively by men.

releases.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore every staff member at the three independent music stores I visited is involved in the Ottawa music scene, whether as a DJ, rock promoter, band member, college radio host, organizer of the Ottawa BluesFest, or some combination of the above.

However, as Sara Cohen has shown in her article “Men Making A Scene”, that independent record stores are highly important to participation in the independent music scenes does not mean they are not also exclusionary. While Cohen focuses on the overwhelming male domination of the Liverpool scene (and one could draw some similarities to Ottawa in this respect), I would argue that individuals of both sexes often find themselves placed symbolically outside the record store in terms of the cultural knowledge at their disposal.<sup>54</sup> This results in both “direct exclusion” as seen in the case of the shopper looking for Stevie Wonder in *High Fidelity*, but is likely most often a case of “self-elimination”<sup>55</sup> as record shoppers who feel they do not have the requisite cultural knowledge opt for the more pluralistic, less-genre specific, and therefore less threatening space of the chain store (or the FutureShop).

### ***Conclusion***

Kruse (2003) writes that “mall chain stores . . . do not serve the same function [as social spaces in independent music scenes]: they are generally located farther away from other sites of scene activity, their employees are often not participants in local music

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<sup>53</sup> Ryan Kerr from Compact Music even proudly pointed to the fact that Ottawa musician Jim Bryson’s recent release was their fourth top seller over the last month. A large Jim Bryson poster is featured behind the cash register.

<sup>54</sup> That women must overcome gender-based exclusion of the kind described by Cohen (1997) obviously creates a significant extra hurdle in obtaining cultural capital.

<sup>55</sup> I am using “direct exclusion” and “self-elimination” in the way described by Michèle Lamont and Annette Lareau (1998).

scenes, and the employees also have less input into artists who are promoted via in-store displays” (p. 95). In this case study, I have expanded on Kruse’s argument by introducing a number of ways in which independent stores differ from chain stores in terms of the degree of cultural capital required to participate within the social space of the store. Independent record stores, especially those affiliated with a specific scene (the indie scene, the punk scene, the house scene, etc.), require far more exclusive cultural capital than that found in mall chain stores and big box stores. This capital is exclusive because the channels through which it is circulated are ‘restricted’ to the stores themselves, conversations between participants within the scene, and specific types of publications; it is not circulated through the music video channels or mainstream publications which might be the first place the uninitiated consumer would turn for information. The exclusivity of the store, however, creates a space in which the performance of approved taste also functions as a way of affirming belonging to a specific scene; these scenes, on the other hand, depend on these spaces as a way of legitimizing their creative production. The placement of local music alongside that of revered, ‘canonized’ music is a way of validating the music of, and participation in, the local scene.

I want to end this case study with three related questions to which I do not presently have answers. First, what is it that makes someone interested in participating in a particular scene? Second, how acquirable are the codes, the cultural capital, of a scene to the would be participant? Third, how open are scenes to those who may not actually possess these codes?

## Chapter 5

### On the Rink: Straddling Scene and Community at the Exclaim! Cup

*“The Exclaim! Cup is trying to reach beyond scenes and bring a community together. I suppose it’s actually creating its own new scene of hockey playing artists.”<sup>56</sup>*

*“So while we may think the main goal of playing hockey is to get exercise, I think that it’s much more about spending time with your friends, or the extended community.”<sup>57</sup>*

Once a month I deliver a free national monthly music magazine called *Exclaim!* to 150 different outlets—record shops, bars, music stores, cafes, etc.—around the Ottawa area. I got the job because of connections rather than any particular delivery skills. In fact, I wasn’t even looking for a job. The magazine contacted a friend of mine who runs a small independent record label in Ottawa to see if he knew anyone who might be interested in doing the route and he got in touch with me. Apparently, the previous delivery person—also a local Ottawa musician—no longer had the time or inclination to lug around papers in sub-zero temperatures. My contact, who had worked for the magazine in the past selling advertising space, explained to me what the job consisted of and about what it paid, and I thought it sounded like a pretty good deal for a day’s work. And that was it. The head of distribution in Toronto—who played in a Toronto band I had seen a few times—sent me the route information and I was off. A few months later, I ended up staying on the couch of one of the writers of the magazine while in Montreal to play a show with my band. My host had also played in a band which I had seen in the past, and now worked for the CBC radio show *Brave New Waves*. He was also one of the authors of *Have Not Been the Same: The CanRock Renaissance*. Not only did it seem like

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<sup>56</sup> Tom Goodwin, Exclaim! manager, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Chris Page, musician, interview.

all of the people who worked for *Exclaim!* were involved in the Canadian music scene, but usually these connections ran several layers deep and combined both the actual practice of playing music with other aspects of the industry such as writing about music, releasing music, working at a music venue, or at the far less respectable end of the spectrum—delivering music magazines.

It's a long day of avoiding parking tickets and lugging hundreds of pounds of dirty newsprint, but the *Exclaim!* route has come to be a monthly ritual to which I almost look forward. Stopping in at the local record stores and bars gives me a chance to catch up on what's going on around town: who's playing where; what local band is doing well or releasing a new album; who has quit from or joined what band; what 'not-to-be-missed' show I missed; who got reviewed in 'pitchforkmedia',<sup>58</sup> etc. Sometimes people comment about last month's issue or the content of the new issue: 'Did you see the review of so and so?' Or, 'Can you believe that so and so is on the cover?' People take an interest in these topics to a varying degree (and indeed, many of the conversations on the route have nothing to do with music) but there is one type of content that tends to guarantee discussion, and that is if a local band has had a recording reviewed in the magazine. While it may come as a surprise to many who live in Ottawa, there are, by a rough estimate gained by looking at local listings and Internet message boards, several hundred bands performing and recording original music within the city. A small number of these bands will gain local recognition past their own circle of friends, fewer still will go on to achieve limited regional or national followings, and a tiny fraction will go on to gain the kind of success needed to be able to make a living playing music full time—it is

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<sup>58</sup> U.S.-based [www.pitchforkmedia.com](http://www.pitchforkmedia.com) has become the North American barometer of what is happening in indie music (see Thomas, 2005).

hardly worth speculating about the number who achieve the fame and fortune associated with 'rock stardom'.<sup>59</sup>

It is these latter categories of 'professional' musician which most assume would be the focus of a music magazine. Yet in *Exclaim!*, many of the bands reviewed fall into the first and second categories (those making music in an amateur or semi-professional capacity). This is not to say that the writers at *Exclaim!* review anything that comes across their desks, but that there is the recognition that music on par with that produced by major labels is being made in cities and towns large and small across Canada, most often without major label backing and usually without the expectation of mass audiences or significant financial gain. However, as one of the founders of *Exclaim!* has said, coverage is initiated not because a band is on an independent label, but because the people who work at the magazine are excited about the music: "*Exclaim!* is dedicated to covering what its contributors are passionate about. Fundamentally, it's about passion not independence. You just happen to find a lot of passion in independence."<sup>60</sup> That means that one can open the magazine and find laudatory reviews for a band like Guelph's The Barmitzvah Brothers, a group of teenagers who hold concerts in their singer's family's thrift store. Or The Junior Boys, an electronic duo from Hamilton who, after recording a self-financed album and posting MP3s on the Internet, were discovered and signed by one of the U.K.'s top indie labels. Indeed, it is not unusual for me to pick up an issue of the magazine and be overwhelmed not only by the number of Canadian bands I've never heard of who are releasing records on their own, or on independent labels, but also the

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<sup>59</sup> Alanis is the only 'big' star that really comes to mind and I suspect she was never really part of the local scene. Kathleen Edwards, who did get her start playing in the local venues of Ottawa, has recently done very well. Obviously there is Paul Anka.

<sup>60</sup> Tom Goodwin, manager *Exclaim!*, interview.

number of genres and sub-genres that are flourishing beneath the surface of commercial radio and MuchMusic coverage.

