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Where there is discord, may we bring harmony

Thatcherism and independent popular music recording in the UK

(1979-1990)

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Abstract

Discourses in the popular music press and trade journals of the post-punk period often portray 'independence' as an ideological end-in-itself (rather than merely an economic necessity) and opposition to corporate major labels is represented in terms of attempts to disrupt prevailing power structures in the music industry. A paradigm is constructed of major vs. indie - of protagonists and antagonists - which is often reinforced in the rhetoric of musicians, music journalists and recording industry representatives. Independence is valourised and a connection is established between the conditions of the production and distribution of music, and its cultural value. Simultaneously, such discourses frequently cite an intrinsic opposition to the policies and political philosophy of the government of Margaret Thatcher, a resistance not only embodied in numerous anti-Thatcher songs and gestures, but in the organisational practices of the independent music sector and the emergence of an ideology of independence which emphasised collectivism and co-operation (as evinced by the formation of the Cartel, a UK-wide distribution network which linked independent labels with independent retailers). Nevertheless, closer observation of the relationship between Thatcherism and popular music culture suggests a more complementary relationship than is generally suggested. For example, The Enterprise Allowance Scheme an initiative instigated to support small businesses and help create the 'enterprise culture' Thatcherism demanded, proved invaluable to numerous start-up record labels during this period including three of the most successful and iconic: Creation, Earache and Warp. Could, therefore, the independent labels set up during this period be regarded as examples of classic Thatcherite entrepreneurship? Or rather can the collectivism of the independent sector be seen as a repudiation of core Thatcherite values?

Similarly, a critical examination of narratives around independence exposes considerable ambiguities around the relationship between independents and majors and the simplistic dichotomy of the 'good' independent and 'bad' major is frequently contested in media discourses. Such narratives also play out with regards to the vital area of distribution, as a variety of independent distributors emerge to challenge the dominancy of major label distributors. Distribution has been historically controlled by the major

labels and the attempt to challenge this dominance can be regarded as the defining feature of the independent popular music recording sector during the punk and post-punk period. Examining this underresearched area of the recording industry will shed significant light on; discourses around independence, the relationship between Thatcherism and independent popular music culture (collectivism vs. entrepreneurship) and attempts to establish a genuine alternative to the economic and industrial power of major labels. The larger implication of the study will be to consider the legacy of the independent popular music recording sector of the post-punk era and the extent to which the model of independent distribution which emerged remains important to independent music production in today's much-changed industry environment.

Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Table of Contents 4

Author's Declaration 7

Acknowledgements 7

Background to the project...8

Part 1: Theory 11

Chapter 1: Introduction 11

1.1. The Ideology of Independence 11

1.2. Structure of the Thesis 17

1.3. 'That's not Indie-sounding': Save Your Love, an independent success story 22

1.4. '500 singles in a carrier bag': Steve Mason and the new professionalism 32

1.5. 'Independent ethics': a storytelling contest 33

Chapter 2: Literature Review.. 39

2.1. 'A bogey which does not exist': Discourses around Thatcherism 40

2.2. 'I'm free to do what I want': Collective Provision vs Individual Freedom 47

2.3 'You can't put a price on freedom': Discourses around independent and major record labels.......... 51

2.4. 'Collective control of entry': Record Industry Distribution 57

Chapter 3: Methodology 63

3.1. Definitions of Key Terms 63

3.2. Research Questions 64

3.3. A qualitative approach: Social construction of reality... 68

3.4. Conducting the research 1: Document analysis 69

3.4.1. New Musical Express 70

3.4.2. Music Week 70

3.4.3. Government policy documents, newspaper interview, parliamentary 72

debates transcripts 72

3.5. Data analysis: Coding the data.. 72

3.6. Conducting the research 2: Interviews 73

3.6.1. Semi-structured Interviews 74

3.6.2. Selection of interviewees 77

3.7. Discourse analysis 78

3.7.1. Storytelling in organisations: Some useful analytical tools 80

3.7.2. It’s time that the tale was told: Researchers as Storytellers 82

3.7.3. Self-narrativisation and affiliation management 87

3.7.4. Venture legitimacy and the paradox of legitimacy 88

3.7.5. Stakeholder Legitimacy and larger voices 89

3.7.6 Us and Them in ideological discourses 90

3.7.7. Some reflections on the methodology 91

3.7.8. Contribution to fields of study 92

Chapter 4: Contingency or Hegemony: What is Thatcherism? 95

4.1. ‘No such thing as collective freedom’: The philosophical roots of Thatcherism 95

4.2 ‘Other men’s freedom’: Hayek and opposition to corporate power 98

Part 2: Thatcherism and the Music Recording Industry 109

Chapter 5: Issues facing the popular music recording industry in the late 70s and 80s 109

5.1. ‘Forever - for free’: Blank tapes 109

5.2. ‘Home taping is killing music’ 112

Chapter 6: Government Policy and Popular Music under Margaret Thatcher 129

6.1. ‘We were children of Thatcher’: The Enterprise Allowance Scheme and the Independent Popular Music Recording Sector 129

Part 3: Discourse and Distribution 139

Chapter 7: ‘I could do whatever I wanted to do and that’s something’: Discourses of independence in Music Week and the New Musical Express in the late 1970s and 1980s 139

7.1. ´Where the money was’: Billy Bragg, The Pastels, and Bourgie Bourgie: Decision-making Processes around Record Deals 142

Chapter 8: ‘I don’t have to sell my soul’: IPC and NME 155

8.1. ‘NME is not a cooperative’: Disputes over advertising in the NME 165

Chapter 9: Record Industry Distribution 175

9.1. The History of Record Industry Distribution from 1877-1976 175

9.1.1. What is record industry distribution? 175

9.1.2. Record industry Distribution before 1950 181

9.1.3. Distribution in the UK 1950-76 184

9.1.4 Barriers to entry: Gala, Top Rank, Triumph 186

9.2. Independent Distribution in the UK from 1976 191

9.2.1. 'Distribution is power': The Cartel 191

9.2.2. 'Separatist ethic': the downfall of Rough Trade Distribution 203

9.2.3. 'Big guys in suits': Pinnacle, Spartan and IDS 206

9.2.4 'Eggs in one basket': Dual and multiple distribution 209

9.2.5 'The acceptable face of Thatcherism': Pinnacle and PWL 219

9.2.6. 'Independent in the true spirit of the word': The independent charts 223

9.2.7. 'A pressure group for the Indies': Attempts to form an independent record label 228

trade organisation 228

Chapter 10: 'Freemarketeer in the sense I was a punk': Contemporary discourses of independence 231

10.1. 'Indie stamps of approval': Taylor Swift and 'folklore' 232

10.2 'Some kid in South London making Grime records': Discourses of power and resistance 233

10.3 'This makes us different': The Guardian and 'autonomy' as a persuasive device 236

10.4. 'Here's where the story ends': final thoughts 237

Appendix 1: 242

Timeline of key events in UK distribution 1978-1991 242

Appendix 2: 244

Typology of recorded music companies 244

Bibliography 247

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Mark A. Baillie

February 2021

Acknowledgements

As is customary, I would like to begin by recognising the support and encouragement provided by a variety of people during this project, support which was appreciated on both a personal and academic level. Firstly, great thanks are due to my original supervisory team of Martin Cloonan (then University of Glasgow) and Kari Kallioniemi (University of Turku) for showing sufficient faith in my ability to involve me in what has been a hugely thought-provoking and challenging project. Their insights and focus, particularly in the early stages of my research, were invaluable, and the feedback I received in both formal and informal contexts was crucial in helping to understand the research process.

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I would also like to thank the Kone foundation of Finland for providing funding in the second year of the project; financial support which proved vital in enabling me to make frequent research trips to the British museum in London to examine their Music Week archives (which would ultimately prove to be the primary source of original data in the thesis) as well as to conduct several interviews with London-based interviewees. Furthermore, the opportunity to present my research at various popular music conferences provided essential critical engagement with academic colleagues.

I would like to thank the interviewees who participated in the research, all of whom gave their time freely and enthusiastically and provided many of the early ‘leads’ in the research process. The interview process was always rewarding and engaging, and the generosity of all participants is much appreciated.

Finally, I’d like to thank my family for their support.

Background to the project

The thesis presented here forms part of a wider research project, undertaken by a group of researchers at the University of Turku, into the relationship between Thatcherism and UK popular culture in the 1980s and beyond. In October 2014, I was invited to participate in this project and sent the brief for proposal funding which was written by Adjunct Professor Kari Kallioniemi who was the head of the project. The proposal included individual research projects which had begun prior to my involvement, which examined various sectors of the UK cultural industries such as television, film and fashion in relation to the policy and political philosophy of the government of Margaret Thatcher. The following research proposals were included in the brief and should provide some idea of the general themes of the project:

- Thatcherism and British Television: Social-Realistic, Comedic and Transatlantic Issues by Rami Mäkhä - which considers ‘how conservative discourses were present in British television of the 1980s and how anti-Thatcher critique, paradoxical interdependence of television’s light entertainment forms and populism/ popular culture reacted to Thatcherism in this context’.
- Two Opposing and Immovable Forces: British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the IRA in Northern Ireland Films by Raita Merivirta which looks at gender issues in the portrayal of Margaret Thatcher in relation to the political situation in Northern Ireland in films both during and after her time as Prime Minister
- Femininity and Fashion in 1980s British Historical Cinema by Anna Möttölä which examines the ‘contradictory cultural ambiguity’ of fashion in films of the new British cinema as well as British Heritage films and seeks to show ‘the cultural ambiguity towards Thatcherism manifested in a manifold group of films’

At the thematic core of the research project was the following question: 'how does the combination of Thatcherism and popular culture uncover a fundamental cultural ambiguity of the 1980s?' The research proposed the analysis of a variety of contemporary source materials (including film, television, pop music and written contemporary texts) to 'provide new perspectives on popular culture's relationship to Thatcherism in the 1980s as well as its continuing legacy'. Although, the original remit allowed a certain flexibility in the direction of travel of my research it seemed from the outset that the themes of paradox and ambiguity, conventional narratives and counter narratives, and contradiction and consensus were intrinsic to the project and that these should be central to my research approach. The prevalence of the idea of paradox and various collocations in the project brief and, indeed, in early discussions around the project suggested the title; *Where there is discord, may we bring harmony*, a quote from St. Francis of Assisi cited by Margaret Thatcher on the steps of 10 Downing Street shortly after her victory in the May 1979 election. Given the tumultuous and often bitterly divisive nature of British politics in the subsequent decade, the quote can be viewed as unintentionally ironic, and the musical connotations of the metaphor seemed apt.

Naturally, there were advantages and disadvantages to carrying out a thesis to a brief (so to speak), albeit the brief was a broad one. The area under research was very familiar to me in both a spatial and temporal sense having grown up in the UK in the 1980s, and it was apparent from the outset that I would be required to challenge my own political and cultural preconceptions in the course of the research. That said, I also realised quite early that I possessed a useful bank of knowledge regarding the Thatcher era, both in terms of its political events and the popular music culture of the period, and that attempting to shed this in the interests of pursuing a notional objectivity would be futile and counterproductive. I also found that many of the assumptions I held about the period *were* challenged in the research process, and often recontextualised or reformulated as a result. As outlined in the methodology chapter, the concept of the reflexive researcher, the researcher's self in the research, the social production of meaning, and subjectivity, are all central to this study.

Ultimately my primary focus became the field of the independent popular music recording industry comprising record labels, distributors, and retailers. The ubiquity of

political and ideological themes in discourses around this sector, in both academic and journalistic accounts, and the prevalence of ambiguities and contradictions in its relationship to the political philosophy of Thatcherism, seemed to lend itself to an interrogation of the central question of the original research proposal.

Part 1: Theory

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. The Ideology of Independence

Ongoing interest in the history of UK independent record labels during the punk and post-punk era can be observed in the publication of a plethora of journalistic accounts of the period including Richard King's comprehensive account of UK independents *How Soon is now? The Madmen and Mavericks who made Independent Music 1975-2005* (2012) which focusses largely on the 1980s'[1]. Similarly, a number of articles following the death of Margaret Thatcher on April 8 2013[2] portray the relationship between 80s popular music culture - 'the heyday of political pop and the left-wing counter-culture in general' (Lynskey, April 8, 2013) - and the Conservative government which she lead throughout the eighties, as one of opposition and conflict, of power and defiance, of a resistance that was embodied not only in numerous anti-Thatcher songs[3] and gestures but in the organisational practices of the independent popular music sector, and the emergence of an *ideology of independence* based around the principles of democratisation, collectivism, and participation (Hesmondhalgh, 1997). The organisations associated with this sector frequently depicted themselves as presenting an alternative to the dominant corporate structure of the major labels and promised to harness the transformative potential of new technologies, and the resulting disruption which appeared in the recording industry paradigm, to progressive and emancipatory ends.

The Thatcherite project, influenced by neoliberal economic theories emphasised a 'pulling yourself up by the bootstraps' individualism, an ideological valourising of entrepreneurship which was pursued simultaneously with a concerted attempt at reversing aspects of the post-war consensus which could be seen to support

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[1] Other books would include *Document and Eyewitness: An Intimate History of Rough Trade* by Neil Taylor published in 2010, *Facing the Other Way: the Story of 4AD* (2013). by Martin Aston, and *Simply Thrilled: The Preposterous Story of Postcard Records* (2014). by Simon Goddard.

[2] Examples include 'Margaret Thatcher: The Villain of Political Pop' (*The Guardian* April 8, 2013), 'What Margaret Thatcher Did for Pop Music' (*NME* April 8 2013). and 'Margaret Thatcher dead: She was hate figure for young in 1980s as popular culture raged against her.' (*The Mirror* April 10, 2013).

[3] Examples include 'Stand Down Margaret' by The Beat, 'Margaret on the Guillotine by Morrissey', 'Tramp the Dirt Down' by Elvis Costello and 'The Day After You' by The Blow Monkeys.

collectivism and community. Policies including the privatisation of large public services such as British Aerospace and utility companies such as British Gas and British Telecom and the deregulation of financial services and attacks on trade unions and the welfare state were aimed at increasing competitiveness and the promotion of an 'enterprise culture' which would engender self-sufficiency, however they ultimately served to contribute to the atomisation of society and the consolidation of corporate power.

The emergence of a huge and unprecedented number of UK independent record labels, which had had begun in the mid-70s, continued throughout the 80s, and experienced further growth due to the late-80s Acid House boom, can be viewed, at least in part, as a response to this and the political nature of much of the popular music culture of the time is frequently cited. Johnny Marr, for example, sums up the implicit assumption that popular music culture, and especially the independent record label sector, was inherently political:

> The political aspect of these times - and Rough Trade had it in spades - was so multifaceted because it was a given that you were political. It really was 'if you weren't part of the solution, you were part of the problem'. You were either mainstream or you were anti the government (King, 2012, p. 168).

Analysis of the New Musical Express (NME) during this period reveals a broad support for progressive social and political issues as well as a consistent and generally vehement opposition to the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher and its 'swingeing attempts to impose extremist right-wing policies on both the Conservative Party and the British people' (NME, July 5 1980, p. 11).

Nevertheless, closer examination of the relationship between Thatcherism and popular music culture betrays nuances which are more ambiguous - perhaps paradoxical - and as will be examined here, many of these ambiguities stem from contradictions inherent in the ideology of Thatcherism itself.

A recurring theme of newspaper articles reporting on Thatcher's death is a depiction of a symbiotic relationship between the harsh social policies of her government and the vibrant and turbulent creative scene of the time. As former NME and The Face journalist, Tony Parsons, writing in the Daily Mirror, suggested, 'Thatcher was terrific for popular culture. When she was gone the idealism quickly withered and died, descending into the knuckle-dragging hedonism of Oasis' (Parsons, April 10, 2013).

Penny Rimbaud of anarcho-punk band Crass articulated something similar in an interview with the Guardian's Dorian Lynskey: 'I think Thatcher was an absolute fairy godmother. Christ, you're an anarchist band trying to complain about the workings of capitalist society, and you get someone like Thatcher. What a joy!' (Lynskey, the Guardian, April 8, 2013).

The response to Thatcherism would involve an unprecedented degree of organised, collective action as musicians engaged with a range of broadly left-wing issues including anti-racism, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), gay rights and feminism. As Andy McSmith observes, 'One of the unintended consequences of Thatcherism was that there was more politics in British popular music, and more political activism by performers, in the first half of the 1980s than at any time before or since' (McSmith, 2011, p. 175).

This heightened period of political awareness in UK Pop, can be traced back to a period before Thatcher's initial election victory in May 1979 to the emergence of punk, and particularly to Rock against Racism (RAR), a movement which, as Frith and Street noted in Marxism Today, 'drew on the power and commitment of punk and reggae in its attempt to build a political movement around a concert platform' (Frith and Street, 1986, p. 28).

Emerging in the UK in the late 1970s in response to the rise of the far-right political movement The National Front (NF), which had been making alarming political gains, RAR represented a new phase in the history of activism in popular music. Although not the first alliance between musicians and political causes in the UK, RAR was significant in that its objective was to oppose the advance of a specific political party, and the relative failure of the NF in the 1979 election can be attributed, to some degree, to the success of the movement.

However, it is also worth noting the significant role played by Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives in the electoral decline of the National Front. On the prospect of Britain's non-white population reaching 4 million by the year 2000, Thatcher, in a TV interview in January 1978, commented, 'Now that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture. People don't agree with the NF but at least it is talking about some of the

problems' (Hewison, 1997, p. 165). As Hewison notes, the NF's share of the vote in local elections began to fall in 1978 and every candidate they put forward in the 1979 general election lost their deposit; nevertheless, racial issues surrounding government policy, the rhetoric of the Conservative party, and the enforcement of legislation would be a major source of contention throughout the 80s. The relative failure of the National Front in 1979 did not lead to a sense that the racist right was on the retreat in Britain. In fact, for many activists and musicians the Conservative election victory meant that the racists were now entering 10 Downing Street. As Linton Kwesi Johnson warned in an interview in April 1979, a matter of weeks before the general election:

> The possibility of a Conservative government in this country led by Margaret Thatcher is extremely disturbing, you know. Mrs Thatcher and her colleagues have made it clear what their intentions are - well, perhaps they haven't made it clear, they've created a lot of mischief, a lot of uncertainty among both black and white people… I think the tory party will be attempting to rob us of some of the gains we, the black community, have made since we've been in this country. I think the powers of the police will be increased and that you'll find there'll be even more intense policing of our community (NME, April 21 1979, p. 7).

Neil Spencer, who as editor of the NME in the late seventies and early eighties played a prominent role in supporting both Rock against Racism and the subsequent political activism of Red Wedge, was in retrospective agreement with Johnson's ominous assessment of the Conservative government's position on racial politics:

> RAR preceded Margaret Thatcher, though only by two years or something, but when she came in it became very much an anti-Thatcher organisation. She was doing the National Front's job for them. I mean, now the National Front's policy was government policy (Spencer, 2018).

The incidence of a series of riots motivated by the perceived misuse of 'sus' laws (laws which enabled the police to 'stop and search' individuals on the suspicion of being in contravention of the 1824 Vagrancy Act) in predominantly black and ethnic minority communities such as St Pauls, Bristol; Toxteth, Liverpool; and Brixton, London, seemed to vindicate the pessimism of observers such as Johnson, and heightened the sense of a country that was becoming increasingly divided.

Rock Against Racism was the forerunner to an unprecedented decade of activism in popular music in the UK, with musicians becoming involved with such diverse political causes as CND, the Miners' Strike, and the anti-Apartheid movement, as well as the global phenomenon of the Live Aid concerts.

Simultaneously, Red Wedge - a collective of musicians - actively supported the Labour Party and sought the electoral downfall of Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives. The NME was also openly in support of the Labour Party, featuring Neil Kinnock on its front cover on the eve of the 1987 election, one which Labour would ultimately lose leading to the demise of Red Wedge.

Parsons alludes to a de-politicisation of British popular music culture ushered in by Thatcher's removal from office and manifested most obviously in the Britpop movement epitomised by Oasis, despite the high-profile support of the band and their label manager Alan McGee of Creation records for Tony Blair, which helped engender the Labour government's 'New Deal for Musicians' (NDfM). Billy Bragg suggested something similar in interview:

> It's only really when it gets to Britpop when I think it stops being political and that's because of the rise of 'lad culture' which is a kind of reaction against the political years of Margaret Thatcher. Once Thatcher's gone everyone's, like, "fuck this - where are the prawn sandwiches?", you know? Seriously, James Brown who was the editor of 'Loaded' used to be the editor of a fanzine called 'Attack on Bzag'. I think he was a member of the Socialist Workers Party (Bragg, 2018).

So, popular music discourses routinely attribute a politicised nature to popular music culture in the era of Margaret Thatcher. This politicisation can be traced at least back to socially progressive cultural trends in the 1960s and much of the organisation of it began in the years proceeding Margaret Thatcher taking office (for example, Rock against Racism). However, this process of politicisation in UK popular music culture reached its peak in the 1980s in reaction to the perception of Thatcherism's reactionary and socially conservative character. As a footnote to this chapter, it is worth noting that the considerable attention paid to the government of Margaret Thatcher by the doyennes of the punk scene, went largely unreciprocated, as evidenced by a briefing

presented to her in advance of an interview with Smash Hits in 1985, where amongst other information concerning the magazine's sales figures and the demographics of its readership she was apprised briefly of the significance of 'the punk era':[4]

THE PUNK ERA

The "PUNK" era which hit the music world between 1976-1978 was a very basic musical style featuring a strange bunch of anti-establishment acts, most famous of which were THE SEX PISTOLS with songs such as GOD SAVE THE QUEEN and ANARCHY IN THE U.K. Other PUNK acts such as THE CLASH and THE DAMMED were populer for a while but when the SEX PISTOLS split up in 1978 the style died out, to be replaced by the current technological musical era featuring computers, synthesisors,and videos.

THE BEATLES

Probably the two most famous BEATLES songs amongst many hits are YESTERDAY which has been recorded by hundreds of people including FRANK SINATRA and ELVIS PRESLEY and ALL YOU NEED IS

[4] 870226 Wall mnt SMASH HITS IV THCR 5-2-243 f5.pdf (rackcdn.com

1.2. Structure of the Thesis

Including this introductory chapter, the thesis consists of ten chapters broadly divided into three constituent parts. Part one places the thesis in context, outlines the research approach, and examines disputes around Thatcherism and the extent to which it can be regarded as a consistent and coherent political philosophy, while part two considers issues facing the recorded music industry during the late 70s and eighties, and UK government policy and the recorded music industry. Part three narrows the broad focus of part two to examine discourses around the independent record label sector, particularly in the area of independent record distribution.

The **introduction in chapter 1** looks at a case study of the first fully independent number one single in the UK (that is independently released and distributed), 'Save Your Love' by Renée and Renato. This allows for an examination of several key themes of the research including the emergence of independent record labels and distribution companies and the extent to which they presented a challenge to the major label system, commercially and/ or ideologically; discourses around the independent record distribution sector and competition between independent distribution companies; and value-perception in popular music cultural production, the various factors which influence it, and how value-perception drives strategic and economic decision-making. 'Save Your Love' is of particular interest because in one sense it is a shining paragon of indie achievement in that it was independently recorded, manufactured, distributed and promoted. On the other hand, it was retrospectively regarded as not 'indie-sounding' suggesting an alternative definition of independence, based on musical genre. The mutability and flexibility of definitions of independence is a theme which recurs throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the existing literature in order to provide a background to and a rationale for the research undertaken as well as to position the research in the context of a field of academic and journalistic literature. Much of the relevant literature is integrated throughout the body of the thesis so the literature review is

organised in terms of key literature outlining the main themes of the study, which are Thatcherism, independent and major record labels, and music industry distribution.