I would suggest that in many ways, *Exclaim!* mirrors the independent record stores described in the previous case study in terms of how certain types of specific cultural capital are valued and in its inclusion of smaller locally-known independent bands within the same spaces as more renowned acts. But unlike the independent store which is rooted in a specific locality, *Exclaim!* is distributed across the country, circulating—in much the same way that national CBC music programs such as *Brave New Waves* or *CBC Radio 3* do—knowledge about labels, bands and styles of music and legitimizing lesser-known bands through national exposure alongside other already ‘canonized’ music. Through a combination of feature articles, reviews, news, letters, a monthly national campus radio chart, and, most recently, advice for independent musicians on how to do such things as distribute music, book tours, reach campus radio, etc., *Exclaim!* constructs/affirms what currently constitutes a certain legitimate music culture and provides information about how to participate within that environment whether as a fan, musician or small label. *Exclaim!* coverage may thus be read both as a contributing factor *to* and result *of* the strong interlocal ties between music scenes—interlocal ties which Kruse (2003) has identified are characteristic of indie scenes. Indeed, Fenster (1995) has argued that such national ‘zines’ must “respect the local in order to retain legitimacy” (p. 87). Furthermore, *Exclaim!* coverage can be seen as evidence of Straw’s assertion (1991) that alternative-music culture (and its associated practices of connoisseurship) is not tied to one locality, but has reproduced itself across various cosmopolitan centres.

Rather than analyze *Exclaim!* and its impact on the Canadian music scene in any great detail (although such an analysis is certainly warranted), I simply want to suggest that the picture created by the magazine of a 'legitimate' music culture which spans the 'amateur' and 'professional' spectrum and places small, often little known Canadian music within a national and international context is one worthy of further study. The beginning of this case study, which described how I came to deliver *Exclaim!*, is provided as an example of the many low-level and decidedly unglamorous positions which are tied to musical activity and which are frequently part of the interlocal network of 'scenes'. It is also meant to demonstrate the overlap between musical, social, and economic spaces. One of the best examples of the interconnections between various Canadian musical scenes and the space that is created when musical and non-musical practice overlap, is the annual *Exclaim! Cup* organized by the magazine. Furthermore, this event might also provide an unexpected example of the type of 'network'<sup>61</sup> which Fenster (1995) has argued "enable[s] the 'local' to survive through its affective and institutional connections to other local scenes" (p. 87). A brief analysis of this event follows.

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<sup>61</sup> Fenster (1995) was discussing networks of distributors, stores, computer networks, etc. in his argument.

### *The Exclaim! Cup*<sup>62</sup>

One of the most striking examples of both the interconnectedness of local music scenes and the extent to which participation in music extends beyond the usual sites of record store, concert hall and recording studio, is *The Exclaim! Cup*. An annual tournament organized by the national music magazine, *The Exclaim! Cup* brings together musicians and others involved in local Canadian music and the arts for a weekend of hockey, rock 'n' roll, and socializing (some combination of networking and partying).

The following paragraph is a description of the tournament from the *Exclaim!* web site:

The Exclaim! Cup arose from a challenge match between the Toronto Morningstars and the Hamilton Sonic Unyon Pond Squad in 1999.<sup>63</sup> Each Easter Weekend since, artist-oriented co-ed teams from across Canada gather in Toronto to compete for the Exclaim! Cup Hockey Summit. All the teams provide live music at a club during the evenings and at the arena during the games. Barrels of food are collected for the Daily Food Bank at the arenas (Exclaim! Cup Official Program, 2005, p. 3).

By 2004 the *Exclaim! Cup* had grown to 24 teams from across Canada, each team comprising musicians, label owners, record or music store employees, campus radio programmers, other members of local scenes, and associated friends. The intimate connection between the tournament and local music scenes can be seen in the various team names which bear the titles and insignia of record labels (e.g. **Ninja Tune** Montreal **Wicked**, Guelph **Three Gut** Feelings), music stores (Ottawa **Songbird** Millionaires,

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<sup>62</sup> I am aware that tying a hockey tournament to Canadian music practice risks wading into essentialist territory and the claiming of this type of music as more Canadian than another. This is decidedly not my intention. Rather this is just one example (out of many) of the types of social connections associated with musical activity at a 'community' level. It should be noted, however, that the loose affiliation of a hockey tournament with a certain 'indie' or 'alternative' scene, and the predominantly (although not-exclusively) white, male makeup of the teams is not a coincidence. Indeed, one of the interesting aspects of Matthew Stahl's "To Hell with Heteronomy" (2003) is the recognition of members of the indie scene he studied, that despite their attempts to form an inclusive 'community,' their membership persisted in consisting of 'whitish, middle class-ish, urbanites' (p. 161). Certainly hockey shares a certain 'whitish, middle class-ness' with indie rock.

<sup>63</sup> Dale Morningstar is a long-time Toronto musician and studio owner. Sonic Unyon is an independent record label, indie distributor and store based in Hamilton.

Toronto **Capsule Music**), recording studios (**Gas Station Islanders**); even cheeky tributes to local music icons (The Winnipeg Souldiers' logo is a large graphic of Burton Cummings' face).

While it is not mandatory that each player be involved in his or her music scene, it is perhaps surprising how few aren't. Indeed, in a telling example of the spectrum of 'professionalism' which seems to characterize Canadian independent music, one may have on the ice at any one time musicians doing quite well for themselves (such as Juno-winner Sam Roberts or Tyler Stewart, drummer for the Barenaked Ladies) and musicians who continue to work part-time or full-time jobs to support their musical endeavours. However, no matter what level of success a player has received in the music industry (or even if the player is not formally involved in music), each participant is included within the tournament as part of what is, for that weekend at least, a group of people highly invested in Canadian music, the majority operating at the small-scale independent level.

The organizers of the tournament require a bio to be written for each player. The guidelines for bios are as follows:

We need to know each player's name, number and position. Each bio should be 20 to 80 words. Please steer clear of inside jokes. Also, include any involvement the player has or has had in the Arts community (e.g. plays bass in the Terminal Sunglasses etc...). If the player isn't involved in the Arts community, please do not make a fictitious association up. It's more of a priority for us to have a player with a healthy attitude than a musician who has a lousy attitude ([www. exclaimhockey.ca](http://www.exclaimhockey.ca)).

The bios which result are a curious mix of hockey bravado (or lack thereof) and music involvements delivered in the self-deprecating style common to this particular scene.

A sampling of 2005 Exclaim! Cup Bios

**Ottawa Songbird Millionaires: #4 Chris Page (Defence)**

Page is just another Ottawa music type who releases records for the understated and hip-the-capital, Kelp Records. His third solo record is called *Decide to Stay and Swim* and he is currently working on a new rock outfit called Camp Radio with defence partner Draves. The Millionaires love to whine about his slap shot.

**Ottawa Songbird Millionaires: #7 Dave Draves (Defence)**

Known affectionately as Dutchie, Draves's pre-game locker room speeches are legendary and it is he, who at the 2004 Cup, came up with the team's ironic rallying cry, "Let's start winning!" Draves has toured extensively with Julie Doiron and his own Fishtales. Lately he's been behind the board for many stellar records coming out of his Ottawa studio Little Bullhorn.

**Montreal Ninja Tune Wicked: #1 Jeff Waye (Defence)**

Co-owner of Ninja Tune Records, and coach/organiser of this here team. Is fairly confident that the rigorous training regime of the last six months will result in some wins, or at the very least not a repeat of the three (count 'em, three) too many men on the ice penalties of last year.

**Montreal Ninja Tune Wicked: #93.5 Patti Schmidt (Defence)**

Host and producer of CBC's *Brave New Waves*. Sure you're probably bigger than she is, but she's still going to stop you getting by her, and you'll be lying on the ice thinking "crap, how come I don't have a girlfriend who knows more about music than I do and can stop an odd-man rush."

**Guelph Three Gut Feelings: #1 Nathan Lawr (Defence)**

Nathan keeps time for folks like FemBots and Sea Snakes and is the boss of his own band the Minotaurs. Hockey is like a life blood that flows through his veins; he aspires to play defence like a mother bear protecting her cubs. Let that be a warning to offensive players everywhere.

**Toronto Morningstars: #19 Tom Goodwin (Forward/Defence)**

Tom used to keep all of his used hockey tape in a ball, but he threw it in the trash a few years ago along with his shot, fitness and balance. However, his balance has returned somewhat after growing sideburns. Tom works at Exclaim! the day after every full moon and is a new regular at the Good Times Hockey League of the Arts karaoke.