Chapter 3 outlines the primary research questions and then a set of four related questions which serve to provide a focus for the rest of the study, before setting out the methodological approach utilised. Central to the research design is an analysis of contemporary discourses around the independent popular music recording sector of the late seventies and the eighties as well as the political discourses of the period. Sources analysed include the music industry trade journal Music Week and the popular music weekly NME. I have also looked at transcripts of parliamentary debates, Prime Minister's briefings, policy documents, and contemporary newspaper articles, particularly those featuring Margaret Thatcher. The methodology takes a narrative-based approach derived mainly from the field of organisational discourse and repurposes a variety of interpretative tools drawn primarily from organisational behaviour studies.

Chapter 4 considers debates around the government of Margaret Thatcher and the political philosophy of Thatcherism and the extent to which Thatcherism can be regarded as an ideologically consistent project or as a series of provisional and discrete responses designed primarily to maintain office in the context of the 4-to-5-year electoral cycle of the United Kingdom. It begins by looking at the historical roots of Thatcherism in the economic and political theories of neoliberal thinkers such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman and, in doing so, points to ambiguities and tensions which existed from the outset in this political philosophy between the competing strands of economic liberalism and social conservatism. In analysing whether there is a contradictory relationship between the government of Margaret Thatcher and the independent popular music recording industry in the 1980s - that is one that is sometimes antagonistic, sometimes complementary - it suggests that the tension between the disparate wings of Thatcherism account (at least, to some degree) for these ambiguities. Thus, we find a government that sets much rhetorical store by individual freedom and liberty harbouring a significant and influential number in its membership who sought to maintain a reactionary stranglehold on the choices of individuals with regards to, for example, abortion rights and sexual morality.

Chapter 5 looks at wider issues facing the music industry in the late 70s and the 1980s including a global recession at the start of the decade, increased competition from a variety of sources in the leisure industries such as video games and cable television, and the general perception that the quality of the product was diminishing (particularly as a result of the lower quality of vinyl which stemmed from the oil crisis of 1973-1974). The ongoing political debate around blank tapes (and the persistent lobbying of government by the BPI for a blank tape levy) allows for an analysis of the relationship between major labels and independents with regards to political lobbying and the efforts of the BPI, although notionally a trade organisation for all record labels, highlight a division between major and independent labels in terms of status and, indeed, priorities and objectives. This disjuncture would prompt independent labels in the UK to attempt to set up their own trade organisation throughout the eighties, an attempt which would culminate in the founding of the Association of Independent Music (AIM) in 1998, confirming that the independent recording sector regarded its interests as being apart from those of the major labels. The chapter ends with an account of the emergence of CD technology, a development which would offer considerable short-term rewards to the recording industry, but which was also the harbinger of further bitter (and narrative-based) disputes around copyright at the turn of the 21st century after the emergence of Napster and peer-to-peer file sharing.

Chapter 6 assesses aspects of government policy and popular music culture under Margaret Thatcher, with a particular focus on several key policy areas. Firstly, it looks at government policy and the TV broadcasting industry and its culmination in the Broadcasting Act of 1990. This serves as a useful example of the conflict between the free market ideals of Thatcherism - its economic liberalism - and the social conservatism which in the case of the Broadcasting Act manifested itself in a preoccupation with safeguarding decency and good taste. Some insights are provided into the Thatcher government's policy responses to issues around the cultural industries which allows comparisons to the popular music recording industry (and the popular music industries generally), which, it is argued here, had long possessed a distinctly entrepreneurial streak despite recurring tendencies towards corporate consolidation. The Enterprise Allowance Scheme, a flagship Conservative policy designed to promote an enterprise culture through encouraging individuals to set up small businesses, is examined next,

and, particularly, the way in which it intersected with the emergent independent popular music recording sector, proving to be the catalyst for several commercially successful and culturally significant independent record labels of the era. A congruity between the economic liberalism of Thatcherism and the innovative and risk-taking independent sector is observed even as political opposition to the social conservatism of Thatcherism is frequently expressed in popular music media discourses.

Chapter 7 analyses discourses of independence in the UK popular music press (particularly NME) in the 1980s in order to highlight some of the disputes and ambiguities that existed around notions of independence and, indeed, to examine why independence was seen to confer value at all. Furthermore, in examining the relationship between independence and value-perception, this chapter will consider the choices made by musicians and the extent to which an ideological and cultural privileging of independence was central to their economic and creative decision-making; in other words, were musicians driven primarily by ideological or pragmatic concerns in choosing which kind of label to sign to and, indeed, to what extent did such a choice actually exist? The mutability of definitions of independence is of particular importance here, particularly insofar as stakeholders tended to ascribe independence in a way which included themselves or the organisations with which they were associated in the definition. Again, this is related to the assumption that independence is something of value and that such value-perception was a powerful influence on the economic decision-making of consumers. The attempt to establish a network of independent popular music recording outside of the corporate system of the major record labels is discussed here and the extent to which this attempt was driven by ideological motives or commercial imperatives (or both) is evaluated. This latter discussion prefigures a more extensive treatment of this question in chapter 9 where discourses around independent distribution are examined in detail.

Chapter 8 uses a case study of the depoliticisation of NME through the 1980s to interrogate the challenges of operating independently in a capitalist, corporate-dominated political and economic system. Specifically, it regards the relationship between NME journalists and editors and their publisher, the international media conglomerate IPC (International Publishing Company) and the tensions and disputes which surrounded several key issues, such as: the publication of advertisements in the

paper which undermined the paper's attempts to present a progressive and coherent political philosophy around social issues such as gender and race; unionisation and how it affected the output of the NME in light of considerable political volatility precipitated principally by the government of Margaret Thatcher's desire to reform the publishing industry and in the face of two resulting major incidents of industrial action (in 1980 and 1984); support for the political activist movement Red Wedge and the consequent endorsement of Neil Kinnock's Labour Party in the 1987 general election which lead IPC to stage a politically-motivated intervention with regard to the paper's editorship.

Chapter 9 examines record industry distribution and is the thematic core of the thesis. The first part examines distribution in the record industry from around the time of Edison's invention of the phonograph in 1877 to the advent of punk in the UK in circa 1976. The purpose of this is to analyse the development of distribution and its role in determining which cultural products are available in the marketplace and how they are presented there. As Negus points out, distribution plays 'a significant part in the struggle to maintain control of production and consumption' (Negus, 1992, p. 55). The questions of why such 'control' is desirable, to what extent it is understood in commercial and/ or ideological terms, and what lengths organisations and individuals go to in order to establish and maintain this control, are central to this research. This second part of this chapter examines independent distribution in the UK during the punk and post-punk era and the extent to which it presented a meaningful and historically unique challenge to the major labels system in both commercial and ideological terms. In analysing stakeholder voices from contemporary media sources (particularly Music Week and NME) as well as later retrospective accounts in journalistic literature and in interviews conducted with relevant record industry participants, I will further interrogate the contested discursive terrain around independence, the extent to which it was considered desirable or, indeed essential, to creative autonomy and ideological credibility, the mutability of definitions of 'true' independence, and the significance of independent distribution in such definitions. In considering independent distribution in the UK in the late seventies and through the eighties, I will look firstly at the Cartel, a distribution network which emerged from Rough Trade Distribution. I will then consider its chief competitors in the independent distribution sector - Pinnacle, Spartan and IDS - and examine areas of real and

perceived points-of-difference *within* the independent distribution sector. As is the case throughout the thesis, this interrogation is designed to examine how notions of independence contributed to value-perception which then influenced the economic decision-making of investors and consumers. Finally, I will provide an account of the emergence of the independent charts, their relation to debates around independence and the central role of independent distribution in such discourses, and their importance to the independent recording industry, in both symbolic and material terms.

Chapter 10 is the concluding chapter and looks at some of the predominant themes around independence in a historical context and in the present day. By looking at contemporary examples of media discourses such as reviews of the 2020 release of Taylor Swift's album 'folklore' and debates during the 2020-21 Parliamentary Enquiry into the economics of streaming, it aims to demonstrate that definitions of independence, despite remaining provisional and contextual (and subjective and emotional) are central to the storytelling contest of the creative industries. Narratives engaged in as part of this storytelling contest rely on well-established cultural perceptions of the value of independence, and various persuasive devices are deployed by the champions of independence to elicit sympathy and affiliation. The purpose of establishing a positive value-perception of an organisation or cultural product through narrative management is to influence the strategic and economic decision-making of stakeholders such as consumers and investors.

1.3. 'That's not Indie-sounding': Save Your Love, an independent success story

On December 25, 1982, the British record industry trade journal, Music Week, reported on a highly significant moment in the history of British popular music culture under the headline 'Indie gets a number one with its second release.' The short article, published in a magazine whose content was generally dominated by coverage of the various major record labels of the time such as EMI, CBS, and Warner, recounted the pioneering success of a small independent label, Hollywood Records, with the single 'Save Your Love', recorded by the duet Renée and Renato. Set up less than a year previously by the husband-and-wife team of John and Sue Richards (who had also written the song), and operating out of the Upper Clacton Road in London, it was, as the article's title noted, only the label's second release and would not only top the

Christmas singles chart in 1982 but would remain number one for four consecutive weeks, eventually selling a total of 980, 000 copies (Music Week, Aug 27 1988). Bobbie Gadhi, who ran the Bromley independent record pressing company Continental Production Services which manufactured the record, when invited by Music Week in 1988 to reflect upon her ten-year long career in the record business described her initial reaction upon hearing the single: 'scepticism is the worst of sins… I suggested it might do better on the Italian market' (MW, Aug 27 1988). Quite how Italian audiences would have responded to the record is difficult to imagine (although it did achieve notable success in several other European countries, reaching number one in Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway). However, such scepticism appears, in retrospect, to have been understandable, given the idiosyncratic nature of both the song and the act that performed it. 'Save Your Love' was an operatic pastiche, containing elements of parody; a prime example of the 'novelty' record which had been a staple of the UK singles chart since its inception in 1952[5] with the Italian-born Renato having been a stalwart of the Northern English club and cabaret scene for the previous 15 years. The record's success was based primarily on a slow accumulation of local radio play, initially at a small number of regional radio stations such as Radio Sheffield, Piccadilly, and BBC Cleveland, before eventually reaching a national audience upon garnering influential support at the BBC. As recalled by radio promoter Fred Faber this was the key to mainstream chart success: 'I thought it was good for Terry Wogan at Radio 2. It took five weeks to get a play. Then calls flooded into the BBC' (MW, Aug 27 1988).

'Save Your Love' was distributed by Pinnacle, one of several independent distribution companies making significant inroads into the record distribution market, which had been traditionally dominated by the majors, in the early 1980s, making the record the 'music industry's first indie-distributed number one' (MW, Dec 25 1982). Pinnacle was set up in 1952 as Pinnacle Electronics, and initially acted as an electronics and audio company which specialised in valves and styli for record players. In the early 1980s, however, although electronics remained an important division of the company (indeed, by this point they had diversified into blank cassettes, video tapes and audio accessories), Pinnacle was focussed on records, and especially the field of record

[5] An early example of this phenomenon was '(How much is). that Doggie in the Window' by Patti Page released on December 18 1952 and later cited by Margaret Thatcher Smash Hits interview as her favourite song of all time.

distribution. Managing director Tony Berry gave a sense of Pinnacle's repositioning towards distribution in an interview given to Music Week in April 1983:

> Pinnacle records, as a division, has been functioning for about eight years, but the first four years were more production company orientated. It's fair to say that in the last four years the distribution company has come into its own, it's been much more a priority than Pinnacle's own label (MW, April 9 1983).

In describing Pinnacle's particular trajectory as a company, Berry provides insights into a more general development in the music recording industry in the UK in the mid-to-late 70s; that of independent companies, of varying scale, resources, and ambition, emerging to challenge the traditional market dominance of the majors. In highlighting Pinnacle's pivotal role in this process, he observes the importance of independent distribution in cultural terms, as well as the competition that existed in the independent sector:

> I believe it's fair to say that Pinnacle has contributed to the growth of the indie sector - alongside one or two other distributors. What companies like Pinnacle do is bring independent music to the high street. If it wasn't for companies like Pinnacle with a large national accounts base, the music- in the hands of regional rock distributors- would definitely have remained more specialist. This is borne out by labels who move to Pinnacle from being independently distributed - they get more hit singles and albums which proves the point' (MW, April 9 1983, advertising feature).

Pinnacle then, according to the narrative promoted by Berry, was bringing music that would previously have occupied a regional niche to a mainstream audience, widening the availability of popular cultural texts, and providing consumers with greater choice; in the process challenging the dominant paradigm of the majors both in the marketplace and in their assumed role of popular music cultural custodians.

Furthermore, the company was unashamedly pursuing success on the same terms as major labels and distributors; that is in terms of *hits*[6]. In discourses around

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[6] Richard Scott described as 'the father of Rough Trade distribution': 'Geoff, when I started at Rough Trade was extremely political,' says Scott. 'But then suddenly he saw hits. I didn't like hits. I thought the original

independence throughout the 80s the frequently competing notions of *cultural significance* and *commercial success* would be subject to dispute, negotiation, and sometimes synthesis (reframing and recontextualising longstanding debates on the relationship between art and commerce) and would be integral to definitions of independence and its various synonyms and collocations such as freedom, autonomy, integrity, credibility and control. As such, these concepts and the ways in which they relate to the production of social meaning and value-perception (and, therefore, drive the economic behaviour of organisations and individuals or, in other terms, investors and consumers) will be analysed and interrogated thoroughly in this thesis. It is sufficient for the moment to note that the cultural significance of the achievement of Pinnacle and Hollywood Records with 'Save Your Love' was predicated on the record's ground-breaking commercial success; the fact that it was successful made it significant.

The story of 'Save Your Love' - independently recorded, manufactured, and distributed and achieving its eventual peak at the top of the UK singles chart through a slow process of gathering local radio airplay and picking up word-of-mouth support from a loyal and proactive fan base - can be regarded as a paragon of independent success, and was hailed by Berry, at the time, as an important breakthrough for the independent sector: 'The fact that Save Your Love has reached number one is a landmark in the growth of the indie scene, and proves that the indie labels can match the majors if they have the right product (emphasis added)' (MW, Dec 25 1982, p. 4).

This desire to 'match the majors' was reiterated a few months later by Pinnacle chairman Terry Scully who, in praising the direction of travel under Berry, emphasised that the company had no intention of resting on its laurels:

> The whole operation must be driven along every day. We must increase our size of operation. We cannot take a single minute to sit back, relax and be half satisfied with our achievements. Yes, I am satisfied with our progress to date- but it's nothing like it's going to be in three years' time. *We are aiming to become a major music and record company* (emphasis added) (MW, April 9 1983).

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intention- the original culture- of Rough Trade was to service a different area of the market' (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 69).

What is meant by matching or, indeed, becoming major record companies is, to some degree, nebulous and elusive in these discourses (and those of various other participants in the independent recording sector). However, two distinct but related concepts that are frequently suggested are the aspirations to *parity of scale* and *parity of esteem*; that is to say, pursuit of the ideal that independents could be as *big* as majors (for example, in terms of market share) and as *valued* as majors (within the wider recording industry, to government bodies, to consumers and so on).

Scully's bold prediction of Pinnacle competing on similar terms with the majors would be fulfilled by the end of the decade, most notably as a result of the enormous success of the independent record label PWL (set up by the production team of Mike Stock, Matt Aitken and Pete Waterman) who would enjoy a hugely productive run on the UK singles and albums charts as well as considerable international success. This success would only arrive, however, after the distributor was saved from liquidation at the end of 1984 by the export company Windsong, following a collapse in revenues attributed by Berry to a combination of 'a dramatic fall-off in business by the electronics side… with bad debts and returns in the record division' (MW, Nov 17 1984, p. 1). The company's financial woes, and subsequent takeover, resulted in the departures of key personnel (the most high-profile of whom were Berry and Scully) and lead to a quite public bout of soul-searching among the 26 labels then distributed by Pinnacle, with Music Week noting that, according to their own survey, a 'slim majority' would retain the services of the distributor under new ownership (MW, Nov 17 1984, p. 4). One example of a label who opted to maintain its relationship with Pinnacle, at least in the short term, was Flair Records, who had recently enjoyed enormous success with the single 'Agadoo' by Northern club circuit veterans Black Lace and who, as stated by the label's PR Jenny Torring, were prepared to cut a deal with the receiver so long as the group's imminent and crucial follow-up 'Do the Conga' was released without impediment (MW, Nov 17 1984, p. 4). On the other side of the coin were labels such as 4AD, who made clear its intention to move to exclusive distribution by Pinnacle's independent distribution rival, the Cartel,[7] and Abstract Dance who chose to move the forthcoming single by the band Cool Notes to EMI distribution over fears that the

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[7] As will be discussed in chapter 9, dual distribution was a common, if somewhat contentious, practice in the first half of the 1980s.

uncertainty around Pinnacle would harm the singles chart prospects. Similarly, the nascent heavy metal label Music for Nations (who would subsequently release important albums by metal luminaries such as Metallica, Slayer and Megadeth), decided to seek pastures new, with a spokesperson announcing, 'we are definitely looking for a new deal, preferably with one of the majors' (MW, Nov 17 1984 p. 4). At the same time, Iain McNay of Cherry Red records was counselling against such a move, admonishing broadly:

> I think it's wrong for people to panic and go off to major companies for inferior deals. I'm confident Pinnacle will survive under new ownership. Cherry Red is owed around £75, 000 and it doesn't look like I'm getting any of it, but it's really important that the largest indies stay at Pinnacle' (MW, Nov 17 1984, p.4).

The crisis around the collapse of Pinnacle in 1984 and the impact it had on the strategic choices of key stakeholders in the independent popular music recording sector of the period, acts as a kind of microcosm through which we can analyse various factors underpinning the economic decision-making of organisations; factors which can be regarded in both commercial and ideological terms. For some of the labels involved such as Flair Records and Abstract Dance, the decision taken appears to have been contingent and provisional; dependent on matters of contextual urgency such as the imminent release of an important record or the possibility of a detrimental effect on chart positioning and, as such, the decision eventually made was driven by pragmatism. Others, such as McNay, seem to be concerned with the broader conjuncture of the independent popular music recording sector as embodied by the adversity experienced by Pinnacle, and the profoundly negative effect a mass defection to major distributors would have on the independent sector as a whole, both commercially and with regards to wider industry perception. Certainly, when McNay says 'I think it's wrong for people to panic and go off to major companies', the words seem to be imbued with a moral sense rather than merely serving warning that such a decision would be misguided or impractical. However, McNay is also eager to point out that major companies offer 'inferior deals', thus suggesting that for independent labels, distribution through a major is undesirable in both ideological and commercial terms and, indeed, that these factors are intertwined.

At this point, it is important to note that the independent labels affected by Pinnacle's difficulties were not faced with a simple binary choice of distribution through Pinnacle or through a major; in fact, several labels moved to rival independent distribution companies, most notably the Cartel, but also Spartan, PRT and Making Waves.[8] The decision-making processes of independent record labels around the choice of which independent distributor to use would be a recurring theme in Music Week throughout the decade and would, even in times of crisis such as the collapse of Rough Trade Distribution in 1991, be thrashed out in consumer-facing music publications such as the NME. Again, these choices, although often primarily commercially driven, were not free from ideological considerations with, as will be discussed in more depth in later chapters, disputes around the relative credibility and authenticity of different independent distributors being commonplace. Amidst the various competing and, frequently, contradictory conceptions of what constituted independence - from definitions based purely on industrial and organisational structure, to those suggesting that independence was a kind of free entrepreneurial spirit regardless of any corporate affiliation, to others which emerged later in the decade which regarded indie as primarily a musical genre or fashion-based subculture, there was a prevailing sense of a hierarchy of independence; in short, some independent labels and distributors were deemed more 'indie' than others. Various questions arise from this hierarchy, questions which are bound up in the production and attribution of social meaning and the fluid social relations of things in the world to other things, but the most important of these here are: how and why was this hierarchy constructed; and what purpose did it serve? Interrogating these questions and the ways in which mutable and competing definitions of independence are intrinsic to understanding them, is central to the research conducted here.

It is also important to consider *where* these discourses take place, across the discursive terrain of a music industry trade journal. The pages of Music Week act as a site for what Wheeldon refers to as 'the storytelling contest of the creative industries' (Wheeldon, 2014), where various industry stakeholders use narrativisation to influence, persuade,

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[8] Some examples of this are; 'Charlie Gillett's Oval label will now be distributed by the Cartel (already a joint distributor). and Making Waves, although its back catalogue will remain with Pinnacle. Other moves include Flicknife to Spartan; Kennick, which had only just linked up with Pinnacle, to PRT and possibly the Cartel, and Powerstation Records, the destination of which is as yet unknown.' (MW, 17 Nov 84, p. 4).

cajole, inspire and elicit sympathy from other potential stakeholders. Above all, it seems the purpose of narratives, as played out in the discursive spaces provided by industry-facing publications such as Music Week, is to create and manage *affiliation*. Affiliative practices involve the use of a vast repertoire of discursive strategies - for example metaphor, irony, self-narrativisation, the subversion or fulfilment of expectation, sincere confession, self-awareness, consent and dissent - and are framed in relation to pre-existing contextual consensus around social identities and societal power relations. This consensus underpins the master narratives which inform our understanding of and allow us to 'make sense of' complex social, political, and economic phenomena and reinforces the dominant paradigms in a society. However, such conventional wisdom is surprisingly protean, being subject to pressure from a plethora of external stakeholder voices, and counter-narratives inevitably arise to challenge and disrupt dominant paradigms and, in their wake, create new master narratives. Wheeldon, in analysing the storytelling contest of the creative industries in relation to the emergence of Napster and peer-to-peer file sharing, and the profound and disruptive implications it contained for the traditional record industry model, reflects on the use of discursive resources to challenge the narrative of major record labels as benevolent patrons and gatekeepers (itself a matter of long-standing dispute): 'new tales abound, which portray traditional stakeholders with their head in the sand, in stubborn and complacent denial of the inevitable convergence of media and technology, or as dinosaurs incapable of adapting to a changing environment' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 4). Furthermore, Wheeldon suggests, such counter-narratives often portray these cultural guardians as 'corporatized, privileged and elitist'[9] (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 4). This description could as readily be applied to discourses around independent and major record labels in the UK music press some 20 years earlier, with major record labels cast as reactionary and complacent 'dinosaurs' who failed to recognise the radical potential of new media and technology and were, therefore, doomed to irrelevance, if not oblivion (The fact that major record labels continued to dominate the recording industry landscape and associated discourses of power and resistance at the turn of the 21st-century and,

[9] Interestingly, as will be discussed in later chapters, charges of privilege (in social class terms) and elitism would be levelled at Rough Trade Distribution throughout the decade, even as they were simultaneously considered to epitomise the attributes of democratisation, participation and access which underpinned the progressive and emancipatory promise of the punk and post-punk era.

indeed, continue to do so 20 years later, in the age of Spotify and the streaming industry,[10] would suggest an adaptive propensity which belies such crude caricatures).