**Toronto Capsule: #1 Peter Kesper (Goalie)**

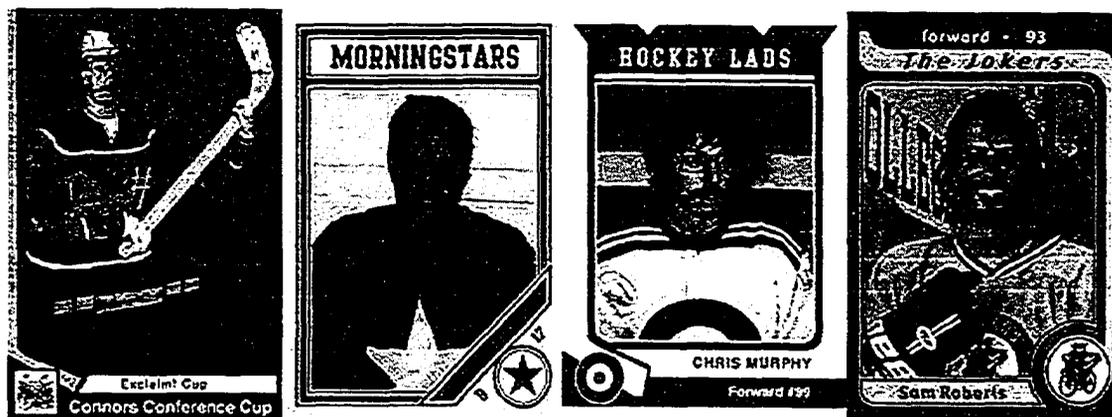
Owner of Capsule Music, plays guitar with N.Q. Arbuckle. Peter has been known to weep openly after a hard-fought victory or when discussing the Kesper Cup. He often yells "you suck" during a game, but we're pretty sure he's just talking to himself.

(Exclaim! Cup Official Program, 2005. See Appendix)

In this small sampling of player bios we find traces of a Canadian music scene which is highly active, yet for the most part has been little examined. In some ways such musical activity may resist the traditional ways of studying music in Canada because preferred types of information for analysis (such as Nielsen SoundScan data for example) are often not readily accessible or accurate for all bands, and would often not be all that impressive in any case.<sup>64</sup> What we do not have in record sales data, however, is perhaps somewhat made up for in the web of connections described in these profiles. Here we have the specific names of studios, labels, stores, magazines, and bands around which music scenes in each locality cohere and which are often identified as symbolic of the scene on a national level. Indeed taken as a whole, I would argue that a larger Canadian independent rock scene begins to emerge. However, what is more interesting than what scene can be constructed out such information, is the sense that what is at work is not a depiction of a certain scene for an external audience (what happens for example when *Spin* magazine does a feature on the Montreal scene) but an affirmation of a certain shared way of life—and one's role within it—in which musical participation acts as a catalyst for a wide variety of social relations.

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<sup>64</sup> Many independent record stores do not submit to SoundScan and often a majority of record sales of small independent bands are made 'off the stage' at shows. Recognizing this lack of data, SoundScan has recently partnered with Indie Pool to solicit sales data from independent Canadian bands (see [www.indiepool.com/soundscan](http://www.indiepool.com/soundscan)).



Cards from the Exclaim! Cup featuring the trophy and some of the better known players: Dave Bidini, Chris Murphy and Sam Roberts (Bidini 2004).

Of course, this is not a scene free of hierarchy; there are players, such as the ones pictured above (Dave Bidini of the Rheostatics, Chris Murphy of Sloan, and Sam Roberts) who arguably possess more symbolic capital than others (based on success without ‘selling out’, artistic reputation, recognition, etc.). It is notable, however, that while the tournament is a fantastic opportunity for making connections, individual careers are de-emphasized at the organizational level. This is perhaps best expressed in the evening performances in which each team is required to perform a set of music/entertainment. While in another environment (if tied to an industry showcase such as North by Northeast for example) these could easily become opportunities for the presentation of the original work of the team’s most esteemed musicians, these performances are collaborative, sloppy, and typically involve the performance of ironic cover songs rather than original material. Jeff Wayne of Montreal’s Ninja Tune label and hockey team says:

They make you perform so you can’t fill your team with wringers. Last year, Amon Tobin did a remix of the Hockey Night in Canada theme, and we performed a true Quebec classic, "The Safety Dance" with the lyrics reworked into "Hockey Pants" (C., 2004).

Notice here that “wringers” refers to hockey rather than musical skills. This practice of deemphasizing musical hierarchies, and emphasizing unprofessional, comedic performances, in some ways mirrors Stahl’s (2003) description of the practices associated with the “Talent Show” begun by members of the San Francisco indie scene. One of the purposes of this activity was to valorize those who were usually audience members and in so doing reinforce the ‘community’ aspect of the scene. To ensure the “Talent Show” did not just turn into another indie concert, a ‘rule’ of the group was that the musicians, if they performed, were not allowed to rely on their ‘customary skills’ (p. 154). While the performances at the *Exclaim! Cup* are not explicitly intended to flatten the hierarchy of performer/audience, I would argue that their collaborative and comedic characteristics may serve to even hierarchies within and between scenes. A team such as the Ottawa Songbirds, which has relatively few musicians with significant symbolic capital, may thus win the ‘talent’ portion of the tournament against a team with more ‘star power’.

Like the talent show described by Stahl, the performances of the Hockey Tournament could be said to affirm a certain belief in ‘community.’ This belief or commitment to a ‘community’ ideal is further reinforced through the “Community Initiatives” part of the *Exclaim! Cup*. The 2005 event had two main initiatives, a food bank drive for the Daily Bread Food Bank and a collection of used instruments and other music-related items for the ArtsCan Circle. Non-charity events were also organized, such as a Free Family Skate and The *Exclaim! Cup Minor Hockey Challenge* in which teams of children related to *Exclaim! Cup* players faced off against teams from the local Toronto Parkdale Flames Minor Hockey Association. I would argue that such activities are examples of the kind of social spaces which are opened up in the intersection of

musical scenes and other aspects of the community. The participation of teams from across Canada—each perhaps associated with an ‘indie’ or ‘alternative’ culture, but nevertheless representing differences in musical style, attitude, and age—likewise creates an overlap of social relationships and musical networks—an overlap in which specific symbolic and cultural capital may be mediated by participation in something which is, in some ways, larger than any one musical scene.

It must be recognized, however, that this characterization of a community which is larger than the ‘scene’ is also somewhat of an idealization. Indeed, as Straw’s thesis of a relatively homogenized alternative-music culture suggests, this overlapping of scenes brings with it cultural capital requirements for full participation. For example, Wayes’ description of the Ninja Tune performance highlights the extent to which a certain degree of cultural capital is a factor in the various communication practices of the tournament. The Ninja Tune Team’s performance of “The Safety Dance”—a classic dance track from Montreal’s Men Without Hats—becomes a playful affirmation of the Montreal scene, and can perhaps be read with a hint of irony considering the ‘arty’ disposition of the current crop of Montreal bands such as Godspeed You Black Emperor and the Arcade Fire. The performances are but one example of how a certain tradition of Canadian musical culture is canonized in the tournament. For example, in 2004, the three skill levels at the tournament were named the Stompin’ Division, the Tom Division, and the Connors Division (after Canadian country musician Stompin’ Tom Connors). In the coverage of the tournament, such a culture is also advanced. Dave Bidini in an article on the 2004 *Exclaim! Cup* writes:

The Morningstars tied our semi-final game on a pass from Andy Ford (formerly of Nothing in Particular) to Paul

Steenheusin (professor of New Music Composition at the University of Alberta) to Johnny Sinclair (bassist with Universal Honey, formerly of Pursuit of Happiness). Chris Murphy of Sloan and Don Kerr of the Ron Sexsmith band played live in the arena's concourse. Before them, a chamber group performed quasi-classical versions of Rush songs while the Winnipeg Wheatfield Soldiers took to the ice in yellow jerseys with Burton Cumming's face on them (Bidini 2004).