So, the pages of Music Week acted as a site of discourse where various stakeholders could appeal to an audience (or perceived audience) in an ongoing and malleable storytelling contest. The readership of Music Week could reasonably be expected to include a wide range of music industry professionals, including record label staff, music publishers, distributors, manufacturers, retailers, booking agents, radio and press promoters, artist managers, and maybe even the odd musician, in other words, potential allies, partners and investors. Thus conceived, it is possible to discern a performative dimension in every contribution to the pages of Music Week, whether in the form of interviews, press releases, or discomposed letters to the editor. The purposes of such texts may be numerous and varied; to make aware, to reassure, to castigate or upbraid, to confirm, to dispute, to define anew, to lobby politicians or to market a brand, however, underpinning these discourses is a sense of positioning in the rhetorical marketplace, of the strategic development of persuasive messages to help construct a particular social reality. For Hannah Arendt, these constructive acts take place in the 'public realm' and are inseparable from the construction of identity:

> Everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance - something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves - constitutes reality (Arendt, 1998, p. 50).

In this public realm we are simultaneously engaged in the construction of social reality and of ourselves in society, of how we appear to others. In Music Week, the construction and management of social reality was designed to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the intended audience, who could reasonably be assumed to be predominantly music industry professionals (and, to a lesser extent, other interested parties such as advertising executives and political decision-makers).

Similarly, discourses in the NME are permeated with a sense of messaging to an audience; however, in this case the audience can be presumed to be different from the

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[10] Some reflections in Chapter 10 on the 2021 Parliamentary Enquiry into the economics of streaming will illustrate this.

one addressed in Music Week and thus the tone and character of discourses, as well as the stakeholder voices which are prioritised, change accordingly. The NME readership were generally fans and consumers of popular music and the main content providers were music journalists and musicians and as a result there is far less discussion of data such as sales figures or chart placings in the paper, and much greater socio-political commentary, in other words, much more emphasis on the cultural value of music and less on its commercial value. Musicians and journalists here are not only engaged in the construction of their own social identity in the discursive space provided, but also in a process of constructing the means through which the audience can create their identity, their own self in society. One means this process of construction of social identity employs, is the use of narratives and stories which not only reflect but actively produce social meaning, and in doing so shape attitudes and beliefs which then, in turn, inform aesthetic and ideological value-perception and influence economic and strategic decision-making. As Gabriel points out in an analysis of organisational storytelling, narratives and stories are an intrinsic component of how people understand the world:

> Facts rarely speak for themselves - and never in isolation. Narratives and stories enable us to make sense of them, to identify their significance, and even, when they are painful or unpleasant, to accept them and live with them. Narratives and stories feature prominently as sense-making devices, through which events are not merely infused with meaning but constructed and contested (Gabriel, 2004, p. 2).

So, narratives and stories not only help us create social meaning, but they are also key to our understanding of social relations and the ontological question of how social reality is constructed. Furthermore, our interpretation of social reality is underpinned by a large set of deeply held beliefs and assumptions which shape our response to the various discourses we encounter. As such, we never passively absorb narratives and stories but instead actively participate in their construction in an ongoing and highly complex process of sense-making. As Wheeldon suggests, the extent to which we 'believe' a storyteller is often more important than facts or data:

> The social world of human beings is organised more by narrative plausibility than precision … mastery of language is often more valuable than control of economic assets … provisional and contextual sense-making, rather than

> scientific principle, tends to drive economic policy and strategic decision-making (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 2).

So how we make sense of things influences attitudes which drive behaviour; something understood by prophets, marketing departments, organisational change management gurus, sports psychologists, political strategists, newspaper editors and many others alike.

1.4. '500 singles in a carrier bag': Steve Mason and the new professionalism

Pinnacle's new owner, Steve Mason, promised to bring a new approach to the company, and outlined the future of the labels distributed by Pinnacle: 'We hope to be keeping the professional ones. We want to make the indie scene more professional. The guy who walks in with 500 singles in a carrier bag could find things rather difficult' (MW, Jan 5 1985, p. 1).

Mason's focus on 'professionalism' would garner him and Pinnacle a reputation for acquisitiveness and corporate mindedness,[11] especially as framed by independent distribution rivals Rough Trade Distribution (RTD), which would persist even as, ironically, he sought to save RTD from receivership in 1990 (see Chapter 9). The rhetorical trope of the 'guy who walks in with 500 singles in a carrier bag' alludes to the emergence of a plethora of small, independent record labels run by enthusiasts who both benefitted from and underpinned the punk and post-punk era of British popular music culture. As will be examined later, this figure acted as the paradigmatic torchbearer of indie democratisation, and as a foil standing in symbolic opposition to the 'corporate monsters' and 'men in suits' of the major record labels (and, when the occasion required, those with 'corporate' aspirations in the independent sector). Favourable narratives recounting the cultural and, indeed, industrial and organisational disruption to the prevailing popular music recording industries paradigm, engendered by punk and the new record labels (which are commonplace in both contemporary and retrospective popular music discourses).often portray this figure as a paragon of the access*,* participation*,* and democratisation facilitated by technological possibilities of

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[11] In a 2012 interview, Mason, outlined this new professionalism with regards to measures taken at the Pinnacle warehouse, 'the first thing I did when I moved into Pinnacle was a stocktake…more records went missing out that back door than you could shake a stick at.' (YouTube 2012).

the time coinciding with the specific social, political and economic conditions in the UK during this period. Such accounts reformulate and recontextualise deeply entrenched narratives of power and resistance (most obviously, the biblical narrative of Goliath) and include protagonists and antagonists, arcs of conflict and resolution, ascription of motive, growth and transformation, crisis and catharsis, and an underlying moral framework with clearly demarcated virtue and iniquity. However, such narratives are always susceptible to counter-narratives such as Mason's which recast the protagonists and antagonists by reframing the moral context. In Mason's account the exemplary paradigm disrupter becomes a nuisance and a timewaster with the implication being that the woes afflicting Pinnacle are largely a consequence of indulging this type of character. At the same time, in extolling professionalism, Mason implicitly takes aim at the 'amateurism' which was central to the 'Do-it-yourself' ethos of punk (again, both in terms of music-making and industrial organisation). The Desperate Bicycles proselytising 'Smokescreen/ Handlebars' (released in August 1977) with its clarion cry 'It was easy, it was cheap, go and do it', epitomised the valorisation of amateurism, giving voice to the belief that enthusiasm was more important than technical ability and setting themselves up against the established authority and financial power of the major label system. Mason was instead advocating a return to a hierarchy of access albeit one operating within the independent recording sector. However, Mason wasn't the only one around this time who was suggesting that the independent sector was being damaged by a surfeit of democratisation. Trisha O'Keefe of the independent trade body, the Independent labels Association (ILA), commenting on the news that a rival independent distributor, IDS, had ceased trading barely a week after Pinnacle's bankers had called in the receiver, told Music Week, 'It's terribly sad but understandable - independent distributors have been victims of their own folly in taking on too many labels which are under-financed and run by people who know nothing about the industry' (MW, Nov 24 1984, p. 1).

1.5. 'Independent ethics': a storytelling contest

Returning to the bullish optimism of Pinnacle, on the back of the success of 'Save Your Love' some 20 months before Windsong's takeover, Terry Scully, in interview, addressed a recurring theme in discourses around major vs. independent record labels throughout the decade; the perception that being released through independents was an inferior and second-rate option:

> A lot of people in the business- on all sides- still look for excuses when singles chart and acts break through the indie network. It's almost as if a lot of people in the record business have a paranoia about being with one of the 'magical names' such as EMI or CBS, even though it has been proved time and time again that major artists can break through on the indie network. Take Depeche Mode, Renée & Renato and Toyah as examples. It is one of my great regrets that people who have had frustration after frustration with major record companies are still slow to go through the indie system, and the benefits of making more money per record sold (MW, April 9 1983, advertising feature).

Discourses around independence in Music Week throughout the 80s are imbued with the competing and contradictory notions of at least some in the independent sector portraying themselves as morally and politically superior to the major label system while simultaneously seeking a parity of esteem in terms of their commercial capabilities. This was particularly true of the Cartel who would not only depict themselves as something ideologically apart from the majors, but also from their independent distribution rivals. Pinnacle however, whether under the leadership of Berry or Mason, made no secret of their mainstream ambitions, an approach which would serve as an ideological point-of-difference from Rough Trade Distribution who, as will be discussed in later chapters, maintained, at least rhetorically, a commitment to perceptions of artistic and cultural credibility. This credibility was bound up in notions of authenticity and as with any such discourses around authenticity in popular music culture was determined through a protracted process of dispute and negotiation across various discursive terrains. As Allan Moore suggests, authenticity is never fixed: 'Authenticity is a matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicized position. It is ascribed, not inscribed' (Moore, 2002, p. 1). Definitions proved to be mutable and contextual depending on who was laying claim to indie credibility and what purpose was served in doing so at a specific time and in a specific place, but generally it was used as a persuasive device, designed to elicit attitudes of affiliation. What is consistent in popular music discourses of the era, regardless of whether credibility was to be measured in terms of the tangible, mainstream success celebrated by Berry, or in the altogether more nebulous terms of artistic credibility (which, incidentally, allowed RTD to position themselves in the

marketplace as a distinct brand from their various competitors, therefore, benefiting them commercially), was the valourisation of the idea of independence. Independence was intrinsic to credibility and authenticity and as such was coveted and prized. In a 2009 Guardian interview, Ian McNay, founder of the influential independent record label Cherry Red, and founder of the UK independent charts, commented on the unlikely nature of the triumph of 'Save Your Love' and in doing so touched upon some of the long-standing ambiguities and disputes around what is meant by terms such as 'independence' and 'indies':

> That's not indie-sounding, is it? It was just some ordinary bloke putting a record out. I liked that. I felt the same when PWL were in the independent charts – Pete Waterman had independent ethics, he went off and made it happen. He's not a purist. There was always the danger of musical snobbery (Stanley, 31 July 2009).

McNay's relatively brief contribution here to the often contested, sometimes fraught discursive terrain around independence in the music industry (or more specifically, the record industry), is dense and several factors worthy of analysis can be unpacked from it, not least the approving description of an 'ordinary bloke' releasing a record; acting as a kind of reification of independence.[12] The implication is that this figure exemplifies the 'indie' values of democratisation and access, and contrasts can be made between McNay's positive portrayal of this character and Mason's disapproval of the 'guy with a carrier bag'. The mutability and flexibility of rhetorical tropes, of how similar figurative entities can be recast and reframed and recontextualised to suit a particular narrative, is in evidence here, as is the provisional and contextual nature of such narratives. In both cases, personification is used to enhance a narrative which is designed to elicit affiliation and agreement in the presumed audience. McNay compares the success of 'Save your Love' to that achieved later in the decade by the label PWL (which will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 9), a UK based label owned by Pete Waterman. For McNay, Waterman represents the DIY impulse which was central to the ideology of independence in 'making it happen'. Indeed, this paragon of self-motivated entrepreneurship is depicted as epitomising the moral and ideological underpinning of

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[12] Although it's worth re-iterating that Hollywood Records was comprised of John *and* Sue Richards.

independence (‘indie ethics’) and closely resembles the rhetorical figure of the ‘self-starter’ so esteemed in the rhetoric of Thatcherism (as will be discussed in Chapter 6). McNay’s cautionary note on the danger of purism and ‘musical snobbery’ alludes to another frequent source of dispute in discourses of independence; that is the extent to which a kind of sanctimonious elitism pervaded the independent sector of the post-punk era. This is a charge most frequently made against ‘The Cartel’ and the labels associated with it and proved a persistent counter-narrative to the depiction of this area of the independent sector as morally and ethically superior.

Another question provoked by McNay’s comment is, what is meant by ‘indie-sounding’? The broad and diverse range of music which accompanied the explosion of independent record labels in the punk and post-punk era can’t easily be categorised into a single genre or sound, and examination of the music press of the period around the late seventies and early eighties generally uses the term ‘independent’ to refer to a sense of creative autonomy, a disruption of the prevailing paradigm in which power traditionally lay in the hands of the major record labels (often cast as the reactionary and bureaucratic villains of the piece). Certainly, describing something as ‘indie-sounding’ in 1982 would not have been commonplace or widely understood (unless, as will be discussed later, in terms of the limitations of recording music on a low budget[13]) and it was only later in the decade and into the 1990s when the term ‘indie’ began to be used habitually to describe a type of music and fashion subculture based around the aesthetics of 60s-era guitar bands.[14] As Ian McNay said regarding the inception of the independent chart some three decades later when the term ‘Landfill Indie’ had become a term of disparagement for bands perceived to be culturally and creatively bereft:

> The word ‘indie’ wasn’t bad back then. Indie meant independence, whether it was pop or post-punk, not just a jangling guitar sound. It was not about image, it was about giving people the chance to do something different, beating the

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[13] A point made by Simple Minds in NME- see chapter 7

[14] ‘Other factors contributed to the morphing of the meaning of ‘indieness’ from small entrepreneurial enterprises successfully challenging the might of the corporate major labels to a kind of generic and somewhat conservative musical form; for example, the emergence of the Chart Show on Channel 4 in 1986, a music TV show that relied exclusively on video clips, and which frequently featured tracks from their own ‘specialist’ indie chart , tracks which were generally representative of the new ‘generic’ definition of indie meaning white guitar bands’ (The Guardian, 2009, Stanley).

> multinationals at their own game without marketing and resources. This made the chart look weird to an outsider (Stanley, July 31 2009).

This case study of the success of 'Save Your Love' and contemporary and retrospective discourses around it provides insights into several key points which will be interrogated in the course of this thesis, for example:

- The historical conjuncture which saw the emergence of many independent record labels in the United Kingdom in the late seventies and early eighties and the historical uniqueness of these organisations.
- The broadly simultaneous and related emergence of various independent record distribution companies as a consequence of technological advances and changes to the industrial paradigm of the major labels.
- The industrial and organisational distinctiveness of these organisations in relation to major labels and distributors; that is to say, to varying degrees they operated outside of the major label system.
- The role of an awareness of the conditions of production and distribution of cultural artefacts in the perception of their cultural value.
- The role of independent labels and distributors in the democratisation of music; in other words, the widening of access and participation to the field of popular music cultural production for both music industry participants and music consumers.
- This process of democratisation comprising both ideological and commercial dimensions and the extent to which these distinct aspects complemented each other or were in opposition.
- The emergence of Indie elitism and the sense of a hierarchy of independence which was related to the value-perception of independent labels and distributors.
- The development of the term Indie, coming to denote a sound/ genre and fashion-based subculture rather than an organisational and industrial structure of cultural production.

- Independence as an attitude or an approach to popular music cultural production irrespective of the industrial or organisational conditions of production.

This chapter has utilised a case study of 'Save Your Love' in order to highlight some of the key points of contestation in discourses around independence, as well as to introduce some of the protagonists who will feature prominently in the context of the independent recording sector in the UK in the 1980s. I will now conduct a literature review which will examine the existing literature which is most relevant to the project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

It is useful to point out here that much of the academic literature which I utilised has been integrated into the analysis of discourses throughout the thesis in a manner more closely aligned with an inductive approach to qualitative research; in other words, the literature does not direct the research but is subject to the research along with other discursive resources examined. Retrospective or contemporary academic accounts of the institutional politics of record labels in the punk and post-punk era or the responses to Thatcherism of popular music stakeholders are as appropriate for discourse analysis as the contemporary reports on the popular music industries gleaned from NME or Music Week or the accounts of parliamentary debates viewed online. Rather than attempting to communicate *everything I know* about the literature I have attempted to shape the review in an integrative manner into the thesis and so, some of the main themes outlined here will be picked up and developed elsewhere. I would like to note, however, one general accounts of the period under examination which is of particular relevance. Matt Worley's *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984 (*2017), covers a period which overlaps with my own area of study, and shares several of the same preoccupations, most notably, the tendency of dominant ('larger') voices to manage the narratives around social and cultural movements and to, therefore, control the meaning that is produced in such narratives: 'narrative accounts of punk serve only to absorb it into an increasingly uniform continuum of popular music history that is close to saturation point' (Worley, 2017, p. 21). This tendency towards condensing disparate and multifarious cultural moments into a plausible and unified account - with conspicuous protagonists and antagonists and key events which move the narrative forward - inevitably prioritises certain people and things and marginalises others. Worley points out that counter-narratives have emerged to challenge the orthodoxies that have arisen around punk: 'polemical essays, too, have sought to contest or undermine perceived wisdom as to punk's motives, meanings and imports' (Worley, 2017, p. 21). However, as he observes, these accounts tend towards the same selective reading of events that besets the narratives that they are arguing against. This subjectivity is an inherent feature of narratives and is a central theme of this research.

One other feature of Worley's work which is relevant here is his analysis of the 'contested meanings' of punk (Worley, 2017, p. 26). For some (such as Scritti Politti and the Pop Group) punk was 'a temporal moment that provided the impetus and the processes by which to enable access to new cultural forms and production' (Worley, 2017, p. 40), to others such as Penny Rimbaud of Crass, punk's anarchic symbolism could be instrumentalised in the fomenting of new forms of political activism and protest, and to still others it was a tabloid-baiting fashion subculture involving safety pins and ripped clothes (Worley, 2017, pp. 36-39). The meaning of punk then was dependent on a complex set of provisional and contextual factors, but an essential feature of any definition was how it could be used to ascribe value. In a similar manner to Worley with punk, this research looks at the contested meanings of independence and how it relates to the ascription and perception of value in record industry organisations.

I have separated the review into two parts, the first of which is a review of literature on Thatcherism. In considering whether the popular recording sector in the UK in the 1980s reflected or critiqued the political philosophy of Thatcherism, I must first examine what Thatcherism is; the scope and limitations of any definitions of it, and areas where ambiguities exist regarding its coherence.

2.1. 'A bogey which does not exist': Discourses around Thatcherism

As the legacy of Margaret Thatcher and her political philosophy are re-examined and reinterpreted in the light of posterity, debates persist over to what extent that Thatcherism can be seen to demonstrate a coherent set of principles or whether her leadership of the country embodied the short-term crisis management that office generally entails. One of the keys to the electoral success of the Conservative party historically has been its protean ability to adapt to circumstances in pursuit of power, and its relative lack of ideological rigidity in comparison to its competitors for office (most notably, the Labour party). There are various examples of this adaptive capacity in relation to the three general election victories of Margaret Thatcher and, of course, Thatcher and her political allies sometimes proved willing to defer the process of ideological regeneration while pursuing the short-term goal of winning office. Nevertheless, despite noting the various contradictions inherent in the policies of the Thatcher government, most commentators still generally hold that Thatcherism was 'a

moral and ideological project which set out to release new energies and produce cultural change' (Hewison, 1997, p. 210). This is an orthodoxy which suits both opponents and acolytes of Thatcherism, however, critiques of the notion of the ideological unity of Thatcherism started to emerge early on during her term in office. Martin Rutherford in a 1983 review of Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques' *The Politics of Thatcherism* rebukes the authors for creating a 'bogey which does not exist' (Rutherford, 1983, p. 44), the bogey being Thatcherism. While acknowledging Hall and Jacques as the originators of the term, Rutherford argues that in areas such as economic management and industrial policy, the government has done little to suggest a break with the past and, indeed, cites the substantial rescue funds provided by the government for British Leyland and the British steel industry as evidence that 'they are not yet willing to leave British industry to the rigours of market processes' (Rutherford, 1983, p. 43). Rutherford describes it as a 'habit of mind' (perhaps implying that it is a particular habit of mind of Marxists) to 'think in terms of ideologies, not individuals' (Rutherford, 1983, p. 44). Borrowing a phrase used by Andrew Gamble to describe the previous Labour administration, he suggests that Thatcher's first term in office has been characterised by 'defensive management of short-term crises' (Rutherford, 1983, p. 43). Peter Riddell, another leading commentator on the politics of the Thatcher era, is similarly critical of the monolithic view of 'Thatcherism' set out in Marxism Today: 'Hindsight often provides the coherence and clarity denied to contemporaries. To talk, as the New Marxists do, of a coherent hegemonic project, or of the Thatcher project is meaningless as well as absurd' (Goodwin, 1998, p. 9).

Peter Goodwin raises two important questions in relation to the idea of Thatcherism as a 'new and distinct political project' (Goodwin, 1998, p. 9). Firstly, to what extent is it new and distinct? Secondly, to what extent can it really be regarded as a 'project'? Did Thatcherism constitute a distinct break from the type of Conservatism that preceded it and did the Thatcher government ever really pursue 'clear and consistent ideological goals'? (Goodwin, 1998, p. 9).

Nigel Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer for much of the Thatcher administration, and a committed proponent of Thatcherite economic policies, was adamant that the approach taken by the Thatcherites was indeed new and motivated by a desire for ideological paradigm disruption: 'Our chosen course does represent a distinct and self-

conscious break from the predominantly social democratic assumptions that have hitherto underlain policy in post-war Britain' (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 13).

Moreover, despite his criticism of the New Marxists, Riddell does go on to make some concessions to those casting the government of Margaret Thatcher in terms of ideology rather than pragmatism:

> The new Marxists may be right to see the Thatcherism of the late 1980s as a deliberate attempt to replace the post-war social democratic consensus and to create an economic and political constituency for capitalist values and aspirations. But that has been very much a second and third-term phenomenon. That was not what the Conservatives were about in opposition or in their first term, up to 1983. The radicalism of the late 1980s has developed on the basis of earlier political successes (Goodwin, 1998, pp. 9-10).

This sense of the incremental nature of the changes wrought by Margaret Thatcher is supported by Martin Cloonan in *Popular Music and the State* as is Lawson's suggestion of a shift away from a social democratic consensus:

> Although the first Thatcher administration (1979-83) proceeded with some caution, as the 1980s wore on, British government policy moved away from the Keynesian consensus towards marketisation. This meant cuts in public funding (in order to decrease reliance on the State), the selling off of nationalised industries and the de/re-regulation of a number of industries (Cloonan, 2007, p. 16).