Such rituals and their recounting bear the marks of an approved, if unofficial, Canadian music culture. Like other versions of 'legitimate' culture, this version carries with it a negation; that culture which is not legitimate, and accordingly, what audiences may be excluded. However, I would also argue that this belief in a 'legitimate' culture and its associated cultural capital (made up of approved musical influences, history and attitude) is a critical component in the persistence of a vibrant independent music scene. A second component is made up of the formal and informal communication practices (e.g. the record reviews in *Exclaim!* and personal narratives of involvement with music) through which this cultural capital is continually reinvested. Indeed, in the communication practices surrounding such a tournament there is ample evidence of Carey's assertion that communication "invites our participation on the basis of our assuming . . . social roles within it" (1988, p. 21) and that communication is fundamentally a "collective activity . . . [and] the product of that activity—meaning—establishes a common and shared world" (Carey, 1997, p. 68). In activities such as the writing and reading of player bios, collective music performances, playing of hockey games, and talking about the event itself, a shared world—one larger than an individual scene—is established. Events such as the *Exclaim! Cup* are interesting, therefore, in that they affirm a 'legitimate' culture and certain shared knowledge, and yet they may also

provide 'openings' for those outside the scene to participate. Such opportunities should be celebrated.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion: It Came From Canada

In this thesis, I have argued that more attention should be paid to the study of local popular music in Canada. I think there are two good reasons for this. The first follows Ruth Finnegan's findings in *The Hidden Musicians*, in which she argues that the abundant practices of local music making form social pathways which are important to the maintenance of society at a local and, by extension, national level. Studying local music is thus one important aspect of finding out what people actually do with music and the role it plays in many Canadians' day-to-day social relationships. The second reason is that some 'local' music does not remain local at all, but facilitated by communication networks (press, downloading, word of mouth, etc.) becomes part of national and international scenes.<sup>65</sup> In other words, local, independently-produced music not only helps create, change and maintain social structures at the local level, but it can extend (given the right circumstances) across geography finding other niche audiences, and occasionally even mass audiences. When this occurs, such music might also be said to have a larger cultural effect, affirming the identification of participants within scenes, and stimulating additional creative and entrepreneurial activity.

In the last three decades the genre I have roughly described as 'indie' music has provided some remarkable examples of the production of local (by which I basically mean music not produced in major studios), low-budget music which has affirmed local participation in music while also connecting with larger movements. Many of these examples have originated in the U.S. For example, Michael Azerrad's *This Band Could*

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<sup>65</sup> This is as true (if not more so) for genres like reggae or bhangra as it is for 'indie' music. See for example, "Pop music's new beat is the sound of Surrey" (Armstrong, 2005).

*Be Your Life: Stories of the American Underground 1981-1991* (2001) describes a number of such bands or movements: Husker Du and The Replacements from Minneapolis, Minnesota; The Beat Happening and K Records from Olympia, Washington; and Black Flag, The Minutemen and SST Records from Southern California, to name just a few. Shank's *Dissonant Identities* (1994) describes a similar movement in Austin, Texas, and the emergence of Daniel Johnston and the South by Southwest festival. And of course, there is Nirvana (whose first album *Bleach* reportedly cost \$600 to record) and the Seattle scene. In each of these movements one finds local bands and entrepreneurs who, with a much smaller investment of economic capital than that typically associated with the production of popular recordings, created music with which local audiences and subsequently wider audiences identified. While none of the aforementioned acts (with the exception of Nirvana) were ever major commercial successes, their music and way of doing 'business' continues to influence fans and other musicians.

It might come as a surprise to many, but a similar tradition exists in Canada. Much of it has been recently documented in *Have Not Been the Same: The CanRock Renaissance* (2001), which details the activity of influential (if not often commercially successful) Canadian bands and scenes between 1985 and 1995. Bands such as The Nils and Deja Voodoo from Montreal; Sloan, Hardship Post and Thrush Hermit from Halifax; D.O.A., Slow and Cub from Vancouver; Change of Heart, the Rheostatics and the Cowboy Junkies from Toronto; the Inbreds and Tragically Hip from Kingston. Interestingly, and this is something which I think is mirrored by participation in the *Exclaim! Cup*, this list of bands is more stylistically diverse and less decidedly

‘underground’ or exclusive in their appeal (with a couple of exceptions such as The Nils or Slow) than those described by Azerrad. Indeed, a future line of inquiry might be whether Canada’s smaller market stimulates connections between bands and labels which might not occur given larger niche markets. What I want to emphasize, however, is that there is a tradition of local, independent, entrepreneurial music activity in Canada, one which, like the scenes in the U.S., has also fostered interlocal networks of musicians, labels, and fans. Certainly larger independent Canadian record labels such as Nettwerk and Attic belong to this tradition, however, I want to suggest that we may learn something quite different by looking at these labels before they achieved a measure of commercial success, or at current indie labels such as Three Gut or Mint Records which continue to release recordings which circulate primarily within a ‘restricted field of production’.

The authors of *Have Not Been the Same* (Barclay, Schneider and Jack) point out, for example, that one of the most important early initiatives of the ‘CanRock Renaissance’ was a compilation album called *It Came From Canada* released in 1985 by the artist-run label Og Records. The authors write: “Og Records, based in Montreal, instigated a national network of bands through the *It Came From Canada* compilations, and created a DIY business model for the flood of indie labels that would flourish in the early 90s” (2001, p. 60). Gerard Van Herk and Tony Dewald had launched Og Records to release albums by their band Deja Voodoo. After the record release for their first 7” recording was attended by delegates of the National Campus/Community Radio Association which was meeting in Montreal at the time (a lucky coincidence), Herk and Dewald found themselves with enough connections to book a cross-Canada tour in 1983.

Many of the bands which appeared on the *It Came From Canada* compilations had played with Deja Voodoo on that tour. According to James Booth, member of band The Ten Commandments and a long time producer at stations such as CFNY and MuchMusic:

It [the compilation] made all the bands feel like we were part of this community, and that we were all on the same level – even through some of the bands were a bit better known, like Shadowy Men and The Gruesomes. It created a focus and a profile for a lot of the bands that got on there. Being on that record gave you a certain amount of credibility, so they were incredible things (Barclay et al., 2001, p. 62)

Such combinations of local music-making, bare bones entrepreneurial activity, networks such as campus and public radio, local independent record stores and venues, and the interest/participation of small, niche audiences are what drives this type of activity. I would argue that the pay off, socially and culturally, of movements like these is significant. One might argue, for example, that the success of today's crop of Canadian indie acts—from Broken Social Scene to the Arcade Fire to the New Pornographers<sup>66</sup>—is a direct result of the type of tradition established by labels such as Og Records and bands such as Deja Voodoo. Indeed, Barclay, Jack and Schneider make much this point in the conclusion to *Have Not Been the Same*:

The artistic course of CanRock has been irreversibly altered thanks to everyone mentioned in the preceding pages. The next generations now have a truly diverse and proud cultural legacy to maintain, and meanwhile younger genres like hip-hop must now fight many of the same battles CanRock did in 1985 (p. 677).

Their closing line “Isn't it amazing what you can accomplish, when you don't let the nation stand in your way?” (p. 677) is a defiant challenge to what they see as the

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<sup>66</sup> Canadian independent bands who have recently been celebrated at home and abroad.

incapacitating belief that, shadowed by the cultural output of United States, we cannot produce anything interesting or original ourselves.

I would argue that understanding Canadian music at the local, national and international level thus requires further study of these small networks of musicians, labels, related infrastructures (record stores, venues, campus radio stations) and audiences, and how these relatively niche-oriented scenes (which Kruse has described as sharing much with Bourdieu's "restricted field of production") interact and integrate with other social formations such as the communities in which they exist, scenes from other localities/genres, and the 'commercial' music industry ("the field of large scale production"). Following Kruse, I have argued that Bourdieu's theories of distinction and cultural capital may be useful in analyzing how these scenes construct themselves as 'different' and maintain this difference in an ever-changing music market. I have also suggested that it is in the sharing and acquisition of cultural capital, that the audience member or consumer becomes an active participant in these scenes. As such, James Carey's notion of a ritual view of communication may offer us insight into how the communication of this cultural capital becomes a way of "wording our world together" and of affirming our place in that world. The case studies of the independent record store and the *Exclaim! Hockey* tournament were meant to demonstrate both what type of musical practices we might study at the local level and how these theories might be applied to them. I think these case studies also suggest the many gaps that exist in such a theorization, not to mention the inadequacy of terms such as 'indie', 'scene', and 'community'.

Obviously, this thesis provides only a small hint at the breadth of musical practices and areas that might be studied. The following provide three possible areas for future research.

### *Ethnographic Study*

Many of the practices addressed in this thesis would benefit from a more thorough ethnographic study. An interesting model for such a study is provided in Gary Alan Fine's research on restaurant workers (Fine, 1992; Fine, 1995). Fine's observational study of how aesthetic decisions are formulated in different types of restaurants is especially interesting in terms of how it might be mapped onto the practices of the sharing of musical taste in a variety of environments. Comparing the interaction of employees and consumers in different independent record stores (e.g. Birdman Sound and Compact Music) and then between independent record stores and mall chain or superstores might provide insights into various sociological/demographic differences and into how dispositions are changed or affirmed in the process of record buying.

Finnegan, Cohen, and Shank have all provided ethnographic data about the actual practices involved in playing rock 'n' roll at the local level. The many personal narratives in Kruse's *Site and Sound* (2003) provide additional ethnographic information. It would be interesting to undertake a similar ethnographic study of a group of independent musicians in Canada and compare the findings to those of these studies. My hunch is that many of the practices of Canadian musicians would coincide with those of musicians in similar genres elsewhere. Indeed, such a study might suggest that there are greater

differences between genres of music than between nations; this might make any commonalities found between genres of Canadian music all the more interesting.

***The 'Pitchfork Effect': Pitchforkmedia + Filesharing Networks***

Another area for further research, and one in which I am personally interested, is studying how musical taste is shared, affirmed and changed in online communication. I have been particularly interested in the role of pitchforkmedia (an online magazine catering to the indie scene) both in building the careers of local Canadian artists outside (and inside of Canada) and in the recent editorial shift towards an appreciation for commercial pop music. I would argue that the combination of a respected and popular online 'tastemaker' such as pitchforkmedia with the ability to sample music freely through peer-2-peer filesharing networks is an especially potent mix in the widespread distribution of independent music, and in general shifts of taste within specific audiences or scenes.

The potency of this combination can be seen in a phenomenon observed by a group of my friends who download music using the SoulSeek filesharing program—something we have jokingly called 'The Pitchfork Effect.' The Pitchfork Effect refers to the common occurrence of finding other SoulSeek users with almost identical catalogues of albums in their shared folders; catalogues which are also strikingly similar to the albums which have garnered favourable reviews on pitchforkmedia. This has translated into the practice of alerting one another to positive reviews with emails such as: 'Watch SoulSeek for a barrage of Death from Above this morning.' This would indicate that pitchforkmedia had given the band Death from Above a good review and that within a

short period of time there will be dozens of users lining up to download the album if you happen have it in your shared folder. The eventual outcome of such patterns seems to be that many users end up with similar catalogues of pitchfork-approved albums.

Interestingly, this frenzy of downloading seems to do little to dilute retail demand. As one of the staff members of Organized Sound told me, “Yeah, it’s pretty apparent when something has been well-reviewed on Pitchfork. In one afternoon, you’ll have six or seven people wandering in asking for some totally obscure band.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the power of pitchforkmedia to push little known indie bands has attracted the interest of the traditional media. For example, the rise of Montreal-based band The Arcade Fire has been partially attributed to pitchforkmedia’s early and glowing review of the band’s 2004 album *Funeral*,<sup>68</sup> an album which they went on to name Best Album of 2004. After the initial review, the album’s first pressing of 10,000 copies sold out in two weeks—no small feat for an indie band.

The Arcade Fire example is illustrative of pitchforkmedia’s ability to push unknown bands to a niche audience in geographically-dispersed localities—and Canadian bands on small indie labels have been some of the main beneficiaries of the site’s influence. Paired with the ability to easily download the music, such coverage drives small Canadian bands with little distribution to audiences in the United States and around the world. And following in the Canadian tradition of celebrating that which is first celebrated abroad, such reviews are also driving Canadian audiences to these bands.

There are a many interesting lines of inquiry that could be pursued in regards to ‘The Pitchfork Effect’. One is examining how pitchforkmedia confirms Straw’s argument

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Andy Kant.

<sup>68</sup> See for example . Time Canada April 4, 2005

(1991) that alternative-music culture can now be said to cohere around forms of connoisseurship, and that the tastes embraced by the audience for ‘alternative’ music can be said to be fairly consistent from one locality to another. Another possible area for research is to analyze shifting taste patterns on the site and how they correspond to online and local consumption. I recently presented a paper titled “Pop Goes Distinction?: Justin Timberlake and Indie Music Scenes”<sup>69</sup> which examines the recent inclusion of previously derided pop music within indie music scenes. I argue that such a shift in taste can be observed both in the coverage on pitchforkmedia, in the downloading patterns of users with ‘indie’ tastes, and in local music practices within the indie scene in Ottawa. Furthermore, I argue that such a shift in taste should not be read as a move towards greater inclusiveness, but rather as a new strategy of distinction within the indie scene—a scene which is becoming more visible in the mainstream (and hence losing its symbolic capital). A final line of inquiry might be to examine to what extent the manner in which pitchforkmedia covers music provides a way for aspirants to the indie scene to acquire the cultural capital necessary to participate in the scene. The online nature of the magazine means that those interested but perhaps not yet comfortable with the codes of the scene may find out what type of music is appreciated and the approved way of talking about this music without any threat of exclusion or need to self-exclude.

This approach to studying a technology such as Internet downloading rejects the “rigid dichotomies” which have characterized the downloading debate thus far, and which Paul Théberge (2001) argues have characterized historical debates about the introduction of new technology in music. This approach would follow Théberge’s argument that technology “must be understood as both an enabling and a constraining

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<sup>69</sup> Frost Free: The Culture of Cool. Graduate conference at Western, February 17th and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

factor that acts in complex and contradictory ways in music production, distribution and consumption” (p. 24).

### *Policy Implications*

One need only review the feedback area of *Exclaim!* magazine following an article on a cultural policy initiative such as FACTOR to appreciate the divergent views within the music ‘community’ on the usefulness of such programs. The majority of musicians and labels likely feel such programs are vital to the continuation of a Canadian music industry, however, there are musicians who see such programs as encouraging mediocrity. Without a doubt, a program such as FACTOR (which provides loans for demo recordings and full-length albums, domestic and international tour grants, and grants for promotional tools such as web sites) helps many deserving artists reach bigger audiences, while also subsidizing some artists who would not likely find audiences on their own. It is also certain that without such a program, much locally-based independent music would continue to be made (few bands I know would give up making music because they have not received a FACTOR grant) although not receiving a grant can certainly delay or prevent the making of an album.<sup>70</sup>

An analysis of the government-related music policy initiatives is obviously outside the scope of this thesis, however, I would suggest that the study of local indie scenes may suggest some questions about policy which might be worth further study. The first is to what extent do such programs, if they are intended to support Canadian independent music, ignore the type of activity described in this thesis? In the introduction

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<sup>70</sup> Juno-nominated indie musician Jim Guthrie recently remarked that if he did not get the FACTOR grant he was applying for that he would not be able to make his upcoming album (CBC’s *The Current*, March 31 2005)

I argued that the recent Music Entrepreneurship Program seems to do just this, cutting off qualification for label support at 25,000 units sold, a number far above that which many of the labels in this thesis might attain. Such cut-offs trivialize the cultural contributions (not to mention economic contributions of their owners) of smaller labels while rewarding larger labels which should arguably be self-sufficient. If such programs are designed to aide independent music, it would seem logical that 'micro-indies' should be included.

A second question might address the infrastructure that helps Canadian acts reach audiences at home and abroad. The role of CBC programs such as *Brave New Waves* and *Nightlines* in helping bands such as The Rheostatics and King Cobb Steelie reach national audiences in the 1980s and 90s (Barclay et. al., 2001) seems underreported, as does the importance of campus radio. Commercial radio generally provides little to no coverage of the types of bands discussed in this thesis, and Canadian Content regulations, which are typically exceeded by public and community radio, have arguably no effect on helping these bands reach a Canadian audience.<sup>71</sup> Much like Og Records' compilation *It Came From Canada*, it might be argued that certain CBC programs and campus radio stations are a way for bands to gain credibility and exposure and a way for audiences and bands to imagine a Canadian music scene. Campus radio on the other hand is integral in giving local bands their first exposure and in creating the sense of a local music community, tied together by radio deejays, bands and local labels. More research is

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<sup>71</sup> While the CRTC has encouraged commercial radio broadcasters to play 'new Canadian artists' and these broadcasters have suggested initiatives for supporting such artists (CRTC, 1998), the music of the Canadian 'indie' music scene remains almost exclusively broadcast by campus and public radio. Berland (1990) has critiqued the role of radio formats in reducing the amount of local content (including local music) carried by commercial radio stations.

needed to ascertain to what extent the CBC and campus radio contribute to the activity of local music scenes in Canada.