However, while it is true that the government's consolidation of power through three successive general election victories allowed them to push through measures which can be seen as ideologically motivated, the radicalism of Thatcherism is called into question in that one of its central tenets - the belief in the need for monetarism over Keynesian economic policies - had been expressed by her Labour predecessor as Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan. As previously noted, Rutherford saw the Labour administration from 1974-1979 as having been defined by 'the defensive management of short-term crises.' One such crisis occurred in 1976 and was to have profound long-term consequences for the Labour Party and British politics, generally. A run on the pound, indicating a collapse of confidence in sterling, forced the Labour Chancellor of the exchequer, Dennis Healey,

to introduce a range of measures which looked remarkably close to monetarism. Tight restrictions on government expenditure, control of the money supply, wage restraints and a move towards achieving a balanced budget, all suggested that the tide had turned away from Keynesianism: 'Keynesian now appeared to be a busted flush: a one-way street to hyperinflation and political instability' (Gamble, 1994, p. 10). Furthermore, the economic crisis was such that the government felt compelled to approach the International Monetary Fund (the IMF) for a $3.9 billion loan in 1976. The IMF creditors insisted on cuts in public spending and a reduction of the budget deficit as a condition of the loan. The economic picture would improve somewhat the following year (partly due to new revenues from North Sea oil) but the events of 1976 represented a momentous turn in British economic policy. Proponents of the prominent neoliberal thinker Milton Friedman (of which Margaret Thatcher was one) had found their moment and would find their natural home in the Conservative Party. However, it is worth noting that the first moves away from the post-war Keynesian consensus and towards the restoration of 'sound money’ (Gamble, 1994, p. 46) occurred under a Labour administration. Monetarism, the defining feature of Thatcherite economic policy predated the government of Margaret Thatcher. As Gamble observes: ‘much of the replacement of a Keynesian by a monetarist policy regime was the work of the Labour government in response to the crisis in the world economy between 1974 and 1976’ (Gamble, 1994, p. 99). Lest there be any doubt of the significance of these new measures and the ideological shift that they represented, the Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, addressing the Labour Party in 1976 was unequivocal in his rejection of Keynesian economic remedies:

> We used to think you could spend your way out of recession and increase employment by boosting government spending. I tell you, in all candour, that that option no longer exists. And in so far as it ever did exist, it only worked on each occasion since the war… by injecting a bigger dose of inflation into the economy, followed by a higher level of unemployment as the next step. We have just escaped from the highest rate of inflation that this country has known. We have not yet escaped from the consequences, high unemployment. This is the history of the last twenty years (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 127).

The Conservatives would attack Labour for resorting to monetarism on the grounds that it was prompted by desperation not ideological conviction and that only the Conservatives could be trusted to see through the necessary economic reforms to the end. The implication was that Labour would revert to some form of Keynesianism at the earliest opportunity, undermining any positive advances that the new economic policies would bring (and indeed, while still in office Labour would attempt to roll back on some of the reforms). Furthermore, the government's attempts to impose deflationary policies in order to revive Britain's ailing economy led to internal division within the Labour Party, not least because it was seen to have been, in part, imposed externally, as a condition of the IMF loan. As Evans notes, the Conservatives were successful in exploiting the situation of a Labour government 'needing to go cap in hand to international bankers' (Evans, 2004, p. 11). More problematically, the trade unions resented Callaghan's adoption of monetarist policies and would express this resentment during the winter of 1978-79, the so-called 'winter of discontent' when they would reject the government's offer of another restraint on wages and launch a spate of strikes. The 'social contract', which supposedly placed Labour alone as the party in the position to manage the trade unions was badly exposed and, as Evans observes, the generally anti-Labour press 'gleefully stoked' an increasing mood of popular hostility to the unions. It was in this context that Margaret Thatcher would come to power in May 1979 and initiate the set of policies which would become known as Thatcherism, however, as Riddell observes: 'If there was a Thatcher experiment, it was launched by Dennis Healey' (Gamble, 1994, p. 200). As has been previously noted, Thatcherism can be broadly viewed as being comprised of two distinct philosophical traditions, those of economic liberalism and social conservatism. Keith Joseph, as observed by Somerville (1992), was a primary influence on both ideological strands. In a speech at Edgbaston in Birmingham on October 19, 1974, he launched scathing attacks on various aspects of the 'permissive society', decried the infiltration of universities by the left-wing, and paid tribute to the self-appointed moral crusader Mary Whitehouse who had launched a campaign against the increasing prevalence of sex on television. Somewhere towards the end of the speech he suggested that in order to preserve the 'natural stock', women from lower social and educational backgrounds should be encouraged to practice birth control. The speech with its none-too-subtle promotion of eugenics was damaging to Joseph and his attempt to rectify matters in a Times article

three days later did little to alleviate criticism, particularly given its depiction of working-class single mothers: ‘They are producing problem children, the future unmarried mothers, denizens of our borstals, subnormal educational establishments, prisons, hostels for drifters' (Somerville, 1992, p. 99). The reaction to Joseph’s speech and subsequent attempt at justification was fatal to his hopes of the Conservative leadership and is widely regarded as precipitating Margaret Thatcher’s decision to run in his stead, but most of the sentiments expressed would have been shared by a substantial section of the Conservative party membership. Indeed, Vinen suggests that the right was more appalled at the idea of handing out free contraceptives to working class teenagers than any other historically dubious connotations (Vinen, 2009, p. 67). The socially conservative wing of the Conservative party (and, indeed the socially conservative part of society generally) had become increasingly dismayed by the relative success, originating in the 1960s, of a number of diverse but inter-related progressive movements which sought changes on various factors including: the liberalisation of censorship laws; the shifting of attitudes towards personal and particularly, sexual morality; the emergence of a radical counter-culture which promoted alternative ways of living and seemed to reject the traditional model of the family unit; and the emergence of a radical feminism which sought to redefine the role of women in society, particularly in relation to motherhood. Narratives of a society in decline underpinned conservative criticism of ‘the permissive society’ and, as Kavanagh notes, a range of antagonists were identified and vilified in the mainstream media and in political discourses through the 1980s: ‘Responsibility for this moral decline is fastened on the leaders of the counterculture, particularly progressive teachers, social workers, lenient magistrates, and race relations advisers. This wing of the New Right is concerned above all with social order’ (Kavanagh, 1990, p.106). There will be a more thorough examination of the influence of the 1960s counter-culture on popular music culture in the 1980s in later chapters, and particularly the way its veneration of individual freedom managed to present a major challenge to the central tenets of social conservatism while simultaneously providing a philosophical underpinning to the economic liberalism of the New Right. It is worth noting for now that the political activism of popular musicians in the 70s and the 80s, notably Rock against Racism and Red Wedge, which promoted socially liberal, progressive ideas, was opposed by dominant, reactionary forces. In short, the musicians were not pushing at an open door

but rather were pitting themselves against equally organised and institutionally more powerful opponents including the majority of the mainstream media. The extent to which Thatcher's socially conservative allies, particularly those on the Christian right, were ultimately satisfied or disappointed with Thatcherism is open to debate. Martin Durham for example, writing in 1993, suggested that 'while the government has gone further with such issues than we might have expected, the policing of sexuality is not a central element of Thatcherism in power' (Durham, 1993, p. 59). However, what is apparent from analysis of the Prime Minister's interviews and speeches throughout her long political career is a willingness to frame her belief system in Judeo-Christian terms, as evidenced by a Sunday Times interview in February 1983 where she observed that the importance of the 1944 Education Act, which provided for religious education in schools, was that it provided the education of children with a moral underpinning:

> The state recognises that you really, I think, cannot have a free society unless there is acceptance of certain standards of values. And those I would say are based inherently on Judaism and Christianity. The acceptance of those principles, whether you accept the religions or not, I mean, I think one of the differences between them at times earlier in this century and the last, whether you were a Christian or Jewish or not, you accepted certain standards of values. Those really do come from a mixture I suppose of classical values of the Old Testament and the New Testament (Sunday Times, February 22, 1983).

The notion of freedom here is once again the central aspect of Thatcher's vision although this time it is conditional upon accepting a Judeo-Christian world view rather than the more frequently cited 'rule of law'. It is also significant that she refers to a time 'earlier in this century and the last', presumably alluding to a time before the 1960s, and, indeed, perhaps as far back as the Victorian era, whose values she often enthusiastically espoused; for example, in a 1983 speech to the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce on the occasion of its 200th birthday:

> The other day I appeared on a certain television programme. And I was asked whether I was trying to restore 'Victorian values'. I said straight out, 'yes I was'. And I am. And if you ask me whether I believe in the puritan work ethic, I'll give you an equally straight answer to that too. I believe that honesty and thrift and

> reliability and hard work and a sense of responsibility for your fellow men are not simply Victorian values. They do not get out of date (January 28, 1983).

By implementing Wheeldon's typology of discursive resources (see methodology), one can demonstrate that the notion of Thatcherism serves a narrative purpose, a sense-making function of a turbulent political era. An analysis of rhetoric around Thatcherism, and the means by which words were used to create a connotational penumbra in discourses around Thatcherism will be central to this research. Analysis of Thatcher's speeches has yielded evidence of the frequency with which 'freedom' was used as an antonym of 'socialism', a word frequently associated with 'collectivism' another word used to convey highly negative sentiments, and often used in opposition to concepts of individual or personal responsibility.

2.2. 'I'm free to do what I want'[15]: Collective Provision vs Individual Freedom

The following part of the literature review looks at debates around the dichotomies of collectivism and individualism, key rhetorical devices in Thatcherism, and ones which were grounded in the writings of Friedrich von Hayek and the school of political thought which would come to be known as neoliberalism:

> And yet the collectivist ethos has made individuals excessively prone to rely on the State to provide for the well-being of their neighbours and indeed of themselves. There cannot be a welfare system in any satisfactory sense which tends, in this way, to break down personal responsibility and the sense of responsibility to family, neighbourhood and community. The balance has moved too far towards collectivism (Margaret Thatcher Speech to the Conservative Party Political Centre Summer School 1979).

David Harvey in *A Brief Guide to Neoliberalism* examines a variety of student movements of the 1960s in western countries and suggests that their emphasis on identity politics and individual liberty (as opposed to the traditional left's prioritisation of social justice) proved fertile ground for the spread of neoliberal political theory and its message of economic and, therefore, political freedom. He observes that notions of 'freedom' had frequently been valorised in popular music culture and, indeed, as

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[15] This is a lyric from "I'm Free" by the Rolling Stones released as a single in October 1965. It was recorded by Bellshill band The Soup Dragons in 1990 and released on Jazz Summers' Big Life label.

Bernice Martin noted, the 'permissive society' of the 60s, so despised by Margaret Thatcher, had been, at least in part, responsible for clearing the way for the new consumer society. The counter-culture, she wrote, 'contains elements which are increasingly appropriate to a complex, mobile and privatised social system in which ego rather than any "natural tribal" group forms the basic unit' (Hewison, 1997, p. 213). Mick Farren, in the NME in February 1980, explicitly linked the rise of the Libertarian Party in the United States with the counter-culture of the 60s: 'All in all, the Libertarians have grabbed the whole set of those Utopian slogans which, a dozen years ago, the Hippies were so sure were going to transform civilisation as they knew it' (NME, Feb 16 1980, p. 17). Marianne Gullestad, writing in 2004, argued that individualism had become the dominant paradigm socially and culturally in western liberal democracies and that its various value concepts had triumphed over a countervailing set of values more associated with collectivism:

> Individualization implies that the discourse of individual rights and liberties has become hegemonic, and that there is a foregrounding of specific value concepts such as freedom, rights, choice, independence, individuality, uniqueness, and achievements at the expense of the concepts of dependence, obedience, duty, togetherness, and community (Gullestad, 2004, p. 219).

The connection that Farren makes between the prevalence of libertarian values in cultural discourses at the outset of the eighties and the social permissiveness of the sixties, which found its purest cultural expression in the form of rock groups such as The Rolling Stones, is made elsewhere as will be discussed in Chapter 8. For now, by looking at a different cultural industry, television, it is possible to highlight the inherent compatibility of popular music culture (and industry) with neoliberal ideas.

Peter Goodwin's *Television under the Tories 1979-1997* provides useful insights into several broadcasting policies enacted by the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, notably the Broadcasting Act of 1990, which serves as a useful example of the ambiguous nature of Thatcherism's putative neoliberalism. Following the 1986 Peacock Report which espoused enthusiastic free-market views in broadcasting and challenged the protected status of the BBC, the Home Office released a 1988 White Paper called *Broadcasting in the 90s: Competition, Choice and Quality*, which advocated a variety of things, including 'lighter touch' regulation of broadcasting and the opening

up of new licenses in TV and radio to a bidding process. The more open and competitive broadcasting market would be achieved ‘without detriment to programme standards and quality’ (Goodwin, 1998, p. 101). Herein lies the conflict between ‘competition’ and ‘choice’, both core concepts of neoliberalism, and ‘quality’ which, with its concerns for standards of public taste and decency, effectively imposed restrictions on the market.

Goodwin detects here an internal government conflict between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Home Office and tensions between ‘the desire for heightened authoritarian controls over the content of television and the desire to open it up to the market’ (Goodwin, 1998, p. 102). Neither of these tendencies runs contrary to most general definitions of Thatcherism (for example, Lawson’s).and this conflict serves as a useful paragon of the contradictions inherent in what is sometimes regarded as a fully coherent and monolithic political philosophy.

In fact, Goodwin considers the structure of British television as being particularly antithetical to neoliberal ideas on deregulation and restrictive practices:

> The new neo-liberalism posed a challenge across the social and economic spectrum from health to transport. The structure of television’s first wave had been established in precisely the period of the dominance of state intervention and welfarism, against which the new neo-liberalism defined itself. So, for that reason alone, television was directly in the firing-line of the neo-liberal challenge (Goodwin, 1998, p. 8).

Popular music, on the other hand, had emerged under a somewhat different set of circumstances and had been imbued with a distinctly entrepreneurial streak, especially from the late 50s onwards, and the free market seemed more naturally suited to an industry that had crossed natural borders far more fluidly than the television industry. As Cloonan notes:

> This belief that pop and the free market were inextricably linked formed a key part of the Conservatives’ attitude towards the music industries. It was also part of what had become an industries’ common sense. As Music Week (27 September 1988) noted, ‘the music industry’ has traditionally been ‘instinctively suspicious of government intervention’ and Miles Copeland, owner of IRS

> records, called pop ‘free enterprise at its best’ (Denselow 1989: 223) following a speech to the Conservative party conference in 1985 (Cloonan, 2007, p. 21).

Frith and Street, writing in *Living Marxism*, also note the innate tendencies of popular music towards entrepreneurship (as well as referring to the ubiquitous Copeland):

> Most pop musicians are, in practice (as the few public Conservatives in rock, like Police manager Miles Copeland point out) small business people, who justify their success in terms of hard work and individual enterprise - their wealth is 'deserved' (Frith and Street, June 1986, p. 29).

In an interview with the Police in the NME in April 1980 (carried out while the band were on tour in India), Copeland, the band’s manager, outlined the means by which he believes rock music can spread Western, by which he meant Capitalist, values: ‘I believe in the word Capitalism in a different way to maybe how some English people would use the term. In England, the word means oppression and everything like that. To me, it means freedom of the individual’ (NME, April 12 1980, p.57).

Stahl (2013) talks of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors in the dissemination of neoliberal theory and practice. The ‘push’ factors can be witnessed in increasing government legislation undermining long-established workers’ rights both in terms of employment law, and the safety net of social welfare programs. The ‘pull’ factors can be seen as cultural, promoting individualisation and deinstitutionalisation as necessary conditions for the advancement of individual liberty and freedom. Stahl uses the term ‘prefiguration’ suggesting that the typical status of the musician as worker (characterised by instability and risk which is reformulated and valorised as autonomy and flexibility) not only foreshadows the typical status of the worker of the future in any industry but that it exerts a moral and normative force which depicts this status as desirable (Stahl, 2013).

John Street observes in popular music culture an innate tendency towards liberalism: ‘It is, of course, important that record companies operate in a market economy which values the “free competition” of liberalism’ (Street, 1986, p. 183), however, he also notes that this tendency is intrinsically ambiguous:

> It is not surprising that the music’s organisation and content reflect liberal ideas. But it is too easy to argue that the meaning of the music is forged by these facts

> alone. Not only are there clear tensions between the liberalism of, say, record executive and the musician, there are also contradictions within liberalism itself (Street, 1986, p. 183).

Negus also points to competing tendencies in the ideologies of musicians, drawn to contending and overlapping practices, which resist easy categorisation:

> Musicians are notoriously individualistic, continually questing for 'autonomy' and 'independence' and desiring the freedom to pursue their own whims. Yet at the same time musicians are continually contributing to solidarities in a way that dissolves any simple individual/ collective dichotomy or pattern of us/ them musical discrimination (Negus, 1999, p. 183).

This part of the review has examined discourses around individualism and collectivism in popular music academic accounts. The political philosophy of Thatcherism was underpinned by a rhetorical insistence on the primacy of the freedom of the individual (which sometimes met ideological opposition in the social conservatism of much of the Conservative party). It was observed that the philosophy of popular music culture (and, indeed, its industrial frameworks) also traditionally support individualism and it is eminently compatible with neoliberal ideas. The next part will look at literature around independent and major record labels, common formulations of them as ideologically dichotomous, and some areas of dispute around this formulation.

2.3 'You can't put a price on freedom': Discourses around independent and major record labels

> Independent record companies have long held a cultural status that far exceeds the actual economic impact they have in the market-place. Independent record companies or 'indies' have become understood as innovative and creative oases for new or unconventional musicians in the midst of a capital-driven and profit-oriented record business (Lee, 1995, p. 13).

Stanley (2013) reiterates a widely accepted view regarding the influence of independent record labels on popular music culture (Gillett 1971, Guaralnick 1986, Peterson 1990, Hesmondhalgh 1997, Byrne 2012): 'The greatest periods in pop tend to coincide with the pre-eminence of independent record labels' (Stanley, 2013, p. 278).

From a set of hugely significant post-war American labels such as Chess, Atlantic, Sun, Stax and Motown through to a number of successful and enduring UK-based labels which followed in the wake of Chris Blackwell's Island Records (for example, Immediate, Chrysalis and Virgin) independents are generally regarded as being at the cutting-edge of new technologies, facilitated by their ability to move quickly and respond to changes in popular music culture as they happen, often compelled by economic imperatives to innovate, and operating in contrast to the slow-moving and bureaucracy-laden majors. Steve Knopper, in discussing the Seattle label Subpop, uses the metaphor of shipping to depict the 'indies' as outgunned and outmanned, relying on their wits alone, to survive in the treacherous waters of the contemporary music business:

> These kinds of independent labels are proving that they can navigate industry problems with far more nimbleness and creativity than multinational corporations like Warner and EMI. They're unencumbered, for example, with the baggage that goes with producing one or two multimillion-selling CDs in order to pay for the smaller releases. The smaller labels don't have to show quarterly results to shareholders or corporate boards of directors (Knopper, 2009, pp. 246-247).

A romantic narrative has emerged of independents locked in a perpetual struggle with the majors, driven on only by a *genuine* passion for music as opposed to the corporate behemoths, whose sole motivation is profit:

> The smaller labels that survived still relied on their love of the form and their gut instincts, and, because they were actually paying attention, sometimes they hooked a big one. They knew when something moved them, but they didn't have the same financial resources and marketing manpower as the big boys (Byrne, 2012, p. 212).

Hesmondhalgh (1999) points to discourses around independence attributing cultural value to these organisations because they were 'less bureaucratic and supposedly more in touch with the rapid turnover of styles and sounds characteristic of popular music at its best' (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35). However, as he points out, despite the independents' hip and artist-friendly credentials, 'such companies were often, in fact,

even more exploitative of their musicians than were the major corporations' (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35). The perceived dichotomy between indies and majors is bound up in long-standing debates around art and commerce and notions of authenticity and is, upon closer scrutiny, far more problematic than the idea of 'majors' and 'independents' as inherently positive or negative words allows. Hesmondhalgh discusses the 'breath-taking rip-offs' many of the early American rhythm and blues labels visited upon their artists and depicts the founders of British independents of the 60s as being more motivated by an entrepreneurial spirit than of any ideological re-imagining of the relations between companies and artists:

> The first generation of British independent companies in the field of rock music was comprised mainly of go-it-alone businessman, influenced by some of the cultural values developed in the 1960s, but relatively uninterested in any thoroughgoing democratisation of the social relations of production (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 256).

Furthermore, the idea that independents have, traditionally, been above the grubby pursuit of profit has always been something of a myth, as outlined by Peter Guaralnick with regards to Atlantic Records, which was founded in 1947 by Ahmet Ertegun to release rhythm and blues records, before becoming one of the biggest and most influential labels in recorded music history: 'Atlantic was nurtured by a combination of creative enterprise, cultural sophistication, business acumen, and a good taste that would have been rare in any field' (Guaralnick, 1986, p. 55).

Matt Stahl in a presentation I attended in Glasgow in December 2015 alluded to the sharp practice of Atlantic in relation to Ruth Brown, an R & B artist so successful in the 1950s that Atlantic was informally known as 'The house that Ruth built', and, indeed, in an interview with Canada's Western News in 2015, he explained how Atlantic routinely claimed its former star acts were indebted to them, thus justifying their non-payment of royalties:

> Ruth Brown had a string of hits that were very important to establishing Atlantic's profitability and reputation in the early 1950s. When she parted ways with them in the 1960s, when new forms of music were becoming more popular

> and she was fading, they told her she owed them $26,000 (Western News, Nov 5, 2015).

The image of the independent as a scrupulous paragon of integrity was also frequently challenged in the 1980s even as the trope of the virtuous indie was at its height. As Factory Records boss Tony Wilson outlined in speaking to the *Umbrella Independent Labels Seminar* in November 1986, in licensing product in territories outside the UK it was generally independents who were guilty of the most underhanded business practices:

> We were discussing the situation of the independents and an hour into this long discussion - there were people from all over the world there - one or two of these people present began attacking those labels present who licensed abroad to majors. There was a great righteousness in the room, 'How dare you license to these majors, you're meant to be an independent.' Factory for example who I work for, we licence all over the world, in half the territories with small independent companies, and in places like Japan with Nippon-Columbia. These people were getting very irate, and I sat there feeling bad and confused, but I couldn't think why, and I looked across the room and there was Peter Walmsley of Rough Trade, and he was going through exactly the same feeling. About four minutes into this diatribe, I think it was Peter who realised why he didn't feel that guilty and explained that in the years we have been operating - and this certainly goes for Factory, and I believe Rough Trade as well - we have probably been ripped off about six times, and all six have been independents in other countries. Badly cheated, stolen from… only by independents, the majors might fuck you around but they don't cheat you in these territories, they don't have any system for cheating you whereas independents do, the point being there is no moral imperative, there is no moral condition in the independent record business, and I didn't feel and nor did Peter Walmsley, any more guilt after we had reminded ourselves of all those awful experiences we had had (MW, Nov 15 1986, p. 6).

Ray Conroy, who as a member of Colourbox was involved in creating the single 'Pump up the Volume' released on 4AD as M/A/R/R/S in 1987 (a record which was the Cartel's first number one) was even more scathing in his appraisal of independent record labels:

> At the end of the day, with indie record labels, it's thievery in terms of the contracts they give out, and I share Robin Guthrie's view on that. They tie you up for ever, and don't pay you properly. And the money they made out of it funded the next five years for 4AD. Martin (Mills) wasn't helpful - they still couldn't find the original contract that was signed. We liked Ivo and thought he was our friend, so it felt like a big betrayal (Aston, 2013, p. 245).

Nevertheless, despite such countervailing views, central to discourses around record labels in popular music culture was and is the idea that such labels are genuinely 'artist-oriented' and that the concept of 'independence' (and related words such as 'freedom', 'autonomy' and 'control') is implicitly positive. The DJ and owner of Bumako label, Jenifa Mayanja, provides a sense of what independence means and what relation it bears to commerce: 'What does it mean to be an independent label? It just means that, yeah, you do have freedom … you can't put a price on freedom' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2020, p. 6).

However, as observed by John Street, the apparent freedom of independents has often been illusory, typically constrained by the superior market power of the major labels:

> Although the independents are relatively free of the bureaucratic conservatism of their larger competitors, and therefore can afford to be more flexible and experimental, they are limited to the degree to which they can give effect to these advantages' (Street, 1986, p. 94).