Another policy question raised by this thesis is the extent to which the government might help small Canadian bands reach audiences outside of Canada. With these bands appealing to niche audiences, the ability to establish a following outside the relatively small Canadian market is often the difference in a band being able to pursue music full-time. The FACTOR international tour grant provides support in this regard, however, the 2005 South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas also marks a high point for the involvement of the Canadian Trade Commission in sponsoring showcases and hosting events where music industry types can find out more about signing Canadian acts (Barr, 2005). Participation in the 2005 festival has been stimulated by the impressive showings of bands such as Death From Above 1979, the Dears, and Constantines (all of which signed international licensing deals following previous performances) and the general 'buzz' which currently surrounds Canadian indie music. While this type of support is no doubt positive, one wonders whether it will continue when the shine eventually comes off of the Canadian indie scene. Indeed, the bands which created this buzz in the first place did so without the current level of support. A less glamorous, but perhaps equally constructive, policy initiative might be to help Canadian bands easily and affordably obtain Visas to play legally in the United States. Furthermore, I have already argued that one of the most effective ways for audiences outside of Canada to find out about Canadian bands is from the combination of online press such as pitchforkmedia, web logs, online word of mouth, and downloading. Any policy which attempts to restrict

internet downloading must take into account the effect such restrictions might have on the ability of independent musicians to reach audiences.

A final policy consideration is one raised in the article “In and Around Canadian Music” (2000), in which Straw presents two models of national music history: one in which “music works to nourish and transform collective, public discourse, creating or renewing forms of language and tradition”; and one in which “music is primarily a token of social and economic exchange – the pretext for small-scale commerce, regularized social interaction and new connections between actors in a wide range of industries and institutions” (p. 181). There are different policy implications depending on the model to which one subscribes. The first implies what we typically think of from cultural policy: artist grants, subsidies and awards shows, for example. But in the second “more elusive” model, Straw suggests much different concerns: “the regulation of alcohol consumption and nightclub closing hours, neighbourhood gentrification, work-study schemes and student loans” (p. 182). These two policy models are likely not mutually exclusive, however, it is definitely the policies implied by the first over which we spend the most time arguing. This is a shame, for as Straw points out, it is the less grandiose concerns such as ‘student loans’ which may be the most pressing, which may allow a local musician to finance a recording if the FACTOR grant falls through. Likewise, in local scenes which tend to cohere around specific live venues and practice spaces, (Kruse, 2003), noise bylaws or regulations on rent increases can be one of the biggest impediments to a scene’s vibrancy. The closing of Vancouver’s Sugar Refinery (a club which played host to many local and out of town bands and was a meeting point for musicians, artists, and others involved in the Vancouver music scene) in 2004 is just such

an example. The following letter posted on the Sugar Refinery's web site makes such implications clear:

Dear Friends,

As you may or may not have heard we are closing at the end of December. Due to restrictions imposed on us by our liquor license and fire inspector we can not do what we need to do in order to survive financially and artistically. We believe we have played an important role in the cultural development of Vancouver and wish to continue doing so someplace where we will be legally licensed. We are asking the City of Vancouver to use their resources to help us relocate to an appropriate location with an appropriate license. . . .

([www.sugarrefinery.com](http://www.sugarrefinery.com))

### *In Closing*

The lead up to the 2005 Junos was characterized by a great deal of murmuring about how the award that really ‘mattered’ in 2005 would be handed out on the night preceding the televised broadcast. The award in question was that for Alternative Album of the Year in which The Arcade Fire, Stars, A.C. Newman, Jim Guthrie and Feist (the eventual winner) were nominated. These artists had a number of things in common. All of their albums had been put out by small independent labels (although not necessarily Canadian labels); all would be considered part of the Canadian ‘indie’ scene in terms of attitude and audience; but most importantly, all had achieved considerable international recognition, indeed far more than that of the most of the bands appearing in the higher profile Juno categories. Carl Wilson’s *Globe & Mail* article “Pour Some Arcade Fire on the Junos” added a public voice to this murmuring, which was followed by a CBC Radio 1 feature on *The Current* about the Canadian indie scene (Wodskou, 2005), and most recently a cover story on the Canadian edition of Time magazine (Blue & Porter, 2005). Indeed, such was the apparent value of being ‘in the know’ about the newly publicized indie scene, that Jake Gold (Canadian Idol judge) when asked before the Juno broadcast about what award he was most excited, said that the awards he was really interested in had happened the night before (Brunton, 2005).

There are many things to celebrate about such developments. Perhaps most exciting is that the current activity of small, entrepreneurial, creatively adventurous scenes in Canada suggests that the fear that local independent music in small markets like Canada’s might inevitably disappear (Rutten, 1991) has not been realized. Rather, the success of bands such as The Arcade Fire and Feist potentially provides a new template

for Canadian cultural production; one which makes use of limited resources and thus can be financially successful by pursuing niche audiences at home and abroad. Should major success come, all the better, but a mass audience is neither expected nor required. Such an approach will not likely satisfy the goals of major labels, but in some sense, this may be the only appropriate response to the current fragmentation of the market. What is critical for such a 'grassroots' or 'low-budget' approach to continue to flourish, however, is a better understanding of the local music scenes in which this music is produced and the various pathways in which this music finds audiences. The appearance of the Honourable Liza Frulla, Minister of Canadian Heritage at this year's Junos—an appearance at which she first lauded Canada's independent musicians and then pledged to crack down on Internet downloading (Brunton, 2005), the very technology which allowed many of those musicians to reach wider audiences—demonstrates the importance of studying these scenes more thoroughly. In this thesis, I have argued that such a study demands more than the usual consideration of sales figures and market share. This thesis has attempted to provide a small contribution to how one might go about such a study.

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#### Personal Interviews

- Jon Bartlett, Ottawa musician and label owner, February 2005
- Linus Booth, owner, Organized Sound, interview November 2003
- Tom Goodwin, distribution manager, Exclaim Magazine, February 2005
- Andy Kant, manager, Organized Sound, interview February 2005
- Ryan Kerr, manager, Compact Music, interview November 2003
- Grant Lawrence, Vancouver musician and producer of CBC Radio 3, February 2005
- Chris Page, Ottawa musician, February 2005
- Jon Westhaver, owner, Birdman Sound, interview November 2003

Appendix: Sample Pages from the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Exclaim! Cup Official Program

## Guelph Three Gut Feelings



Back Row: John Hill, Bob Millar, Steve "Sully" O'Sullivan, Dave Withers. Middle Row: Heather Pollock, Adam Elliott, Keran Grant, Robbie Roth, Brydon Gills. Front Row: Vishi Khanna, Tanya Hobbs, Shawn Cantelon, Angie Gammage, Kim Temple

This year marks the Feelings' third go-round at the Exclaim! Cup Hockey Summit. Avid participants in the Good Times Hockey League of the Arts, Guelph recently achieved a long-held team goal by finishing out the regular season ahead of arch rivals the Parkdale Hockey Lads. Reigning Hootenanny champs, this rag-tag bunch of musicians and artists can be counted on to bring more than their share of fun, spirit and enthusiasm to whatever event they partake in. Incidentally, the team is named for influential Guelph-spawned indie label Three Gut Records, home to such critically-acclaimed acts as Gentleman Reg, Jim Guthrie and the Constantines.



**#1 NATHAN LAWR (Defence)**  
Nathan keeps time for folks like FernBots and Sea Snakes and is the boss of his own band the Minotaur. Hockey is like a life blood that flows through his veins; he aspires to play defence like a mother bear protecting her cubs.

**#4 JOHN HALL (Forward)**  
After not being able to find his stick for 18 years, John finally decided to buy a new one. His specialties include confusing his opponents by getting the puck caught in his skates where even they cannot find it. Currently, he is working on following coach Miller's advice of "squeeze the stick!"

**#7 SHAWN CANTELON (Forward)**  
Two years of playing in the Exclaim! Hockey Association of the Arts without so much as a doodle was making Shawn feel a little guilty. So he joined a band. He now plays bass for the Randwines, and anyone who witnesses their shows will attest to the fact that he is a better hockey player than musician.

**#8 TANYA HOBBS (Forward)**  
Tanya used to play hockey a lot as a kid but, somehow or other, left the game behind. Rust? What rust? It didn't take long for Hobbs to be a real team leader on and off the ice and she continues to be one of Three Gut's brightest all-stars. A great songwriter to boot, Tanya currently fronts melodic punkers Calyx, who call Guelph home.

**#9 STEVE "SULLY" O'SULLIVAN (Forward)**  
Sully is the man behind the not-so-famous fiery and destructive Von Sulstrus shows. A three-year veteran of the Feelings franchise, Sully has become a perennial fan favourite for his knack of putting the biscuit in the basket. No wait...oops. That's Vishi. Sorry.

**#10 BOB MILLAR (Defence)**  
The game of hockey teaches us all about what and who we are. Bob is currently examining the connection between the strengths and weaknesses that exist in our daily lives and what he believes is a far more realistic view of self: the person you are on skates.