Street goes further, in arguing that the notion of genuinely independent labels has often been something of a 'misnomer' and that independents have rarely enjoyed real autonomy. The freedom of independent labels, historically, has often been compromised by the necessity of using major label distribution: 'an independent that uses a larger company for its production and distribution may have to make concessions' (Street, 1986, p. 94). This view is supported in Simon Napier-Bell's account of the relationship between Charisma Records, set up in the late 1960s by Tony Stratton-Smith (manager of the Nice), and Polydor:

> Only the choice of artists remained outside Polydor's influence; everything else was theirs. They took profits from distributing Charisma's records in the UK and

> from selling the overseas rights to other companies. The same applied to every other company Polydor financed (Napier-Bell, 2002, p. 128).

Napier-Bell recounts Polydor's drive during this period to establish UK-based subsidiaries in a bid to dominate the UK market, which lead to the establishment of Reaction Records, under the putative control of Robert Stigwood, and Track Records, under The Who manager, Kit Lambert. It was useful for the majors to tap into the cultural capital of 'independence'[16], however, genuine autonomy was virtually non-existent. The numerous independent record labels that emerged in the UK in the late 1970s and 1980s (including such iconic names as Rough Trade, Factory, One Little Indian and Creation) attempted to break with these characteristics, particularly the reliance on major labels in the crucial field of distribution and were able to make their own significant contributions to the history of popular music. Furthermore, discourses around popular music journalism and academic writing ascribe implicit ideological characteristics to the UK independent labels of the post-punk era. This ideology is generally defined in terms of an opposition to corporate power alongside a resistance to the political philosophy of Thatcherism. David Hesmondhalgh uses the term *ideology of independence* (1997) in relation to independent cultural production in the UK in the late 70s and early 80s, a term which can be seen to be analogous to what Matt Stahl in *Unfree Masters* calls the *ideology of autonomous art* (2013) that is to say, that perception of the conditions of production and distribution play a role in establishing the cultural value of music. The new breed of independent record label would aspire to a different kind of relationship with artists, as evident in the different contractual practices they would employ:

> At Rough Trade, Mute and Factory, new ways of dealing with artists were developed which challenged the standard arrangements in the music industry. Deals with musicians were often on a 50:50 bases, rather than the usual single-figure percentage royalty rates. Long-term contracts were rejected in favour of deals based on personal trust. The aim of such deals was to be as 'musician-centred' as possible contracts were avoided on the grounds that the standard

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[16] Indeed, Richard King quotes a major label VP in 2007 who recognises the commercial value of indie authenticity: 'that aspirational indie vibe is pretty important when reeling the 25-35s in' (King, 2012, p. xvii).

> contracts were loaded in favour of companies and that if the personal trust between musicians and companies broke down, there was no point in pursuing the relationship, anyway (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 261).

The importance of maintaining control over the means of production and distribution was central to the ideology of independence as indicated by the creation of a separate indie chart in 1980 eligibility for which required a specific set of conditions, as outlined by indie chart compiler, Barry Lazell:

> To have indie status… a record - or the label on which it was released - had to be one which was independently distributed: produced, manufactured, marketed and put into shops without recourse to the corporate framework of the major record companies (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 46).

The Indie Chart then defined the independent sector in opposition to the corporate world of the majors, a manifestation of the distinct industrial differences between the different types of organisations, but also of a sense of inherent ideological disparities. The key feature that set true independents apart, and thus qualified them for entry to the independent chart was distribution (although this was frequently contested in popular music discourses through the eighties). I will now look at relevant literature relating to popular music record industry distribution.

2.4. 'Collective control of entry': Record Industry Distribution

There is remarkably little academic literature examining the subject of record industry distribution and significantly less dealing with distribution in the UK. Even in an analysis which sets out to examine the structures of the music industry in some detail such as Negus' *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* distribution tends to be absorbed into accounts of record label organisation and structure and given a somewhat superficial treatment. A variety of journalistic books published about UK independent record labels in the 1980s explore, to varying degrees, the importance of independent distribution although this is never the primary focus. These accounts also tend to prioritise accounts of the rise and demise of Rough Trade distribution and the Cartel at the expense of other important independent distribution companies of the time such as Pinnacle and Spartan; presumably because the Cartel allows for more compelling narratives and provides more striking protagonists and antagonists. Such qualifications notwithstanding, the best

accounts of 1980s UK independent distribution are provided in David Cavanagh's *The Creation Records Story: my Magpie Eyes Are Hungry for the Prize (*2000) and Richard King's How Soon Is Now? The Madmen and the Mavericks who made Independent Music 1975-2005 (2012).

The most useful academic examinations I have found of distribution have been Peterson and Berger's *Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of Popular Music* which looks at the record industry in the USA from circa 1950-1975 and sheds light on the means by which major record labels use the channels of distribution to control the production and consumption of popular music, and the work of K.D. Tennent, particularly, *A Distribution Revolution: Changes in Music Distribution in the UK 1950-76*. Peterson and Berger set out to examine the orthodoxy of culture being cyclical in nature, particularly in terms of relatively long periods of cultural homogeneity being disrupted periodically by shorter periods of intense creativity. They draw the conclusion that 'periods of market concentration are found to correspond to periods of homogeneity, periods of competition to periods of diversity' (Peterson and Berger, 1975, p. 158).

Another way of viewing this is that the periods of diversity occur when the major labels' stranglehold over the means of production and distribution loosen a little to allow independent labels market entry. That 'the greatest periods in pop tend to coincide with the pre-eminence of independent record labels' (Stanley, 2013, p. 278) is a view that has become widely accepted (see also Gillett 1971, Guaralnick 1986, Peterson 1990, Hesmondhalgh 1997, Byrne 2012) and is commonly framed in terms of innovative and risk-taking independents with nothing to lose operating, often as a consequence of economic imperative rather than ideological impulse, in a manner which serves to inspire and encourage innovation, in stark contrast to the bureaucratic and conservative majors. Peterson expresses this viewpoint elsewhere:

> The oligopolistic record companies of 1948 were bureaucratically organised with both a large number of levels in the hierarchy of authority and numerous functionally differentiated and vertically integrated departments. This is a form of organisation well suited to efficiently producing a large number of standard products. Given their collective control of entry into the popular music market, the major record firms were able to operate profitably by crafting the kind of

> music that could be produced by such a bureaucratic machine (Peterson, 1990, pp. 107-108).

Peterson and Berger compare the immediate post-war period from 1947-55, a period of market concentration (they note that the only independent record label to achieve a significant market share during this period was the Chicago-based Mercury Records), with the period from 1955 to 1959, which witnessed the arrival of rock and roll, and saw the majors being challenged by a 'spate of under-financed independent companies including Atlantic, Chess, Dot, Imperial, Monument and Sun Records' (Peterson and Berger, 1975, p. 164). The majors had, according to this analysis, maintained their dominance of the recording industry in the late 1940s and early 50s by maintaining control of two key areas which occurred 'downstream' of the production process (i.e. the part of the process involving taking the product to market): 'the four leading companies controlled the media of merchandising music and the channels for distributing records' (Peterson and Berger, 1975, p. 162). 'Merchandising' here seems to have a broadly similar meaning to promotion, and, indeed, by way of explanation, the authors describe how the majors used corporate connections to radio and movie companies to access the vital promotional channels of Broadway productions, Hollywood musicals and recorded music programmes. The second means of control of the industry was achieved by owning the means of getting product into the market: distribution channels. For a variety of reasons, including anti-trust legislation aimed primarily at the oligopolistic Hollywood film industry and the majors losing their grip on radio promotion (for reasons which relate to the advent of television), these control mechanisms were undermined through the decade and market concentration was weakened enough to allow smaller companies to access the market.

By 1958 a large number of small companies operating on a mix of job-shop and solo-production had successfully entered the market. They survived by using every means, legal and illegal, to get their records played on the air and then get copies of the records distributed to record stores quickly and in sufficient numbers. Most of the independents that survived more than two or three years and moved up in the ranks of record firms did so by crafting a sound that could be identified with the company. Motown, Stax and A&M are good examples of companies that grew in market share rivalling for a time the major companies by creating a distinctive sound (Peterson, 1990,

p. 108). The major labels' market share was reduced substantially during the years immediately following the advent of rock and roll, however, as Peterson observes, the major labels used their own heavy artillery, in the form of acquisition, in re-addressing the market disruption which had allowed the independents to achieve so much success in the late 1950s:

> The established major companies lost three-quarters of the market share, as noted above, but did not disappear. Rather they adapted to the new conditions. By the 1970s the majors had regained much of their prior market share, by, in effect, becoming financing and distribution companies for a series of divisions that were allowed to operate as independent small firms (Peterson, 1990, p.108).

A new paradigm emerged through the 1960s and into the 70s where nominally independent companies would be reliant on majors for the crucial step in the supply chain of distribution. K. D. Tennent provides a similar analysis of UK distribution during approximately the same period in 'A distribution revolution: Changes in music distribution in the UK 1950-76'. Approaching his subject from a business and industrial management perspective, Tennent observes that popular music has usually been regarded from a sociological angle, focusing on the effects of popular music on society and vice-versa. Tennent's priority is to examine *how the music reaches the consumer.* This process involves distributors and wholesalers (which Tennent sometimes appears to use interchangeably) and manufacturing. Tennent attempts to apply the theories of Alfred Chandler who wrote three influential books, *Strategy and Structure (*1962), *The Visible Hand* (1977) and *Scale and Scope* (1990), on the theory of business organisation, or what makes firms (especially large firms) successful. In *Scale and Scope*, Chandler outlined the three fundamental principles upon which the success of major companies is based:

> First investment in production facilities realises economies of scale and scope embedded in technological development. Second, investment in a marketing and distribution network delivers sales volume equivalent to the production capacity. Third, investment in managerial hierarchy is required in order to co-ordinate production and sales and to plan for future investment in these functional activities (Chandler, 1990, p. 8).

'Economies of scale' are operated by companies who rely upon volume or output to achieve cost and price advantages. Unit cost will generally diminish as scale increases and fixed costs, or overheads will tend towards being spread (and therefore reduced) over units of output. Variable costs can also be reduced per unit as operational efficiency increases. This model can be viewed as characterising the early period of the recording industry and has always been a significant feature of major labels' business model. 'Economies of scope' refers to economic models based on product diversification or 'variety over volume'. The acquisition by major labels of boutique and specialist independent labels provides an example of this. The cost for a major to use its production, manufacturing, distribution and promotional channels over several labels is less than the costs for these labels to do this independently. The Chandlerian 'scale and scope' economics paradigm, as Tennent points out has generally been regarded as more appropriate to the business approaches of U.S. and German major companies in the 20th century (with some attributing Britain's relative economic decline to insufficient investment in the three prongs of production, distribution and management), however, Tennent observes a more ambiguous picture in relation to the music industry, and in particular, distribution: 'Music required economies of scale and scope in distribution - the ability to handle a large and diverse catalogue, while also responding to the fast turnover requirements of the popular part of the industry' (Tennent, 2013, p. 328). The global consolidation of the major labels into three large groups - Universal, Sony and Warners - is a process which can be regarded in Chandlerian terms, and began in the 1960s as a reaction to the success of independent labels in the late fifties. The majors' traditional reliance on economies of scale would continue, however, the majors would become increasingly diversified, attracting specialist independent labels and operating in an increasingly wide range of market segments. The majors increasing control over wholesaling and distribution was integral to this consolidation of power in the UK and Tennent concludes that the Chandlerian model was put into practice to some degree in the UK music industry:

> Independent wholesalers were edged out of the market by the 'big four' manufacturers, which could cut transaction costs by offering market-specific distribution capabilities. Before 1965 the record companies did this by emphasising economies of scope and the speed of their response to small

> retailers. After 1965… economies of scale were more actively introduced to the equation in order that the record companies, rather than large-scale retailers, could benefit from them (Tennent, 2013, p. 342).

Tennent then concludes that the British-based major firms made an active investment in distribution, in the process 'radically re-shaping their industry' (Tennent, 2013, p. 342). This account of major label consolidation of control over distribution up to 1976 only tells part of the story. Contemporaneously, changes to the majors' approach to independent retailers would provide opportunities for a new breed of independent distributor (see chapter 9). This section reviewed the academic literature regarding record industry distribution. In Chapter 9, I will attempt to provide a definition of record industry distribution, examine further some debates and discourses around distribution that were raised in the literature review, and describe the relationship between the key stages of music industry production and consumption: production, manufacturing, distribution and retail. The purpose of this review was to frame the research questions which are broadly:

1. To what extent did UK independent record labels represent a 'collectivism' that ran ideologically contrary to the 'individualism' of Thatcherite policy?
2. What were the defining characteristics of independence in the context of popular musical recording in the UK in the late 70s and the 1980s?
3. To what extent did the political philosophy of Thatcherism and policies of the Thatcher government facilitate the development of independent labels in the UK?
4. To what extent did the independent popular music recording sector present a progressive ideological challenge to the social conservatism of Thatcherism?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Definitions of Key Terms

Throughout this thesis, the term *independent popular music recording sector* has been used to cover the diverse roles played by stakeholders and participants in the field of independent popular music recording. Although the term may seem unwieldy, and perhaps verbose, I felt that it was necessary to cover the range of activities which contributed to independent recording and that brevity was worth sacrificing for the sake of precision. Most journalistic accounts concentrate on independent record labels (just as most accounts of popular music history generally focus on record labels and artists), prioritising these types of organisations over other important service providers such as manufacturers, distributors, marketing and promotion companies and retailers, and paying only cursory attention to related functions such as live music promotion and music journalism. This can be attributed, in part at least, to the greater degree of visibility of record labels historically, which can be seen as the result of labels marketing efforts through various media channels.

Defining the term *independent* is the most elusive, as during the research it became apparent that the definitions used by stakeholders were hugely flexible and subjective. Underpinning this was a sense that independence was eminently desirable and, indeed, that it played a role in the creation of value-perception in popular music cultural organisations, among investors and consumers and thus influenced strategic and economic decision-making. Definitions varied from an industrial-organisational structure operating out with the corporate structure of the major label system (most notably in the area of distribution which had traditionally been the domain of the major labels).to a ‘sonic, stylistic phenomenon’ (Landry, Natural Music, 2020), that is a music and fashion-based genre. In fact, on some occasions, ‘independence’ was used to describe an attitude or way of seeing things regardless of record label affiliation. The contested nature of independence is one of the central themes of this research and so, I have resisted imposing a singular, dominant definition over other possible definitions.

This stems from, in part, from a phenomenological approach to the social existence of people, that the subjective nature of experience gives rise to multiple realities as observed by Denscombe:

> Reflecting the fact that the world as experienced by living human beings is something that is created through the way they interpret and give meaning to their experiences, phenomenology rejects the notion that there is one universal reality and accepts, instead, that things can be seen in different ways by different people at different times, in different circumstances, and that each alternative version needs to be recognised as being valid in its own right (Denscombe, 2003, p. 100).

Independence throughout this thesis is the word which paints a thousand pictures but what is consistent is a sense that it is something implicitly positive and, indeed, in a broader context it seems to belong to a socially and culturally agreed upon set of unambiguously positive words (‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ are other examples). It is frequently counterpointed with words which are almost exclusively deployed negatively such as ‘corporate’ and ‘bureaucratic’. The manner in which, and the reasons why, independence is seen in different ways by different people, at different times, in different circumstances are central to the study.

3.2. Research Questions

The research examines four key questions which are outlined here along with some preliminary observations on their relevance:

1. To what extent did UK independent record labels represent a ‘collectivism’ that ran ideologically contrary to the ‘individualism’ of Thatcherite policy?

The vigorous individualism espoused by Margaret Thatcher was explicitly intended to reduce an over-reliance on the state which, for her and her ideological bedfellows, was the primary cause of Britain’s myriad woes in the 1970s and was the curse of the Keynesian consensus that had dominated British politics since the end of World War 2. ‘Collectivism’ was routinely utilised as a pejorative term in Thatcher’s rhetoric, an antonym of freedom and responsibility, and a psychological and, indeed, moral impediment to the emancipatory promise of enterprise. Independent labels which

emerged in the UK in the mid-70s and through the 80s were, in common with their historical independent label predecessors, entrepreneurial by nature; *however,* through various collaborative practices, most notably the formation of the independent distribution network the Cartel, it could be argued that they repudiated the core philosophical tenet of Thatcherism.

2. What were the defining characteristics of independence in the context of popular music recording in the UK in the late 70s and the 1980s?

The definition of an independent record label that was dominant during the late 70s and through the 80s was framed, to a large degree, in the context of *what it wasn't*; that was, affiliated to a major record label. In fact, this had been, to a large extent, the definition of independent record labels throughout the history of the recording industry; however, the major organisational and industrial paradigm disruption that occurred during this period was the emergence of a number of independent record distributors. This new breed of independent record labels and distributors (which gave rise to and was driven by a growth of independent record shops), facilitated a significant cultural shift in terms of providing access to the market for cultural producers and access to cultural products for consumers. However, in popular music discourses in contemporary media sources and in retrospective journalistic accounts, the definition of independence seems to be subject to dispute and negotiation, always highly prized and frequently coveted. A discursive hierarchy of *true* independence arose which was often underpinned by ideological considerations and out-group bias rather than any core, inalienable qualities of organisations. In short, it seemed to be that independence could be conferred or withdrawn by privileged stakeholders' voices in the discursive realm of the popular music media.

3. To what extent did the political philosophy of Thatcherism and policies of the Thatcher government facilitate the development of independent labels in the UK?

The prioritisation of small businesses in an enterprise culture was a core aspect of Thatcherite economic policies and one which coincided with the profusion of independent record labels and retailers in the late 70s and 80s. In order to provide support to small business and encourage entrepreneurship (as well as to offset a huge

upsurge in unemployment caused by the government's fixation on controlling inflation), the government introduced the Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS), a scheme which incentivised start-up businesses by providing cash loans as well as offering other favourable conditions. Amongst those to take advantage of this offer were many music-related enterprises, including some of the most successful independent record labels of the era. It is rare to find anyone involved with the independent popular music sector at the time or, indeed, retrospectively who views the government of Margaret Thatcher positively, however, the EAS seems to have made a significant contribution to the development of UK independent record labels in the early-to-mid 1980s.

4. To what extent did the independent popular music recording sector present a progressive ideological challenge to the social conservatism of Thatcherism?

The concept of Thatcherism, in common with most reductive linguistic and conceptual constructs, tends to oversimplify a disparate and varied set of beliefs and actions, many of which were provisional and contextual and serve to problematise any sense of a monolithic political philosophy. That said, it is possible to detect in the policies and political philosophy of Margaret Thatcher, a social conservatism running simultaneously with an economic liberalism which valourised entrepreneurship. This social conservatism manifested itself in a reactionary approval of 'Victorian values' as well as in policy decisions which undermined progress in areas such as gay rights and race relations. Many of the independent record labels which emerged in the wake of punk invoked a progressive and emancipatory rhetoric and opposition to the government of Margaret Thatcher was routinely expressed by musicians in the popular music press of the period.

Several methodological approaches suggested themselves which I will consider presently. My initial focus was on carrying out interviews with various participants in independent cultural production (particularly in relation to the recording industry).in the 1980s, and, indeed, this is still a key part of the research methodology. However, as well as this, I have embarked upon an analysis of discourses of independence and politics in contemporary popular music-related media, particularly the NME whose readership was primarily comprised of fans/ music consumers, and the music industry trade journal Music Week (whose readership consisted mainly of music industry

professionals). This is in part due to the problems of reliability presented by oral history wherein, consciously or otherwise, interviewees are likely to be susceptible to reformulations of conventional wisdom and received opinion. The interrogating of orthodoxies around the sector of independent popular music recording is a central theme of this research study and so, it was vital to have a significant counterpoint to the self-narrativisation that inevitably ensues in interviews. Furthermore, the rhetoric of independence still retains a cultural value and, therefore, an economic value to many of the participants in the independent cultural sector whom I interviewed, contributing, for example, to the brand identity of record labels and instrumental in the sale of back catalogues. This being the case, interviews were, intentionally or not, likely to be affected by performative messaging and retrospective sense-making. The problem of the practiced interviewee was something I was conscious of during the research process, where the experience of being interviewed is so common for some individuals that responses can tend towards glib and unreflective truisms even in discussing matters which are complex and multifaceted. Moreover, in conducting research into a period so extensively covered in popular music journalistic accounts there lies a danger that much of the responses will tend towards conventional narratives and points of dispute or counter-narratives will be blunted by groupthink and collective memory, as one interviewee, Gerard Love, formerly of Scottish band Teenage Fanclub (who released their first record in 1990), observes:

> I think you eventually just maybe read about it - you just condense it so much - that you lose the actual realistic texture to it, it becomes like a headline. It condenses and condenses until it becomes so bland. But that’s memory, isn’t it? Memory processes things that way (Love, 2017).

The pages of music newspapers from the 1980s were thus a far more ‘neutral’ and ‘unbiased’ source of data on the themes I intended to research, untroubled as they were, with the potential of negative historical revisionism and retrospectively agreed-upon conventional wisdom. That is not to say that they were neutral and unbiased in themselves but rather that the character and purpose of the bias that was displayed *at the time* was of particular interest in this study.

3.3. A qualitative approach: Social construction of reality

The research utilised a qualitative approach throughout as a means of examining the experiences and perceptions of individuals in the world - their lived experience - and how it relates to the production of meaning. Qualitative research is a broad approach encompassing a diverse set of social research methods in a wide variety of disciplines, however, a common feature of such methods is the interpretive nature of the analysis of data, as Denscombe notes:

> Qualitative data, whether words or images, are the product of a process of interpretation. The data only become data when they are used as such. The data do not exist 'out there' waiting to be discovered, as would be the case if a positivistic approach were adopted but are produced by the way they are interpreted and used by researchers (Denscombe, 2003, p. 268).

This interpretive component of qualitative research is its point of departure from positivistic approaches and an assumption that the researcher's beliefs, attitudes and values will play some role in the analysis of data is implicit in the research process.

A phrase used throughout the research is 'the social construction of reality', in keeping with Berger and Luckmann's assertion that 'reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyse the process in which this occurs' (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 13), and social constructivism provides a theoretical underpinning to the research project. Creswell argues that meaning is something ascribed rather than inscribed, and the attribution of meaning and, consequently *value,* is the cornerstone of attitudes and beliefs which drive behaviour:

> Individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences - meanings directed towards certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meaning into a few categories or ideas (Creswell, 2003, p. 8).

Creswell follows Crotty (1998) in identifying three key assumptions of constructivism:

1. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting.

2. Human beings engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspective.
3. The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community (Creswell, 2003, p. 9).

Creswell makes three points on this in relation to the researcher; qualitative researchers generally use open-ended questions to allow research participants to express their reality; the researcher determines to make sense of the context and background of participants and, crucially, they then must *interpret* what they find, an interpretation which is, in turn, shaped by their *own* social and cultural assumptions; qualitative research is generally inductive, involving a process of generating meaning through the collection and analysis of data in fieldwork (Creswell, 2003, p. 9).

This framework, which is presented by Creswell and Crotty with regards to the ways in which *individuals* socially construct reality, is also relevant to the ways in which *organisations* produce meaning as outlined by many analyses of organisational discourses (Mitroff & Kilman 1975, Gabriel 2004, Garud et al 2014, Wheeldon 2014).