**#11 ANGIE GAMMAGE (Defence)**  
Angie hopes that her third appearance at the Summit results in her first appearance on the scoreboard. Known for playing D like her life depends on it and her "Who me? I didn't even touch him!" routine, Angie's off-ice training program includes studying the art of

**#14 DAVE WITHERS (Forward)**  
Dave is a pillar of the Guelph music scene, having played in Black Cabbage and Billy But and is now working on a record of his own. He also has the uncanny ability to turn most conversations on to matters of bodily function.

**#16 ROBBIE ROTH (Forward)**  
Robbie was born with a hockey stick in his hands; his delivery was painful, but his destiny clear. He was put on this planet to play the puck and to rabidly sniff out victory for his Three Gut team-mates. He is a popular Libra who wears his jersey with pride and his heart on his sleeve. So please do not slash him on the arm.

**#21 KIM TEMPLE (Forward)**  
Kim's a hard-hitting drummer who likes to keep it in the pocket. You may remember her from such performances as "Dances with Suck" at last year's Hootenanny, Pat Benetar at the 2004 GTHLA fundraiser and Petra Kriss in the all-girl KISS cover-band Smooch. Be nice or she'll show you the ol' hi-hat, give you four on the floor and shuffle you off to Buffalo.

**#22 VISH KHANNA (Forward)**  
Vish's band the Neutron Stars played shows with the Rheostatics in Toronto in 2003. Before a show, a fellow came by looking for Dave Bidini. Martin Tielli looked at him quizzically before politely saying, "Dave? Dave's not here, man." As the gentleman left, Vish looked on in awe. Tielli shrugged at Vish as if to say, "Who the heck was that?" "Holy," Vish blurted out. "That was hockey analyst Paul Romanuk." And that is one of Vish's favourite hockey rock stories. Vish also plays in Guelph's the Nathan Coles Outfit, Calyx, Dry Tickle, and fronts the Cryin' Out Loud Choir.

**#29 STEVE SEITZ (Goalie)**  
Hailing from the booming metropolis of Burlington, Steve is in his first full season with the "Green Machine." Editor and producer in the sports TV field, he recently finished his basement.

**#34 BRYDON GILLISS (Defence)**  
Wearing white skates to games as a youth, Brydon was shunned from hockey. He turned to designing fun fur skate covers for local figure skating events. He returned to the game, at 35, to impress his newborn child and keep him from following the dainty path he'd gone down. He now pretends to be a slow-footed, hard-nosed defenseman in the mould of Lanny Bohonos and Aki Berg while trying not to cry when he gets hit on the nose.

**#111 ADAM ELLIOTSON (Forward)**  
Previously Three Gut's coach, Adam hopped the boards to join the team on the ice this year, giving the Feelings the physical presence they were sorely lacking. He can still be heard beliving his favourite words of wisdom, "Chip it out, Three Gut!" and "Let's play our game, Three Gut!" which magically led Guelph to their first tie in last year's Summit.

**INFINITY JONATHAN KNOWLES (Aquarius)**  
Jon is the co-founder of the Carleton Cup, aka "The Ultimate Canadian Triathlon" (skate/run/drink), the event that donated the Dominion Award to this tournament. Originally with the Dominion Award winning Parkdale Hockey Lads, he joined the Feelings early last year and they, coincidentally, went on to win the Dominion Award at the 2004 E! Cup. He bristles when

## Victoria Humiliation



Back Row: Nicos Fassler, Joseph Cook, Mark Simmons, Graham Duncan, Geoff McPeak, Joel Walmsley. Middle Row: Teige Reid, Paul Shrimpton, Matt Wood, Alice Wood-Sanagan, Duncan Bunclark, Curt Whitworth. Front Row: Mark Sanagan, Scott Gray, Chris Sanagan, Stephen Dublin, Luke Moretti (Pat Prezenti, Mike Thompson)

Five-year veterans of the Exclaim! Cup Hockey Summit, the Humiliation has gradually become a talented hockey club to watch out for. The team made its first playoff appearance at last year's tournament and finished the Good Times Hockey League of the Arts 2004/05 regular season second overall in Zed Division standings. Eager to see its tenacious brand of fire-wagon hockey through to this year's Summit finals, the Humiliation's Hootenanny set routinely scores among the weekend's most inspired acts as well.



**#1 CHRIS "HOT PISS" SANAGAN (Goalie)**  
After teaching last year's semi-finals, Hot Piss is eager to return to the tournament and demonstrate that the Humiliation were no mere flash in the pan. In this, their fifth year of tournament play, Hot Piss is determined to bring Humiliation to the masses.

**#3 GRAHAM DUNCAN (Defence)**  
Graham is a freelance journalist and Exclaim! delivery guy. Graham is a stay-at-home defenseman but he's going to try to make it out for a few games. When not out of position on the ice he can be found out of position on the fret board of his stand-up bass.

**#7 PAUL MORRIS (Forward)**  
A product of the vaunted Athens Flyers development system, this sportswear entrepreneur quit hockey and rural Ontario in the mid-'80s to pursue punk rock glory. After touring the globe as a member of Sons of Ishmael and M.S.T., Paul converted to the church of April Wine and formed his current band Cousins of the Moose. A stay-at-home guitarist/vocalist, Paul enjoys junior hockey road trips and hates spicy food.

**#9 JOSEPH J. COOK (Forward)**  
A rock'n'roll original, the legendary "Little" Joe Cook is a veteran of Alan Freed's Rock'n'Roll Review, Dick Clark's American Bandstand and Harlem's Apollo Theater. He's scored many big hits and created the falsetto style of singing later to be copied by many, including Frankie Valle. He earns bread as a graphic designer.

**#11 NICOS FASSLER (Forward)**  
They say that justice is blind, and maybe this winger is too. Fassler has patrolled the right (sometimes left) side for the Humiliation since the team's inaugural game and has tallied just four goals and 12 assists over the five years since. Fassler says: "My hope is to match the offensive output of hockey's more famous lawyer-cum-hockey player, Ken Dryden." To that end, Fassler is still seven points shy. Here's to hoping.

**#12 CLINT WHITWORTH (Forward)**  
Although he doesn't seem to be good for more than converting excellent scoring opportunities into breath-taking saves, Clint is honoured to once again wear the triumphant Thumbs Down.

**#13 STEPHEN CRIBBIN (Forward)**  
A master at using his ass in front of the net to gain position, Cribbin manages the Humiliation with equal

in the Year of the Rooster, his playing style is more that of the hungry dog. He earns a living as a pixel pusher.

**#16 SCOTT GRAY (Defence)**  
The Humiliation's secret weapon, Gray now lives in Montreal, where he continues to record and perform as the Sally Fields. He blames errant passes on colour blindness, but admits the insane rage is society's fault.

**#17 LUKE MORETTI (Forward)**  
Using his guitar to both woo the farmer's daughter and set the barn a-blaazin', Luke will run an arpeggio through your defensive coverage in five-four while you are still tuning up.

**#19 DUNCAN BUNCLARK (Forward)**  
Duncan has been described as dazed and confused. Chuck full of inner demons, he has a golf swing like a folding lawn chair. Sometimes he can be found haunting the blue line, wondering why he's there.

**#20 MIKE THOMPSON (Forward)**  
Mike plays his hockey right-handed and his guitar left-handed, which helps explain that confused look on his face. He stopped yapping at refs a while back, after he tried reeling a league game himself. Now he just yells at the zamboni driver.

**#22 MARK SANAGAN (Defence)**  
Mark's been studying Arabic at McGill, and is now addicted to hushy. He is too busy building a garden of earthly delights to send in his own bio.

**#24 PAUL SHRIMPTON (Forward)**  
Paul began his hockey career as a collector of O-Pee-Chee gum and a great spectator of the game from the living room couch. Paul now attempts to play hockey, while spending as much time recording the sounds of blades on chalkboard for the musically under-challenged, Paul is half of Tinkertoy.

**#33 TEIGE REID (Defence)**  
Teige is an Irish-born actor and writer with a tendency to drink himself out of work. He's proud of his Irish heritage but has embraced Canada completely and can often be heard proudly saying that watching the '72 series highlights gives him a greater sense of pride than reading Joyce or listening to the Wolfstones.

**#59 JOEL WALMSLEY (Defence)**  
In the U of T library by day, and in the break-beat chemistry lab by night, Joel Walmsley is a philosophical theoretician on a drum and bass mission, with the blue line wisdom to beat you into submission.