My research attempts to utilise the framework of social constructivism and, in particular, how it is deployed in the study of organisations and organisational behaviour and apply it to various organisations operating in the UK in the late 1970s and 1980s (most particularly, independent record labels and distributors). The discursive toolbox used by organisations in their ongoing storytelling contest, including tropes, metaphor, narratives and stories, will be examined in the light of two underpinning and very broad questions:

- *How* do organisations produce meaning?
- *Why* do organisations produce meaning?

3.4. Conducting the research 1: Document analysis

The primary media sources I analysed were the New Musical Express (NME).and Music Week, with the NME being accessed in Glasgow's Mitchell Library and Music Week in the British Library in London.

3.4.1. New Musical Express

The NME was a weekly pop music publication aimed at a youth demographic. It is generally regarded as enjoying a 'heyday' of cultural significance in the era of punk and post-punk before gradually losing influence in the mid-late 80s. To give some sense of its coverage, in the second half of 1985 it sold an average of 105, 808 copies per week ('Pop paper sales down by 100, 000 Feb 15 86). This placed it significantly ahead of its 'inkie' rock rivals Sounds (which averaged 77, 193 copies) and Melody Maker (with 61, 433 copies). I initially intended to analyse all three publications; however, the time-intensive nature of this approach made me aware that it wouldn't be possible to carry out a comprehensive analysis of all three publications within the scope of my research. My initial instinct was to look at NME first and so I decided to narrow my focus to this particular publication (although on occasion I looked at articles in the rival publications when particularly relevant).

The bulk of this research took place in 2015 and 2016 in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow which has an extensive archive of NME (as well as Melody Maker and Sounds).covering the period under examination, which, despite an urge for chronological congruity does not coincide exactly with Margaret Thatcher's time in office, but rather actually begins in the couple of years before she first became Prime Minister in May 1979, and ends circa May 1991 with the demise of Rough Trade Distribution (RTD), some 6 months after her resignation. The upsurge in independent record labels and distributors, and its accompanying narratives, began some years before 1979[17] and, so, it would have been remiss to omit this period in pursuit of historical neatness. Similarly, the woes of RTD in 1990-91 seem to mark a landmark of some kind for the independent sector which arose from the punk and post-punk era and so this is, broadly, where my research concludes.

3.4.2. Music Week

Music Week was founded in 1959 as Record Retailer (it relaunched as Music Week in 1972).and was, and remains, a trade newspaper for the UK music industries; predominantly, the record industry. Early in the project, it occurred to me that although in the NME I had access to tens of thousands of texts related to popular music culture in the UK in the late 70s and through the 80s, there was a certain conformity of dialogic

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[17] Richard King for example begins his account of UK independent labels in 1975 (King, 2012).

interaction in that they were invariably interactions between musicians and a presumed audience comprised primarily of fans (or consumers), through the cultural intermediary of music journalists. So, despite a multiplicity of stakeholder voices there was a certain uniformity or predictability to the narrative frameworks utilised, often pitching the musician as a virtuous protagonist trying to protect something of value (for example, 'freedom', 'control' or 'integrity') from an untrustworthy and unreliable antagonist, often a major record label. Though there was nothing, in itself, *wrong* with this uniformity, since the recurrence of rhetorical tropes, of underpinning moral values, and the reinforcement and subversion of dominant paradigms were all central to the research, I felt it would be useful to interrogate different kinds of stakeholders, to observe the same narratives playing out but to a different purpose, with the idea of narratives being purposeful and performative (they *do* something as well as reflect something).being another key component of the study. The pages of Music Week seemed like a good place to go[18] for different perspectives, as it presented more of an 'industry' view of the entities and events being narrativised (of course, there was also a different prioritisation of events and entities than featured in NME), and the audience was also different, being made up largely of music industries professionals. Furthermore, the intermediary, the journalist, was presented differently, in that Music Week articles were generally anonymised (with a few rare exceptions). I believe this anonymisation was preferred because it implied an objectivity in the reporting, the sense of facts being dispensed without fear or favour, an integral part of the identity management of the publication. Access to Music Week wasn't as straight forward as with NME as, although there is an online archive of Music Week issues, it doesn't extend back to the 1980s (or, at least, it didn't when I conducted the bulk of this research in 2017 and 2018). I therefore planned a series of research trips to the British Library in London who hold a comprehensive collection of back issues of the paper. Eventually, I made six trips of, on average, three full days' duration, compiling a personal archive of several hundred articles photographed on a digital camera. The approach here was somewhat different from the research carried out in my hometown of Glasgow in that there was a constant sense of time pressure, in contrast to the

[18] I was already familiar with Music Week having used many of its articles to discuss issues around the music industries when I taught Music Business in colleges and universities.

leisurely approach taken in the early days of the project in the Mitchell Library. By this time, however, I think I'd honed my analytical skills on the NME and could work more efficiently.

3.4.3. Government policy documents, newspaper interview, parliamentary debates transcripts

Any further analysis of documents was conducted online with two major repositories of documents being particularly useful: Hansard, which provides access to reports of parliamentary debates in the two houses of the UK Parliament, the House of Commons and the House of Lords; and The Margaret Thatcher Foundation which provides a vast database of speeches, interviews, press conferences etc. The Thatcher Foundation claim to have catalogued every public utterance of the former Prime Minister from 1945-1990 and the scale and variety of the content here was invaluable in examining the political philosophy of Thatcherism.

3.5. Data analysis: Coding the data

Denscombe outlines three stages in the process of coding data:

- Open Coding: where chunks of codes are assembled in relation to their general content along general themes.
- Axial Coding: where connections between different codes are observed and codes can be subsumed under more general headings.
- Selective coding: where the focus shifts to the most important codes - the central codes- which will be most useful in analysing complex social phenomena

As he points out, this process allows for the ascribing of meaning to social phenomena:

> The aim of this process is to arrive at concepts that help to explain the phenomenon - basic ideas that encapsulate the way that the categories relate to each other in a single notion. These concepts then form the cornerstone for the generation of theories that provide an account of things, and in some sense or other, explain why things happen as they do (Denscombe, 2003, p. 120).

As the codes and themes of the data took shape and certain words and concepts seemed to recur, I began to get a sense of what areas were most significant and would

constitute the core of my thesis. In other words, as I worked on the data, the data was working on me, suggesting thematic connections and disjunction, events and organisations that were central to my research question, and others which were marginal and peripheral. My research practice with regards to the music publications was straightforward; I would open an issue of Music Week (for example).and scan every headline, each advertisement, and every piece of data (for example, chart information) for keywords which I listed as the research progressed. So, words such as Pinnacle, Rough Trade, PWL, independent charts, independents, and majors would capture my attention and I would read the article and either make a copy of it or not, based on a judgement of its value to my research. My method for analysing Music Week was much more efficient than when analysing NME, partly because of the limitations of time as mentioned previously, but also because I'd sharpened my analytical skills somewhat by the time I came to Music Week, and I'd started to find a clearer sense of what areas were of relevance to my study. In keeping with many qualitative research studies, the concepts which underpinned the theory and analysis of the study emerged from the research process rather than being established prior to the undertaking of the research (the original brief presented by the University of Turku, notwithstanding).

After articles were copied, I would again categorise them according to core themes, and print out the most relevant ones. At various times I would have folders on the themes of, for example, *the independent charts*, *attempts to establish an independent record label trade organisation*, *home taping and the blank tape levy, the emergence of CD technology,* and so on. These categories were useful in a practical sense, of course, in terms of ease of access to source documents; however, I found they also helped in the cognitive process of categorisation around themes and events. In other words, where does one theme or event end, and another begin? Naturally, the subjective nature of much of this process of categorisation is acknowledged.

3.6. Conducting the research 2: Interviews

To complement the analysis of primary source documents, I engaged in interviews with a variety of music industry professionals who were active during the period being researched. Below are some observations on the process.

3.6.1. Semi-structured Interviews

> Interviews are very specific social encounters between individuals which occur at particular times and places. The relationship which is established, and which develops (or does not develop) during the encounter will decisively influence any material derived from an interview. Interviews are not about 'extracting' information or truths that are waiting to be revealed. Instead, an interview is an active social encounter, through which knowledge of the world is produced via a process of exchange (Negus, 1999, p. 11).

As Negus points out, interviews are a process through which information is produced rather than revealed or discovered, and, as such, they are salient examples of the social production of knowledge. Disentangling the interviewer from the research (and, of course, the social relationship that already exists between interviewer and interviewee).is profoundly difficult, and perhaps even a fool's errand, and so, rather than pursue a futile objectivity, I tried to be aware of subjectivity and the role it played in the questions I asked and the answers I received. As Walshaw observes, 'subjectivity is the cornerstone of the research encounter. Centralising subjectivity in the research encounter means just that. It means that the researcher can never hope to be detached' (Walshaw, n.d., p. 587).

A significant aspect of this research project involved semi-structured interviews with participants in popular music cultural production during the era in which Margaret Thatcher was in office. This included record company owners, musicians, artist managers, fanzine writers and local promoters (and participants who took on a combination of these roles) and focussed on attaining data on a variety of different areas in relation to Thatcherism and popular music, for example:

- Perceptions around independent and major record labels; decision-making processes around seeking out and signing record deals; to what extent were decisions based on pragmatic or ideological considerations.
- Involvement in government schemes, such as the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, or extended periods on the 'dole' (claiming unemployment benefit). What were the social conditions in which music was made and, how, if at all, did

government policy influence the context, process, or consequences of music-making?

- Engagement in political activism, for example, participation in CND events, miners' benefits, involvement with Red Wedge, anti- Poll Tax demos. To what extent, were political activities (or absence of them) bound up in the process of music-making; in other words, did being a musician drive political activism?

The choice of semi-structured interviews was based to some extent, on what I presumed the expectations of the interviewee to be. 'The tight control over the format of the questions and answers' (Denscombe, 2003, p. 166) that characterise structured interviews would most likely have served to oversimplify complex social phenomena (as well as to bore or alienate the interviewee). Unstructured interviews would have suggested a lack of preparation and would have had the real potential to go off-topic given the breadth and scope of the subject matter of the study. Semi-structured interviews struck a balance between allowing interviewees to 'speak their minds' while maintaining a thematic structure. Participants were chosen based on my existing music industry contacts, recommendations from interviewees and other parties, and a sense that participants were willing to engage in the research. This meant that interviews carried out tend to be with people who are still, in some way, active in music, either at a local, or a wider level. The project involves a degree of snowball sampling where new potential subjects were suggested by those already involved in the study. Generally, those recommended were friends or colleagues of the current participant.

On every occasion, interviews took place at a place of choice of the participant, with locations ranging from public houses to private offices to individual's houses. Half of the interviews took place in Glasgow, another three face-to-face in London with the remaining two being conducted by telephone. I drew up a set of questions which began, in every case, with an enquiry into the interviewee's early popular music awakening. I've found that every pop music enthusiast has a kind of origin myth of pop music discovery and most enjoy telling it. This introductory question was designed, therefore, to put the interviewee at ease but also to, potentially, reveal something of the interviewee's process of becoming involved in the music industries as a practitioner.

Here are the original set of questions, I drew up for interviews:

- Could you provide me with some background of how you first got into music; what sort of formative influences did you have and what attracted you to the idea of music-making?
- What were your initial experiences in music in terms of your first band (s), going to rehearsal/ recording studios, and playing your first gigs?
- How did you subsidise your music-making activities before becoming 'professional'? Did you do other work outside of music, were you signing on, were you on a government scheme etc.?
- At what point did you first consider record labels; did you have a clear plan with regards what type of label to sign to or did things just fall into place?
- Did you at any point put out your own records or did this ever cross your mind?
- When you eventually did sign your first record label deal what factors influenced the decision-making; for example, did the reputation/ image of the label influence the decision or were the terms of the deal itself the most significant factor?
- Were you conscious of any difference between major and independent record labels and, if so, did that affect your decision-making?
- Can you recall any of the basic terms of the deal and how did the relationship with the record label work out?
- Would you describe yourself as politically aware during this period; did you, for instance, take part in any politically-related musical projects (such as benefit gigs)?
- Were you affiliated with any political party or political movements (such as CND or Rock against Racism)? Did you, generally, vote in general elections?
- What are your recollections of the government of Margaret Thatcher, and do you think her policies influenced the popular music culture of the 80s?

3.6.2. Selection of interviewees

Interviewees were of a similar demographic profile in one key area: that of age. It was essential for the research that participants were active in music in the era of Thatcherism, either as musicians or music industries practitioners and, so, this entailed that they would inevitably have been, at least a young adult in the 1980s. Participants were often recommended by other interviewees and, so, there was an element of snowballing as mentioned earlier.

One disconcerting demographic factor, upon reflection, is the exclusively male makeup of research participants. Several female participants in popular music were contacted through various means; face-to-face observations, e-mail, Facebook and so on, however, ultimately none were able or willing to participate. I recall seeing Richard King reading from his How soon is now book in Mono in Glasgow in 2012 and in an ensuing Q and A being asked why the subheading of the book referred to the Madmen and the Mavericks. King insisted that this had been a decision made by his publisher but acknowledged the problematic nature of gender makeup of the 1980s popular music recording sector, including in the independent sector even as it, or at least part of it, promulgated progressive gender politics. It is informative that most of the label owners and A & R heads at independent labels in the 1980s were men, some notable exceptions such as Claire Wadd of Sarah Records and Jeanette Lee of Rough Trade, notwithstanding.

A Vox Article from 1992 gives some impression of the gender imbalance in the independent record label sector of the time; after surveying various independent label heads on the matter of distribution (particularly, whether they were distributed through a major or independent distributor), Vox published their own independent record label guide listing information on 26 labels (including Beggars Banquet, Big Life, Music for Nations, PWL and Rough Trade). This information included data such as key acts, distributor (s), label owner and head of A & R. Of the 46 label and A & R heads listed, 43 were male, shining an unwelcome light on the male-domination of the sector (A question of Indiependence Vox Oct 1992).

3.7. Discourse analysis

Wheeldon (2014) examines the importance of master narratives in relation to the production of social meaning in the cultural industries. In doing so, he identifies 4 key discursive domains in the creation of such narratives, which are:

- Conversation and Dialogue
- Rhetoric
- Tropes
- Narratives and Stories (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 123).

This typology, which Wheeldon brings to bear on discourses around music consumption in the digital age most notably peer-to-peer file sharing and 'piracy', will provide a useful framework for analysing discourses around independence in the media of the 1980s. Wheeldon examines ways in which narratives involve a process of sense-making through the construction of themes and ideologies, and how rhetoric is deployed as a persuasive device, designed to elicit support for such constructions of meaning. The relationship between narrative and rhetoric was of particular interest in the analysis of discourses carried out here, particularly, the extent to which it dictates economic decision-making among diverse popular music industries practitioners (including, record labels, distributors and musicians), and consumers. The extent to and means by which, stakeholders utilised the discursive methods of *affiliation management* and *performative positioning* across the terrain of the music press (specifically NME and Music Week).is also of interest in demonstrating how the shaping of narratives - the storytelling contest- was and is central to the construction of attitudes and beliefs which create value-perception which then drive economic decision-making at both the individual and organisational level. Much of this is familiar from behavioural science and related fields such as psychology, sociology and political science, and this study will draw on other disciplines to examine how organisations use storytelling as persuasive devices. As Wheeldon argues, the social production of reality is achieved 'more by narrative plausibility than precision', and narratives fulfil a 'provisional and contextual sense-making' purpose' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 2) which then drives the decision-making

of stakeholders. The application of the concepts of *narrative plausibility* and *provisional and contextual sense-making* has proved very useful in the analysing of discourses around independence in 1980s popular music culture and, particularly, the way persuasive devices were used in the pursuit of short-term and contingent goals. Nobel prize-winning economist, Robert Shiller, in considering the examples of how narratives not only reflected but actively *produced* historical events such as the Great Depression of the 1930s and the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 provides further insights into the role of narratives and stories in the sense making apparatus and the subsequent decision-making of individuals and organisations:

> The human brain has always been highly tuned towards narratives, whether factual or not, to justify ongoing actions, even such basic actions as spending and investing. Stories motivate and connect activities to deeply held values and beliefs (Shiller, 2020, p. 127).

For Mitroff and Kilman, organisations do not exist in an objective state outside of storytelling, but instead are actively produced by stories, and what they describe as 'the epic myths of the organization' are central to the social construction of meaning of organisations:

> If accounting and finance are the backbone of organizations, then the stories that permeate organizations of any size are their lifeblood. Stories are so central to organizations, that not only do organizations depend on them, but stronger still, they couldn't function without them. Big or small, every organization is dependent on countless stories for its functioning (Mitroff and Kilman, 1975, p. 18).

For Mumby and Clair, organisational discourse is inextricably bound up with individual identity; the social relations between the self and the organisation can only be produced through discourse.

> Organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are 'nothing but' discourse, but rather that discourse is the principle means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are (Grant et al, 1997, p. 181).

3.7.1. Storytelling in organisations: Some useful analytical tools

This study makes use of four distinct but overlapping areas of interest, identified by Gabriel, concerning organisations and the function of storytelling:

- narratives and stories as aspects of the politics of organisations involving attempts to control and to resist.
- narratives and stories as aspects of individual identity and group identity, of the self in the organisation.
- narratives and stories as symbolic artefacts drawing on profound culturally-embedded mythological archetypes.
- narratives and stories as a means by which knowledge and meaning can be shared, disseminated, and contested (Gabriel, 2000, p. 5).

Elsewhere, Gabriel identifies six key ways in which narratives are formed which involve the prioritising and foregrounding of some aspects of events and the diminishing or omission of others. Of course, the choices made here are those of the storyteller whose decision-making is also an essential contributory factor in the social production of meaning:

> Framing – various characters and events are situated at the centre of the narrative, while others are peripheralised or omitted completely.
>
> Focusing – the concept of framing is expanded by placing special significance on a particular group of events or characters, while reducing the significance of others.
>
> Filtering – particular events or characters are removed from the narrative, irrespective of their relationship to key characters or events.
>
> Fading – particular events or characters come into or out of focus to develop or highlight key aspects of the plot and then are erased as though their purpose and importance are exhausted.
>
> Fusing – several characters or events are integrated into one, regardless of temporal or other contrasts or internal, logical contradictions.
>
> Fitting – specific events or characters are redefined or repurposed according to the needs of the plot (Gabriel, 2004, p. 8).

This conceptual framework for the analysis of stories and narratives was enormously helpful, possessing the twin attributes of being simple to understand, and eminently applicable to narratives in any context and to any degree of complexity. Central to its usefulness is a sense that what is left out of narratives is as worthy of consideration as what is included. It was also a useful analytical toolkit for analysing the ways in which I, as a researcher, acted as a producer of meaning by prioritising some voices and excluding or marginalising others.

Gabriel also sets out a set of useful interpretive devices, which he calls 'poetic tropes' which can be utilised by the storyteller in order to influence the representation of events (Gabriel 2004 p. 5). The key tropes are outlined here with some examples of how they were deployed in stories of the independent popular music recording sector in the 1980s:

Attribution of motive – this is a trope which involves individuals becoming agents, endeavouring to shape events and achieve desirable outcomes; motives cannot always be recognised through mere observation, but rather are subject to interpretation. Attribution of motive (particularly negative motive) is a recurring theme in discourses around independent popular music culture in the 1980s, for example, the accusation that Pete Waterman and Steve Mason were profit-oriented and, therefore, Thatcherite. Through this, they were ascribed out-group status and the value of their cultural production demeaned.

Attribution of causal connections – here chronological order is depicted in terms of causality; As Gabriel notes, 'causal connections in stories tend to be simple and mechanical rather than complex, statistical and probabilistic' (Gabriel 2004 p.5). The demise of Rough Trade Distribution was generally held in contemporary discourses and retrospective accounts to have been a result of overextending in buying an expensive new computer system (that didn't work properly), renting out a new warehouse space while still paying rent on the old one, and investing millions of pounds in Rough Trade U.S.A. That is not to say that these were not the primary causes of RTD's downfall, simply that this account is satisfying and plausible enough that it discourages further investigation.

Attribution of responsibility – here sense is made of events by attributing culpability or commendation to influential agents, diminishing the role of circumstance and fortune or

misfortune. For example, when Rough Trade Distribution collapsed, blame was attributed to its founder, Geoff Travis by Big Life Owner Jazz Summers (see chapter 9). This was balanced by other stakeholder voices such as Osman Eralp of Mute who attributed credit: ‘He has signed a good dozen of the best bands to come out of this country in the last decade. To trivialise that because of the problems of a distribution company wouldn’t be fair’ (18 May 91, p. 1).

Attribution of unity – where a certain category of individuals or organisations are treated as interchangeable and, therefore, any one object can be presented as a proxy for the whole. This is frequently the case in discourses around independent record labels where independents are often depicted as belonging to a unified, homogeneous group despite vast disparities in scale and organisational structure (see, for example, chapter 10 regarding Jazz Re: freshed and Beggars).

Attribution of fixed qualities – here individuals or organisations are regarded as having inherent, immutable qualities which underpin their actions unless some transformative influence intervenes. For example, in popular music discourses in the 1980s, the majors are often portrayed as monolithic, corporate monsters and ascribed characteristics which are portrayed negatively such as being bureaucratic, profit-driven, and lacking in innovation (Gabriel, 2004, pp. 7-8).

As I have outlined here, these attributions are applicable to narratives around record labels in the UK in the 1980s, and help detect patterns in discourses, to identify recurring themes, and to draw from that the meaning being produced.

3.7.2. It’s time that the tale was told: Researchers as Storytellers

Gabriel speaks of a ‘psychological contract’ between storyteller and audience which grants the storyteller licence to ‘mould the material for effect, to exaggerate, to omit, to draw connections where none are apparent, to silence events that interfere with the storyline, to embellish, to elaborate, to display emotion, to comment, to interpret, while he/ she claims to be representing reality’ (Gabriel, 2004, p. 4). To what extent, does this also apply to the researcher? Is the quest of the researcher the pursuit of the pure and unvarnished truth, ‘to unmask falsehood and bring truth to light’, or as Negus suggests is the presumption of such a thing problematic in that it ‘presupposes that there is some underlying truth about the world, and that we can gain access to it by

asking the right sort of questions in such a way as to reveal this truth'? (Negus, 1999, p. 10). On this, I am inclined to agree with Negus. So, if the researcher cannot be seen to be merely revealing a truth that already objectively exists, like the omniscient narrator, to what extent is the truth *produced* or *constructed* by the researcher in the research process. What is the reality Gabriel is referring to, and, indeed, what is the relationship between fact, truth and meaning? Negus also alludes to the problem of the researcher attempting to communicate a putatively 'objective' version of reality.

It was necessary to be aware of my own cognitive, cultural and political biases, formed initially during the time period under consideration, as a music consumer and fan and subsequently sustained (and sometimes subverted) through my own experiences with the recording industry as a musician and music industry manager. In doing so, I have attempted to avoid the selective interpretation of evidence, garnered during the research process to confirm a set of pre-existing beliefs around independent and major record labels, which although complex and sometimes contradictory, remain deeply entrenched. The danger of confirmation bias is also present with regards to the other major theme of the research, the political philosophy of Thatcherism and the personal characteristics of Margaret Thatcher. Growing up in a city which was deeply (and generally negatively) affected by government policy in the 1980s, and where the mere mention of Margaret Thatcher's name can still evoke a reflexively visceral response, I regarded it as vital to adopt as neutral and disinterested an approach as possible. Looking at TV footage and reading about such pivotal moments in British political history as the Miners' Strike, the Falklands War and the Poll Tax Riots, I was aware that my responses were conditioned to some extent by my experience at the time as well as by the memory of the voices of familial and societal elders, whose general attitudes to these turbulent events, I remember as a mixture of anger and bewilderment. I realised reasonably early in the research process that researching an era which I remember first-hand, and which had such a formative influence on me personally and politically, would present several challenges with regards to objectivity that researching, for example, the emergence of country music in 1920s America, or Hamburg and the British Beat Boom, wouldn't. However, as well as providing challenges, this proximity to the research material with regards to place and time, allowed the opportunity to engage more directly with the content, enabled a contextual understanding of some of the key

political concepts and theories, and proved useful in generating a sense of rapport with interviewees. This realisation brought with it the danger of assuming a kind of interpretive authority which could also serve to cloud or corrupt the research. In short, I had to navigate through a set of pre-existing and culturally entrenched beliefs which were a threat to the objectivity of the research while recognising that spatial and temporal familiarity with the research topic also possessed some benefits. I was determined in the process to try to avoid a reductionist conclusion which glibly confirmed prevailing orthodoxies in popular cultural accounts that viewed Margaret Thatcher and major record labels in wholly negative terms and saw the sector of independent popular music recording as a kind of morally virtuous challenge to both (see various examples throughout this study). On the other hand, I have sought to avoid the kind of *reflexive debunkery* which can beset academia, where a contrarian rejection of orthodoxy is pursued for its own sake rather than for the wider good of research. If my research tends towards historical revisionism in places I hope that, as far as possible, this derives from a reliable reinterpretation of historical sources. The interpretation and reinterpretation of the motivations and moral underpinnings behind the actions of historical figures is a potentially fraught area, however, since a large part of this research consists of the examination of narratives and how they influence factors such as the political strategy of governments and the economic decision-making of music industry stakeholders and music consumers alike, then it is necessary to undertake an appraisal of why people acted in the manner that they did and what factors motivated them to act in certain ways. For example, one of the many apparent antinomies of Margaret Thatcher is that she can simultaneously be regarded as one of the most morally driven and conviction led of politicians and yet one of the most pragmatic and contextual, and an examination of the extent to which she was driven by an underpinning moral sense or simply by political and provisional contingency, will form part of this research. Any research examining the relationship between the political philosophy and government policy of Thatcherism and its relationship to popular music culture in the UK in the 1980s, especially with regards to areas of ambiguity, contradiction and paradox, has to start with an examination of what Thatcherism actually is and to what extent it is a coherent and consistent political ideology.

Furthermore, the extent to which a moral framework underpinned the decision-making processes of various stakeholders in the field of independent popular music recording during the period of Thatcher's prime ministership will be interrogated. On the rhetorical battlefield of the music press and music industries trade publications, real and perceived moral positions are outlined and met variously with favour or disdain by those stakeholders involved, although positions taken are often far from being easily predictable and unambiguous. One example of this will suffice for the moment, although a thorough examination of the relationship between morality and discourse and the intentions behind and consequences of such rhetorical struggles, will ensue. Roddy Frame speaks of his band, Aztec Camera, and its progress from the small and short-lived Glasgow record label Postcard through to the much more established independent Rough Trade and finally on to the major label WEA Records (and his own resulting behaviour) in moral terms:

> I was still like a Postcard boy in my head and when we left Rough Trade to join a major, I sorta reacted by being dead contrary. See, when we signed to a major (WEA), I thought, oh well, fuck it, I'm going to be worse than they expect. It was like a guilt Thing - I thought that the WEA Aztec Camera was somehow morally inferior to the Rough Trade Aztec Camera (NME, 12 Sep 1987, p. 46).

A degree of Indie puritanism can be detected in Frame's response to his career trajectory, with the offence of signing to a major label eliciting feelings of guilt and moral transgression. Indeed, there is a persistent Faustian motif in discourses around independence in the 1980s, a sense of musicians selling their souls for money and fame by signing to a major label but suffering unpleasant consequences (such as being forced to compromise artistically or incurring the ire of disgruntled fans).in doing so. Frame goes on to sound a familiar lament of those following this well-trodden path in bemoaning the ensuing lack of freedom 'I hated dealing wi' (sic) all these record company people, the idea that I had to share my ideas wi' anybody was anathema' (NME, Sep 12 1987, p. 46). As well as alluding to the familiar trope of the authentic, autonomous artist, Frame outlines another potentially damaging repercussion - the loss of credibility with original fans: 'Are there still Aztec Camera fans? To tell you the truth, I thought we lost a lotta cred when we left Postcard - y'know, they'll never be as good as the B-side of the limited-edition Postcard single' (NME, Sep 12 1987, p. 46). So, the

process of signing to a major label can lead, in the long run, to the alienation of the most devoted part of an artist's fan base. Furthermore, this process can lead to commercial damage when these consumers decide to spend their money elsewhere, on other acts who have managed to retain their indie credibility. In other words, credibility is bankable. This interview is typical on the theme of independence in the music press of the time and illustrates the connection between notions of moral and ideological purity and the economic decision-making of consumers. Another important question, and one central to of this research, can be observed in Frame's responses, a question framed by Wheeldon in these terms: 'are we Masters or Subjects of Discourse?' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 128). The ubiquity and resilience of dominant modes of discourse means that we are not always conscious of the language that we deploy, so culturally embedded are the tropes and cognitive biases that underpin it. This applies, as Wheeldon observes, not only to dominant discourses, or the discourses of power, but to discourses which are presented in opposition to this dominance, as part of political and ideological counter-narratives, narratives of defiance:

> Whether we consciously embrace or resist particular discourses, we get caught up in their reproduction. We adopt particular discourses, or counter-discourses, because they are plausible, well-packaged, off-the shelf products. They make sense to us in ways which are more accessible, and less mentally taxing, than critically re-evaluating all of life's complex dilemmas, and then building our thinking and our arguments from first principles (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 128).

The consequence of this can be that we unwittingly accept the ideologically-driven language of power and, indeed, become a vehicle for re-enforcing its underlying ideological assumptions, thus reinforcing ideological paradigms. However, the language of counter-discourses can be adopted equally uncritically and reflexively, serving to cast oneself in a particular light, in opposition to real and perceived power, for purposes that may or not be entirely understood or intended by the user. Frame, in casting himself as guilt-ridden over what can be viewed in traditional terms as a successful career path, may be demonstrating awareness of the implied reader of the NME, an archetypical figure presumed to possess a certain set of demographic characteristics (young, white, male) alongside a broad set of political and ideological opinions (anti-corporate, left-wing, anti-establishment). Frame's *mea culpa* can be regarded as serving

an ideological function in that he is positioning himself in a complex performance as an ally, or affiliate of the audience despite his appearing to have 'sold out'.

3.7.3. Self-narrativisation and affiliation management

> Self-narratives are a medium through which individuals at every level play a creative role in formulating both their own identities and, by extension, the culture in which they are participants… Self-narratives may at first sight seem too personal to contain recurrent stylistic or thematic patterns, but life stories or personal narratives do seem to form a recognised genre in our culture. It is an informal and often unwritten one, it is true (Finnegan quoted in Negus, 1999, p. 180).

Finnegan points out the prevalence of self-narratives in the discourses of musicians and how it relates to the production of social meaning; that people not only see themselves but create themselves in the social relations that they participate in. This is as valid for music fans and consumers, and, indeed, anyone who engages in or with music at all. For Wheeldon, the cultural industries possess a distinctive cultural status in that, compared with the more functional objectives of other industries, the cultural industries are uniquely engaged in the generation of social meaning. While the *uniqueness* of the cultural industries role in the production of meaning may be open to debate, Wheeldon is correct in asserting that they are notable in the extent to which they contribute to the individual's construction of reality:

> They can simultaneously reinforce and disrupt our perception of reality: of what is good and bad; right and wrong; relevant or irrelevant; fair and unfair… they have a greater influence on the interpretations of our complex world, and on how we should engage with it. In this way, their impact on behaviour can be deeper and more subtle than that achieved through laws and regulations (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 1).

It is also true to say that a cultural industry such as popular music contributes not only to how individuals understand society, but to how they see themselves in society. In this respect, it can play a key role (as Finnegan observes).in the production of identity. This social formulation of identity will be discussed further in chapter 7.

3.7.4. Venture legitimacy and the paradox of legitimacy

Garud et al identify the *paradox of legitimacy* as a systemic feature of the relationship between storytelling and entrepreneurial ventures. The entrepreneur, in seeking stakeholder support in order to attract venture capital, uses storytelling to set expectations of future success, in the process 'plotting' various possible challenges and opportunities (these can be, for example, technological, legislative or demographic changes).into a 'compelling, chronological account' (Garud et al, 2014, pp. 3-4). Such narratives are designed to engender stakeholder engagement and must simultaneously contain the features of plausibility and aspiration; to be convincing enough that stakeholders have a reasonable expectation of a successful outcome, but also to contain enough of a challenge as to excite potential investors and stakeholders and to have the appearance of being ambitious. The reason why this balancing act is delicate, and indeed crucial to the long-term prospects of the venture, is that it can store the seeds of investor dissatisfaction, 'the very expectations that are set through projective stories to gain venture legitimacy can also serve as the source of future disappointments' (Garud et al, 2014, p. 2).

Venture legitimacy discourses are ubiquitous in the pages of Music Week through the 80s: from Tony Berry's bold predictions in the wake of the success of Renée and Renato; to Richard Scott suggesting in 1985 that centralising the despatch of the Cartel would allow them to set up a parallel sales force to the majors (chapter 9); to the publicly stated ambition of Jim Kerr of Simple Minds (chapter 7), there is a sense of stakeholders setting out future expectations, to achieve a venture legitimacy to enthuse stakeholders and potential investors (including fans).and influence how they act. To gain venture legitimacy stakeholders must convince others that they are going somewhere, and that the destination is desirable. Furthermore, the process should possess a uniqueness of purpose, as described by Lounsbury and Glynn, 'entrepreneurial story content must consist of claims that emphasize a core, distinctive, and enduring set of attributes, capabilities, and resources that lend strategic distinctiveness and competitive advantage' (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001, p. 552). An example of this would be the identity creation and management of the Cartel which presented itself from its inception in 1982 as having a core and immutable ideological virtue which was distinctive in the independent recording industry, certainly as

compared with rivals such as Pinnacle and Spartan. This strategic distinctiveness was important in providing the Cartel with a point-of-difference in the marketplace, an identity which was immediately recognised and understood. For an enterprise to have legitimacy it must be perceived as desirable, suitable, or admirable according to a socially constructed set of values, standards or beliefs. This repertoire of societal values is vast and complex and subject to constant dispute and negotiation.

3.7.5. Stakeholder Legitimacy and larger voices

Borrowing from and repurposing Garud et al*'s* concept of venture legitimacy, I think that *stakeholder legitimacy* is a useful normative concept in analysing discourses of credibility and authenticity in the field of independent cultural production. Just as organisations make use of an extensive discursive repertoire to attain legitimacy-perception in order to influence decision-making, so do individuals, navigating a complex and mutable landscape of social and cultural norms and values to acquire in-group acceptance in a specific cultural and economic context. This manifests itself in various ways but one example of it, as exemplified by Roddy Frame above, is the management of identity and the quelling of suspicions over motive. The attribution of motive (negative or positive).as observed by Gabriel is a crucial aspect in producing value-perception and it is, therefore, necessary for stakeholders to persuade others that their motives adhere to a consensually produced standard. For example, it was generally perceived negatively for an indie musician in the 80s to appear to be motivated by financial acquisitiveness as this was seen to compromise the creative process and resulting cultural product. One way this motive could readily be ascribed and thus legitimacy undermined was signing to a major, which frequently incurred charges of compromise and a loss of credibility.

Legitimacy of organisations or individuals is conferred or withdrawn in relation to the production of social meaning and the attribution of value. This meaning stems largely from stories and narratives which are told in the context of other stories and ideas. Thus, the process of producing meaning does not only involve the stakeholders in the storytelling but an intertextual relationship with other and, sometimes, larger voices. These larger voices, which can be anything from ancient myths to dominant ideological narratives of the day, inform the receptivity of the audience and thus condition the production. For example, Independent popular music culture in the UK in the 1980s is

inextricably bound up in narratives around Thatcherism and the political shift towards the New Right that was taking place during this period. As with every aspect of these discourses, the position of these larger voices in discourses, and the extent to which they are prioritised or marginalised, is provisional and contextual and is, in itself, subject to negotiation and dispute.

3.7.6 Us and Them in ideological discourses

Drawing predominantly from the field of organisational discourse and the study of organisational strategy and change management, it can be demonstrated that a variety of discursive resources and strategies may be utilised to produce and reproduce ideological discourses. The ultimate goal of all ideological discourse is, as Van Dijk notes; 'positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation' (Van Dijk, n.d., p. 157). Van Dijk proceeds to outline various ways that individuals and organisations engaged in ideological discourses 'mitigate, hide or deny *Our* negative acts or properties, and *Their* good ones. Thus, *We* are associated with positive norms and values, whereas *They* violate such basic principles of civilized social life (emphasis added)' (Van Dijk, n.d., p.157). The use of collective pronouns is widespread in ideological discourses in many contexts, and they often act as simple referents for antithetical concepts of affiliation and estrangement. However, it is crucial to note that the intended audience of ideological discourses must *produce* meaning in discourses rather than merely internalising a pre-existing and immutable *truth*. The in-group ('we' and 'us').and the out-group ('they' and 'them') have to be constructed by the audience and such constructs, although often founded in deeply embedded cultural and societal norms and values, are constantly in flux, subject to continuous reformulation and recontextualisation. The negative characterisation of the Other was an inherent feature of discourses in the popular music media of the late seventies and eighties and this negative characterisation, as with all ideological discourses, served a purpose, the purpose being to motivate certain behaviour (which could be disparate and contingent).in the audience. Van Dijk notes that a widespread and effective rhetorical ploy for the negative presentation of the Other is something he refers to as *Comparison to Major Villains and Recognized Evil* (Van Dijk, n.d., p. 157), where historical figures around which an objective consensus of iniquity has been formed, can be instrumentalised as tropes in the negative depiction of *the Other*. For example, as will

be discussed later, Pete Waterman was compared to Leni Riefenstahl (and, of course, by extension, Nazism, the paradigmatic *Recognised Evil*), and Saddam Hussein (see chapter 9). In both comparisons a certain ironic overstatement can be detected; however, they act as conceptual rhetorical shortcuts to an understanding of Waterman as part of the out-group, as someone deplorable. Of particular interest here is the frequent casting of Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism as the *Major Villain and Recognized Evil* in both contemporary and retrospective accounts of the era. Waterman was also compared negatively to Margaret Thatcher as was Pinnacle's Steve Mason, but so were the new breed of independent record labels which emerged from punk and post-punk who positioned themselves in opposition to the values of Thatcherism. For example, former Sex Pistols manager and self-styled *enfant terrible* of popular culture, Malcolm McLaren, dismissed Rough Trade and its peers as 'these grocers, who are the most styleless, the most poverty stricken in terms of imagination, street suss and feeling. They've contributed to the overall greyness of the culture…They're just Maggie Thatcher's, they're nothing… the ground floor of EMI is better than any of these companies' (NME, August 9 1980, p. 26).

3.7.7. Some reflections on the methodology

It is useful to draw some conclusions regarding the research design here as well as pointing to the strengths and limitations of the approach. In keeping with the reflexive nature of the study, the research design was produced in the process of the study as I began to draw connections, prioritise certain voices, and develop a sense of the temporal and spatial context of the research area. As outlined previously there was a certain reflexivity inherent in my approach regarding the attempt to make sense of certain social relations. As Denscombe notes, this is an inherent feature of social research projects: 'Reflexivity concerns the relationship between the researcher and the social world. Contrary to positivism, reflexivity suggests that there is no possibility of the social researcher achieving an entirely objective position from which to study the social world' (Denscombe, 2003, p. 300). The trick then was to embrace a degree of subjectivity, acknowledging that in analysing discourses in retrospective accounts of the period in the light of certain primary sources, I was shaping and moulding the data to a certain degree. Challenging some of my own longstanding perceptions and beliefs was

part of the research process although I also sought to avoid any narrative of a journey of personal discovery.

Jonathan Wheeldon's book *Patrons, Curators, Inventors and Thieves: The Storytelling Contest of the Cultural Industries in the Digital Age* was of great importance in encouraging me to consider the analysis of discourses as a research approach and directed me towards a wealth of literature on organisational discourse, the discursive repertoires and analytical frameworks of which I have drawn on extensively.

Interviews were generally pleasant and interesting affairs and I found no great reticence amongst participants in sharing their often trenchant views. There was, however, a certain paradox in the interviewing process in that during the early interviews I began to get a clearer picture of what aspects of the study I wanted to prioritise. Of course, by this point I had carried out several interviews without this insight. One different approach I might have taken with the benefit of hindsight would be to conduct analysis of more quantitative data such as record sales, company finances, quantity of independent music companies at given times, and so on. Although certain quantitative data such as singles and albums charts and end-of-year sales reports were examined, this was done in a largely piecemeal way as part of a qualitative approach rather than as a systematic quantitative approach.

3.7.8. Contribution to fields of study

This research aims to contribute to various academic fields and to bring the methods and theory of discourse analysis and organisational discourse studies into the field of popular music studies.

An interdisciplinary approach has been utilized in order to examine three key areas, as outlined below:

- Discourse analysis in popular music studies

To my knowledge, no extensive analysis of discourses in popular music media has been carried out previously, despite the easy availability of a substantial repertoire of primary sources. The prevalence of popular cultural accounts of the period under scrutiny, in the form of, for example, journalistic books, TV and film documentaries and newspaper articles, illustrates the enduring cultural influence of the organisations and

individuals involved in the UK independent recording sector throughout the late 70s and 1980s, however, these narrative accounts tend to exhibit a tendency toward what Worley calls (in relation to punk), ‘an increasingly uniform continuum of popular music history’ (Worley, 2017, p. 21). A comparative and integrated analysis of primary sources alongside retrospective sense-making accounts allows for an interrogation of core orthodoxies of this period in relation to notions of independence and its cultural value-perception. The theoretical framework and practical research methods employed here could be utilized in a broad range of future research projects, including, for example, discourses around the emergence of CD technology from the early 1980s through to the end of the decade when the disc had become the dominant format in the UK popular music market, or discourses around attempts to form an independent record label trade organisation, leading ultimately to the formation of AIM in the late 1990s.

- Organizational discourse and popular music studies

Drawing on a range of organisational discourse academic literature (most notably, Wheeldon 2014 but also including Mitroff and Kilman 1975, Gabriel 2004, and Garud et al 2014), this research endeavours to analyse organizational narratives in the context of popular music organisations. The emphasis here is on the independent recorded music sector (especially independent record labels and distributors but also including trade organisations such as the BPI and the ILA).and attempts to address the questions of how and why organisations produce meaning in discourses. The only substantial work which regards aspects of the popular music industries in the context of organizational discourse that I am aware of is Wheeldon’s, which is a thorough and insightful account of organisational discourses around piracy and peer-to-peer filesharing in the early years of the 21st century. Although, the discourses examined here relate to a specific place and time (the UK recording industry in the 1980s) many of the themes examined are of relevance to the contemporary popular music industries as demonstrated in chapter 10 with regards to notions of independence around Taylor Swift’s ‘folklore’ and the related ascription of value, as well as the 2021 Parliamentary Enquiry into the economics of Streaming where the long-standing rhetoric of independence was used as a persuasive device to elicit affiliation and drive the behaviour of policy-makers.

- Thatcherism and popular music studies

Although popular music-related academic analysis of Thatcherism began shortly after her taking office (for example, Frith 1983, Frith and Street 1986, Denselow 1989) and features, in varying degrees, in later scholarly work such as Hill (2002), Cloonan (2007) and Worley (2014), it still seems to me to be a somewhat under-represented subject in popular music studies. Certainly, there is a much greater wealth of journalistic accounts of Thatcherism and popular music culture available, whether in the form of newspaper articles, TV documentaries or books. McSmith (2011), Beckett (2015) and Rachel (2016) are three accounts of this turbulent era which feature popular music to varying but significant degrees. The analysis of discourses around Thatcherism in contemporary sources allows for the interrogation of retrospective narratives of resistance to and defiance of Thatcherism. In some ways, the relationship between the political philosophy and policies of the Thatcher government and popular music culture is demonstrated to be ambiguous, with a degree of compatibility between the aspirations of stakeholders in the independent recording sector and Thatcher's enterprise culture being acknowledged. On the other hand, a resistance to Thatcherism, both rhetorically and through political activism, is shown to have been a prevailing theme of UK popular music culture during Thatcher's time in office. The theoretical framework and research methods used here would be useful in examining other relationship involving popular music culture and politics, including, for example, UK popular music culture and Tony Blair's New Labour, a theme that is, very briefly, touched upon here.

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the methodological approaches undertaken and to outline the research methods employed. I will now consider the ideology - with ideology here understood as a 'system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy' (eNotes, n.d.) - of Thatcherism and the extent to which it represented a consistent political philosophy.

Chapter 4: Contingency or Hegemony: What is Thatcherism?

4.1. 'No such thing as collective freedom': The philosophical roots of Thatcherism

> Few doubt that Mrs Thatcher has a coherent set of political ideas and that these guide her behaviour (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 10).

Discourses around Margaret Thatcher, including accounts of independent popular music culture of the time, often regard the ideological nature of Thatcherism as axiomatic. This review will examine some of the debates and disputes around the question of 'what is Thatcherism?', focussing on to what extent it can be viewed as a consistent political project rather than a disparate set of political actions characterised by the short-term crisis management office generally entails. The purpose of this interrogation is to shed light on apparent incongruities between government policy in practice and the widespread assumption, which prevails to the present day among both admirers and detractors, that Thatcherism was underpinned by an ideological rigour and purity of purpose. This assumption has not gone unchallenged and, indeed, debates around the extent to which notions of the internal coherence of Thatcherism were merely a tool which served a rhetorical purpose, as part of an ongoing process of narrative creation, with Margaret Thatcher as the chief protagonist and various 'enemies' (e.g., trade unions, the miners, the Greater London Council, 'socialists' generally) as antagonists, circulated from very early on in Thatcher's first term in office. It will be demonstrated that the broad Conservative movement of the 1980s was often divided along the lines of economic liberalism and social conservatism and that in popular music culture (and more specifically independent popular music culture) which was at the time frequently portrayed as antithetical to the values of the New Right, there existed a more nuanced dynamic, a complementarity between the entrepreneurship which had historically characterised the field of independent popular music recording and the economic liberalism which constituted an integral part of the Thatcherite project.