**#67 MARK SIMMONS (Defence)**  
This time last year, Mark was in Australia, staying on Russell Crowe's farm training for his part as Art Lasky, "the Hebrew KO King," in the upcoming Ron Howard film, *Cinderella Man*. Although only appearing in the film for less than two minutes and given just one line in the movie, "Why isn't he sitting down?" this former 2000 Olympian used his skills as a stunt double on the movie, working on the set for much of the summer of 2004.

**#90 MATT WOOD (Forward)**  
Man Wood is pretty good. At turning words and working wood. Shins McBlash bumps and smashes.

# Nightmares

The Nightmares were created in the back of a van during a 2004 cross-Canada rock tour. The Nightmares aim to create an organic team of close friends and family, including no less than four brothers: Sean, Aaron, Craig and Paul Dean (aka the Dean Line). Putting in a solid showing during GTJLA exhibition play this winter, the team is now poised to take its game to the next level at its first-ever Summit appearance.



- #0 JOHN TAMBURRO (Goalie)** A love for shut-outs and a healthy *jeu de virre* are all that needs to be said for John.
- #1 JAMIE MCGUIRE (Goalie)** Jamie is well known as being a Montreal Canadiens fan. He is also a member of the Head Coach of the Canadian National Amputee Hockey Team, is also a lover of music and those who create it. He is also known for having played in the first hockey game Sean Dean ever played in as a youngster back in Richmond Hill.
- #2 DAN SCHWARTZ (Defence)** He is the classiest player the Nightmares have ever iced. Dan splits his time between playing the drums and playing with his daughter.
- #3 STEVE CLARK (Forward)** Steven Clark is a filmmaker by trade, but a right winger at heart. He grew up in Montreal back when the Habs still got some respect, but has since moved to Toronto where he lives with his wife and daughter. His first feature film was called *Looking For Leonard*, and he is currently at work on the next.
- #4 MICHAEL MCGUIRE (Defence)** In 1999, Mike tipped the scales at 217 lbs. Through a dedicated routine of yoga and mental fortitude he re-shaped himself into a lean hockey machine, while re-connecting with his inner Gretzky at the same time. When not dazzling people on the ice, Mike is the producer of Zero Gravity circus.
- #7 ERIC GRAUER (Defence)** Eric is your typical stay-at-home defenseman, born and raised in Montreal, and been living in Toronto for the last eight years. He works in the film and television industry as a key grip. He's an avid guitar player and songwriter, who composed a

song for Montreal's once-famed Bran Van 3000.

- #9 CHRIS MCGUIRE (Forward)** Chris McGuire, enjoys karaoke nights and singing in the shower. In keeping with the family theme the Nightmares try to nurture. Chris is the brother of Goalie Jamie McGuire.
- #10 GAVIN BROWN (Forward)** Gavin was formerly the trapsman for Phleg Camp. Now he's a producer of hit records and highlight reel goals.
- #11 MIKE "BELITZ" BELITSKY (Defence)** Mike was born in Boston, Mass. One part captain plus one part coach equals the drummer for the Sadies.
- #12 CRAIG DEAN (Forward)** Craig is the driving force behind the Dean Machine. His hustle is second to none and is inspirational to all. He is also an avid supporter of the local music scene and putting the puck in the net.
- #13 SEAN "THE BEAR" DEAN (Forward)** Sean was the first marquee signing by the Nightmares. His hockey skills are keen and his musical ability sharp. He's a former member of Phleg Camp, the Atomic 7, and the Makers Mark. Sean is now the bass player for the Sadies.
- #14 AARON DEAN (Forward)** Aaron is the youngest member of the now infamous Dean line. "The Kid" divides his time between studying guitar, playing hockey, and growing taller than his brothers.
- #15 PAUL DEAN (Forward)** Paul is the crowning jewel in the "Team Dean" crown and a masterfully skilled hockey player.
- #16 ANDREW SCOTT (Forward)** A family man and a staunch disciplinarian. Andrew plans to carry some of these attributes to the ice. He comprises one quarter of the band Sloan.
- #17 MIKE SMITH (Defence)** Mike is a core member of the Nightmares. "Smitty" is also known for his fine work in Jughead, the Ubangi Tribesman, Turbo Disturbo and as road manager for the Sadies.
- #47 BRENT RAYNOR (Forward)** Brent is highly accomplished on the wing and on the job as a rock journalist. Brent is an invaluable spoke in the Nightmare wheel.

# Ottawa Songbird Millionaires



Back Row: Ian Lefeuve, Jon Bartlett, Peter von Althen, Jonny Nivelä, Dave Draves, Andrew Geddes. Middle Row: Josh Grace, Chris Page, Rob Hinchley, Ian Giles, Dave Merritt, Jim Bryson. Front Row: Doug MacPherson, Alex Morimer, Craig Anderson, Chris Sheppard, Pat Banister, Blake Jacobs.

Formed in the late 1990s, these veterans of Ottawa's rough-and-tumble Mohawk League will make their sixth straight appearance at this year's Exclaim! Cup Hockey Summit. Although the squad has yet to register a championship, the Millionaires have enjoyed runners-up distinction more times than the modern-day federal Tories. Off the ice, the team enjoys a reputation for its abundance of spirit and creativity, particularly at the Hootenanny. Named for the legendary Renfrew Millionaires, this Songbird Music-sponsored squad originally won the tournament's Team Spirit Award without even knowing there was such a thing.



- #15 JON BARTLETT (Forward)** Bartlett has more energy than the entire Millionaires dressing room. He is the man behind Kelp Records, and the singer/songwriter for Ottawa groups Greenfield Main and Rhume. When he isn't tirelessly championing Kelp artists, he's talking up his latest G-Main record *Burnburners and Heartburners*. Exclaim! Cup is JB's favourite time of the year, so we just lace him up and turn him loose.
- #21 JOSH GRACE (Forward)** Actor-comic-musician and gore-meister, Josh has starred in such roles as Dr. Pretorius in the cult hit *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter* and Bionic Bigfoot in *Hair Knuckles and the Pearl Necklace*. It is unknown whether or not Josh is the man behind the Unknown Wrestler, but Blake's roommate has been seen on stage in many incarnations such as Remi Royale. Josh's cousin is Guy Carbonneau, so now you know, it's in the blood.
- #22 JIM BRYSON (Forward)** Singer/songwriter Bryson loves to talk a big game when it comes his on-ice prowess but it's his pre-game ritual of bubble baths and schlocky TV that keep his team-mates guessing. His latest record is *The North Side Benders*. Bryson has signed on to tour with Kathleen Edwards' band this year and his praying gigs don't interfere with the Millionaires' run at the Cup.
- #25 DAVE MERRITT (Forward)** This London Fog ex-pat once used his "inside Millionaires knowledge" to get his name on the Exclaim! Cup. We were so impressed by his devious mind we gave him a multi-year contract. Merritt is the main force behind the fabulous Ottawa group Golden Seeds.
- #65 IG (Forward)** IG's real name is Ian Gillies, and although miffed at the demise of fave watering hole Chairs on Wheels, IG is looking to have a few cold ones at this year's Cup "where someone else suggests." IG laced up with the squad four years ago when we realised he could skate better than he could coach.
- #85 CHRIS "SHEPPY" SHEPPARD (Forward)** Sheppy can skate like hell, but often isn't sure where he's going. There are great tour stories from his roadie-ing days with Punchbuddy that Bryson loves to share. Chris has been splitting his time between two nation's capitals. The one south of us is where his sweetie is. Although there is limited ice time in DC, Shep sweats he's in shape.
- #98 IAN LEFEUVE (Defence)** Pronounced "La Fever," Lefeuve is the capital city guitar whiz with a bucket of on-ice charm to boot. Ian does his fair share of knob tweaking in his Ottawa studio, although he has kinda moved to the 116. His guitar playing can be heard everywhere, but most prominently with his pop band Starling.
- #104 BLAKE JACOBS (Goalie)** Millionaires back-stopper and circus ringleader, Mr. Jacobs is the keeper with the "extra movers." Blake plays blistering solo rags for two Busby Ottawa rock bands, Nanpower and the Bushwackers, which he now rightfully devotes far more time to than his lame-o hockey team.
- #601 ANDREW GEDDES (Forward)** Geddes is a regular Charity Cathy after the whistle. Once cited for chronic hacking in the East Ottawa Mohawk league, Geddes has toned down his game of late. Unfortunately, his game has also become a bit of a rare sighting as he spends a lot of time on the bench as the team's resident vomiter.

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