The post-second world war period had witnessed a general consensus between the two major political parties in the United Kingdom, around the ideas of John Maynard Keynes who seemed to have reconciled the seemingly oppositional forces of state planning and

free markets in a mixed economic model. This model prioritised social and economic factors such as full employment - indeed the Conservative manifesto of 1950 stated: ‘we regard the achievement of full employment as the first aim of a Conservative government’ (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 40) - the nationalisation of industry, a commitment to the Welfare State, and conciliation of trade unions in areas such as free collective bargaining (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 42). The consensus was to coincide with a general economic boom which would last for at least two decades and unemployment between 1948 and 1970 would never exceed 3 % in the United Kingdom (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 40). The hegemony of Keynesian ideas was such that Richard Nixon, although conservative, would refuse to deviate from the social democratic consensus which had arisen around the New Deal of Harry Truman’s government, conceding in 1971, ‘we’re all Keynesians now’ (Stoller, 2019, p. 235). Nevertheless, almost contemporaneously with the beginning of the ascendancy of Keynesian economic ideas in the UK (and much of the Western world), Friedrich von Hayek was outlining in *The Road to Serfdom*, a critique of central planning which would profoundly influence Margaret Thatcher and other advocates of what would come to be known as neoliberalism. Hayek argued that any type of centralised government planning was inherently dangerous as well as being economically inefficient and would inevitably lead to the diminishing of individual liberties. Samuel Brittan identifies in the work of Hayek, the blending of two distinct traditions; one being classical liberalism with its emphasis on individual liberties, free markets, and the rule of law and the other consisting of a social conservatism imbued with an inherent belief in the civilising value of traditional institutions and customs (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 76). Hayek deplored central planning on the grounds that he believed that it must inevitably lead to the type of totalitarian horror that was ravaging Europe at that time, and, indeed, cited the abandonment of liberal traditions throughout Western Society as the primary cause of the rise of what he regarded as the twin evils of Fascism and Socialism: ‘we have progressively abandoned that freedom in economic affairs without which personal and political freedom has never existed in the past’ (Hayek, 1944, p. 11). For Hayek, ‘freedom’, ‘liberty’ and ‘individualism’ acted as antonyms to ‘socialism’ and ‘collectivism’:

> Individualism has a bad name today and the term has come to be connected with egotism and selfishness. But the individualism of which we speak in contrast to socialism and all other forms of collectivism has no necessary connection with these (Hayek, 1944, p. 14).

Margaret Thatcher would employ these terms during her political career in a similar rhetorical fashion. In a 1976 speech to the Liberal Federal Council in Canberra Australia she clearly conveyed the difference between her political philosophy and that of her philosophical antagonists, the Socialists, in terms of individualism versus collectivism:

> Our way upholds the importance of the individual and makes provision for him to develop his own talent. To us, all individuals are equally important, but all different. It is this difference which gives richness and variety, and strength, to the life of the community. This philosophy is diametrically opposite to the Socialist approach which insists on putting everyone into efficient units to do whatever the collectivist socialist wisdom considers best. But freedom is individual. There is no such thing as collective freedom. Nevertheless, a false 'collective' mystique has entered the language of Socialism (Sep 20, 1976).

For Margaret Thatcher socialists were not merely her political opponents but the very enemies of freedom, and collectivism, rather than a method of achieving social harmony and egalitarianism, was a vehicle for the diminishing of individual liberty. Thatcher's definition of socialism was flexible enough to encompass the Labour Party of Neil Kinnock, at least in a rhetorical sense, as she outlined in a 1984 interview: 'As for the Labour Party, there isn't a Labour Party, it's a Socialist party. The good, solid, honest Labour people have not been strong enough to stand up to the others.'[19] (Financial Times, Aug 31, 1984).

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[19] For his part, Kinnock argued against the policies of Thatcher and the Conservative Party on similar grounds: 'The result of their free market policies is not liberty, it is tyranny - the despotism of unemployment, the dictatorship of pain, the apartheid of disadvantage' (NME, 13 June 1987, p. 24).

4.2 'Other men's freedom': Hayek and opposition to corporate power

Margaret Thatcher's political understanding of collectivism and individualism, of socialism and freedom were rooted in the philosophy of Friedrich von Hayek and his contemporaries and were founded on a deep mistrust of the power of the state. However, the aversion of Hayek and his fellow conservative intellectuals of the 1930s Chicago School (Stoller, 2019, p. 224) to the concentration of power due to the inevitable threat it posed to individual freedom extended beyond the parameters of Soviet or Nazi totalitarianism. As Stoller points out, 'this older generation of Conservatives, while opposed to central planning, had an egalitarian streak, opposing private monopolies as fiercely as labor unions' (Stoller, 2019, pp. 224-225). Such opposition to corporate monopoly power had a long history in the United States and was voiced by politicians on both sides of the left and right divide, as demonstrated by the commitment of democratic president Woodrow Wilson in 1912 to 'take my stand absolutely, where every progressive ought to take his stand, on the proposition that private monopoly is indefensible and intolerable. And there I will fight my battle. And I know how to fight it' (Stoller, 2019, p. 1). Corporate interests and monopoly power were widely regarded as antithetical to democracy. In fact, some decades after Wilson's commitment, in 1938, the United States president Franklin D. Roosevelt articulated the menace that the consolidation of corporate power presented to the freedom of individuals in much starker terms:

> Unhappy events abroad have retaught us two simple truths about the liberty of democratic people. The first truth is that the liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is fascism- ownership of government by an individual, by a group, or by any other controlling private power (Stoller, 2019, p. 126).

Another formative influence on Thatcher was the American economist, Milton Friedman, a disciple of Hayek who was similarly wary of consolidated corporate power, writing in 1962:

> The first and most urgent necessity in the area of government policy is the elimination of these measures which directly support monopoly, whether

> enterprise monopoly or labor monopoly, and an even-handed enforcement of the laws on enterprises and labor unions alike (Friedman, 2002. p. 132).

Friedman was one of the foremost of a group of economists, the so-called Chicago school, who would espouse the tight control of the money supply and the virtues of the market economy and lead a counterattack on Keynesianism. Friedman advocated monetarism as a response to one of the great economic ills that had beset much of the Western world in the 1970s: inflation. One of the central tenets of Keynes had been that the government could maintain full employment by managing the economy. Whether or not Keynesianism was responsible for the period of full employment which had underpinned the post-war consensus in Britain, or whether it had been a product of a set of favourable macro-economic conditions which had benefitted a number of western countries , is a matter of some conjecture, however, it had become apparent in the 1970s that Keynesian methods were no longer effective in combatting inflation (indeed, Britain in the early 70s was suffering under 'stagflation', a combination of both rising unemployment and rising inflation). Friedman argued that inflation was a result of an excess of money in the system that could have as its cause, for example, government 'printing' money in order to inject demand into the system to decrease unemployment. In response to Keynesian state management of unemployment, he developed a theory of a 'natural rate of unemployment', broadly defined as 'the rate to which an economy naturally reverts unless it receives greater and greater financial stimuli and, in consequence, rapid and ever-increasing inflation' (Graham and Clarke, 1986, p. 25). The choice then was stark yet simple, the prioritisation of decreasing inflation at the expense of increasing unemployment. In his *Capitalism and Freedom* and *Free to Choose* (which would also be broadcast as a TV series in 1980), Friedman presented a range of themes, developed from Hayek, which were central to the New Right and would be key tenets of the government of Margaret Thatcher: the inevitable inefficiency of government planning; the economic benefits of lowering taxes; the virtues of privatisation and deregulation of state-owned industries and services; and the abolition of a range of 'restrictive' legislation such as minimum wages, government subsidies of industries, and the protection of labour through employment laws (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 80). The role of the state should be minimal, limited to a small set of responsibilities including the maintenance of law and order, the protection of private

property and national defence, or put more succinctly, 'to determine, arbitrate, and enforce the rules of the game' (Friedman, 2002, p. 27). Furthermore, Friedman would argue, as with Hayek, that capitalism and individual freedom were inextricably linked; indeed, that one engendered the other. In his hugely influential book *Capitalism and Freedom*, first published in 1962, Friedman outlined the relationship between capitalism, liberalism and freedom: 'A liberal is fundamentally fearful of concentrated power. His objective is to preserve the maximum degree of freedom for each individual separately that is compatible with man's freedom not interfering with other men's freedom' (Friedman, 2002, p. 39).

Markets, according to Friedman, facilitate the dispersal of decision-making and therefore of power, as opposed to government's natural tendency towards centralisation and concentration of power. As Kavanagh put it: 'Capitalism or the voluntary interaction between buyers and sellers of goods and services, permits … economic freedom which, in turn, is essential for political freedom' (Kavanagh, 1990, p. 80). The first senior Conservative to convert to monetarism was Keith Joseph, under the influence of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA). The Institute had been established by Antony Fisher who had read *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944 and committed himself to the economic ideals which would eventually inform the New Right. Incorporated in 1957, it would be dedicated, through key opinion-formers such as Lord Harris and Arthur Seldon, to refuting many of the Keynesian orthodoxies that dominated post-war economic thinking. The ideas of Hayek and (to a lesser extent). Friedman were disseminated through a series of discussion papers with the express purpose of reaching important political figures such as Joseph. Joseph, for his part, was instinctively suspicious of the 'collectivism' of consensus politics which had, he believed, resulted in extensive state regulation, excessive borrowing and public spending, over-taxation and Keynesian demand-management. He argued that the middle ground of British politics had shifted progressively leftwards in the decades after the second world war, as the Conservatives had accepted one Labour policy after the other (for example on high public spending, nationalisation, and comprehensive education). This had put a considerable burden on the economy and lead to the productive private sector being drained by the inefficient and over-subsidised public sector.

In 1974, Joseph launched a series of speeches denouncing the Conservative Party leader Edward Heath and the dominant economic belief system built around Keynes. A rise in oil prices in 1973-1974 had resulted in a crisis which served to exacerbate the sense of a nation in inexorable decline: 'Keynesianism and interventionist policies were badly discredited, and to that was added widespread disquiet about the state of the country, the loss of authority and the drift towards ungovernability' (Gamble, 1994, p. 89).

Joseph under the influence of Hayek and Friedman and the lobbyists of the IEA was of the firm conviction that successive governments, both Labour and Conservative, had subsidised welfare provision by effectively 'printing' money. The inevitable consequence of this was inflation, the rate of which was increasingly rapidly and looked set to spiral out of control. Figures from the International Monetary Fund suggest that inflation had risen to 24 % by 1974 (Evans, 2004, p. 7). For Joseph and his ilk, and indeed for a great number of the general public, inflation was the number one danger to political and social stability and the remedy for it was monetarism. Monetarism, however, would not merely reverse the economic decline of Britain; for the New Right it would serve the higher purpose of safeguarding individual freedom. Margaret Thatcher succinctly articulated this mission of spiritual rejuvenation in a 1981 interview: 'economics are the method. The object is to change the heart and soul' (Sunday Times, 3 May, 1981). This transformation of the 'heart and soul' required a comprehensive reshaping of the discursive terrain of post-war Britain, with the dominant political and philosophical paradigms which supported existing power relationships between government and the electorate, and trade unions and government, as well as long-standing positively regarded social structures such as the welfare state, coming under fire from a set of counter-discourses which placed the entrepreneur, the self-reliant individual, at the moral centre of the narrative.

The radicalism of the break with consensus politics allowed the Conservative Party to position itself as the party of modernity while simultaneously casting the Labour Party as the party of entrenched trade union power, encumbered with a narrow political vision based on outdated notions of class. As Hewison observed, Marxism Today conceded as much in an article in October 1988:

> Increasingly at the heart of Thatcherism, has been its sense of New Times, of living in a new era. While the Left remains profoundly wedded to the past, to

> 1945, to the old social democratic order, to the priorities of Keynes and Beveridge, the Right has glimpsed the future and run with it. As a result, it is the Right which now appears modern, radical, innovative and brimming with confidence and ideas about the future (Hewison, 1997, p. 213).

This vision of dynamism and modernity was not only designed to sweep away the Socialist left with its emphasis on collectivism and organisation and troubled relationship with the power of the trade union movement but would also, in its wake, usurp the paternalistic One Nation Tory wing of the Conservative Party, with their belief in the virtues of a benevolent hierarchy based on the long-standing stability of the British class system: 'The individual, empowered through the sovereignty of the consumer, was to be liberated by the freedom of the market not only from the dependency culture of collectivism, but the old hierarchies of deference, status and taste' (Hewison, 1997, p. 212).

However, although the rhetoric of the New Right valorized 'freedom' above all else, the limitations of the type of freedom that neoliberal economic ideas in practice would promote, became evident:

> The freedom of the individual is purely economic: there is freedom to make money but also freedom to starve. The market becomes the only sphere of social action, and the economic becomes the only motive of morality. Ultimately, economic activity becomes the principal form of human expression (Hewison, 1997, p. 212).

Steven Wells in reviewing the 1988 single 'Choice?' by the Blow Monkeys, whose lead singer Robert Elms (AKA Dr. Robert) was prominently involved with Red Wedge, drew attention to the link between the supposed freedom of Thatcherism and its inevitably dire consequences for some individuals:

> 'Choice?' attacks the Tories on the ideological front and generally pisses over the notion that Thatcherism is the champion of 'freedom of choice'he freedom for everybody to sleep in a cardboard box in a shop doorway in Charing Cross Road for instance). To get to the NME offices from Waterloo station you have to go through a vast concrete amphitheatre, otherwise known as Cardboard City. I often wonder what goes through the mind of a Tory voter as he or she passes

> these scores of kids made homeless by high rents and the squeeze on social security (NME, July15 1989, p. 16).

Hewison describes a process of the redefining of the citizen as a consumer, ‘a paying customer for public services which previously were available by right’ (Hewison, 1997, p. 212), and regards the argument for lower taxation as an argument for the customer opting out of paying for public services. The idea of economic freedom inevitably leading to political freedom as espoused by Hayek and Friedman and their disciples, has proven to be problematic. In fact, from observing nations in which Neoliberal economic policies have been enacted the question arises: do more free markets inevitably lead to less free societies?

In *Road to Serfdom*, Hayek had quoted Elie Halevy’s view regarding the paradox inherent in Socialism’s desire to bring together two apparently irreconcilable things: ‘The socialists believe in two things which are absolutely different and perhaps even contradictory: freedom and organization’ (Hayek, 1944, p. 33). Yet, this same contradictory tendency appears to beset the ideas of the New Right. As Gamble observes:

> The idea of a free economy and a strong state involves a paradox. The state is to be simultaneously rolled back and rolled forward. Non-interventionist and centralized in some areas, the State is to be highly interventionist and centralized in others. The New Right can appear by turns libertarian and authoritarian, populist and elite (Gamble, 1994, p. 36).

Inherent in the ‘freedom’ extolled by advocates of neoliberalism is the possibility, or perhaps even inevitability, that huge levels of economic inequality will arise. The freedom for one person to make huge profits and the freedom of another to starve, accompanied with the ideological commitment that government must not intervene to address these inequalities (through, for example, high taxation or generous welfare systems), necessitates the existence of powerful systems to protect the wealthy, in both the enacting and enforcing of legislation. As a result, an emphasis on ‘law and order’ becomes a powerful theme of neoliberal systems, both as a form of discursive reassurance for those privileged by the system, and as a mechanism for deterring those who have been socially disenfranchised from attempting to redress the balance through

criminal means. The Conservatives in the 1980s depicted themselves frequently as the party of law and order.[20]

The inevitability of some (indeed many) individuals falling into poverty under such an economic system is explained away, not by recognising the structural flaws in the system itself, but by identifying character flaws in individuals. This moral dimension acts as a powerful kind of paradigm reinforcement in which the successful can justify their wealth as being 'deserved' and 'self-made', while those who do not prosper are portrayed as being morally lacking 'as scroungers' or 'benefit dependents'. Furthermore, the neoliberal economic model suffers from the deep structural defect of possessing an inability to prevent those who do prosper initially from establishing the kind of restrictive barriers to entry that prevent others from following in their stead, from 'pulling up the ladder.' The kind of complete economic and political freedom of opportunity envisaged by Hayek and Friedman is dashed upon the rocks of financially powerful vested interests, and corporate lobbying groups using their power to curtail competition both by means of control of the markets and attempts to influence legislation. It is another of the paradoxes of Thatcherism that the rhetorical valouriser of the self-made entrepreneur often enacted legislation that would bolster corporations at the expense of smaller enterprises. In fact, the persistence of inequality arising from neoliberalism in practice would serve to suggest that this tendency is structural and inevitable. Matt Stahl also observes the paradoxical nature of neoliberalism's Utopian claims on the freedom of the individual: 'Individual autonomy is liberalism's primary postulate and its fundamental promise, yet it is precisely individual autonomy that must be limited, alienable, and commodified in order for the institutions of a liberal market society to function' (Stahl, 2013, p. 227). Gamble attributes this ambiguity to the two distinct philosophical traditions permeating the broad ideas of the New Right: a liberal tendency, which prioritizes the free market and argues for economic liberty derived from an open and competitive economy, and a conservative

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[20] Indeed, a confidential document produced in November 1979 and declassified in 2010, entitled *Public opinion after the first seven months in office,* gives an indication of the electorate's approval of the government's handling of various policy areas. 'Law and order' is the area where government approval ratings are highest.

tendency, which is concerned with the restoration of social and political authority, of law and order (Gamble, 1994).

As Brittan noted, these distinct and often competing strands can be traced back to Hayek, and account for the various manifestations of thinking surrounding the New Right. It can also be useful in understanding some of the apparent contradictions inherent in the policies of the government of Margaret Thatcher. The emphasis of the Thatcher government on socially conservative and, to a large extent, Christian morality found parallels in the United States during the same period, particularly after the success of Ronald Reagan in the 1980 U.S. general election which was strongly linked to the emergence of the religious right as an electoral force (Somerville, 1992). This was the first American general election in which the Christian right had existed as an organised, collective force and, after aligning themselves firmly with the Republican Party, they would exert considerable pressure throughout the 1980s on a range of social and moral issues such as abortion rights, contraception and sex education in schools. The NME pointed to the role of powerful Christian preachers such as Jerry Falwell, founder of the Christian lobbying group the Moral majority, in linking this emerging political force with the Republicans:

> TV evangelists like him have also been steadily building a right-wing political power base alongside their regular religious 'ministry'. They see their collective mission as a moral crusade against abortion, the equal rights amendment, gay rights, drugs, pornography, arms limitation and Godless Communism. Their influence is enormous within the Reagan Campaign (NME, Oct 11 1980, p. 11).

Reagan, who was as committed to neoliberal economic reform as Thatcher, generally depicted himself as a protector of traditional moral values and was similarly sceptical of the 'progressive' values of the 1960s counter-culture. This increasing climate of moralism would have a significant impact on popular music culture most notably through the formation of a committee called the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) which claimed to represent the interest of 'concerned parents' who were worried about the effects of the increasing prevalence of moral degeneracy in popular music on the nation's children. The committee comprised of four women, Tipper Gore, Pam Howar, Pam Baker, and Sally Nevius whose political connections saw them become collectively known as 'the Washington Wives'. The PMRC originally advocated a

categorical rating system similar to that already in use in the film and video industry, for material that was deemed to contain explicit themes; however, after objections from the US recording industry trade organisation The Recording Industry of America (RIAA).that such a system would be logistically and economically onerous, they settled on a demand for a generic warning label to inform consumers about the lyrical content contained in records. The labelling system was to be voluntary and at the discretion of the record labels who were expected to act in 'good faith'. This proposal allowed the PMRC to refute charges of promoting censorship since, as Tipper Gore argued in front of the Senate in 1985, 'a voluntary labelling is not censorship. Censorship implies restricting access or suppressing content' (PMRC Hearing Sep 19, 1985, p. 13), and to sidestep charges of infringing on first amendment rights which protected, among other things, the right to free speech. Gore also argued against government intervention, suggesting that, as the excesses the PMRC were railing against had arisen in the marketplace then they should be resolved in the marketplace, specifically, by the industry that had permitted them to develop; the recording industry (Gore 1985 p. 13). Gore went on to explain, somewhat disingenuously, that this labelling was simply another form of packaging, 'a time-honoured principle in our free market system' (Gore, 1985, p. 13). That this packaging would be carried out as a response to political pressure from a hugely influential pressure group, undermined Gore's framing of the debate as being an essentially benign exchange of ideas between equal parties; however that she felt the need to do it reflected the fact that it was important for the PRMC, whose allies were predominantly right-wing and Republican, to avoid a narrative where they were seen as advocating more government in an era where the mantra of the New Right had been quite the opposite. The debates around PMRC and censorship provide an example in a US context of the tensions inherent in a political philosophy which espoused liberalism on one hand (and the values of small government) with a social and cultural conservatism which sought to restore traditional values in the face of perceived rising permissiveness. Gore, in addressing the Senate committee recognised this contradiction, in doing so, invoking the customary notion of freedom:

> The issue here is larger than violent and sexually explicit lyrics. It is one of ideas and freedoms and responsibility in our society. Clearly, there is a tension here, and in a free society there always will be. We are simply asking that these

> corporate and artistic rights be exercised with responsibility, with sensitivity, and some measure of self-restraint, especially since young minds are at stake (Gore 1985 p.13).

The PMRC campaign took place in the milieu of a culture clash between right-wing traditionalists and left-wing progressive who were engaged with a variety of complex and inter-related themes surrounding the regulation of sexuality, the role of women in society, and the family. Such issues were not exclusive to the UK and the USA by any means but the emergence of the New Right in both countries served to foreground their significance as observed by Somerville:

> In all the main advanced industrial countries of the West since the 1970s, the family has become an issue which excites media attention and public debate, and which has become a prominent item on the agenda of the major political parties. The family has become politicized. This has been particularly the case in America and Britain where it has been associated to different degrees with the electoral successes of a revived conservatism under Thatcher and Reagan which committed itself to policies to strengthen the 'traditional' family (Somerville, 1992, p. 1).

There remains a sense of the contradictory nature of aspects of Thatcher's political philosophy, a tension between the competing strands of liberalism and the conservatism; of the free economy and the strong state; of economic freedom and social control. Hewison cites an article in the Economist in 1993 which, in the immediate aftermath of Thatcher's long time in office grapples with this question: 'Why was a politician who celebrated the individual over the state such a relentless centralizer of government power, and so careless of civil liberties? The reason is that Thatcherism was never a coherent set of economic and political ideals' (Hewison, 1997, p. 213).

The struggle between economic liberalism and authoritarian conservatism is one of the most fascinating aspects of the political philosophy of Thatcherism and one which manifested itself in various ways with regards to government policy throughout the 1980s. Perhaps the elusive nature of Thatcherism can be illustrated by the attempt by Nigel Lawson, who was chancellor of the exchequer from 1983 to 1989, to define it:

> The wrong definition is whatever Margaret Thatcher herself at any time did or said… The right definition involves a mixture of free markets, financial discipline, firm control over public expenditure, tax cuts, nationalism, 'Victorian values' (of the Samuel Smiles self-help variety), privatisation and a dash of populism (Vinen, 2009, p. 275).

This chapter examined the extent to which Thatcherism can be viewed as a coherent and consistent political philosophy in order to prepare the ground for an analysis of Thatcherism in relation to the UK recorded music industry. An awareness of the competing wings of social conservatism and economic liberalism is crucial in understanding how Thatcherism related to UK popular music culture.

Part 2: Thatcherism and the Music Recording Industry

Part 2 will attempt to contextualise some of the themes of the research in terms of macro-economic challenges facing the recording industry during the period and some of the collective responses that were implemented to deal with them.

Chapter 5: Issues facing the popular music recording industry in the late 70s and 80s

This chapter examines wider issues affecting the popular music recording industry in the late 1970s and 1980s with the intention of providing some context for the later focus on disputes and negotiations between the independent and major record label sectors in the UK. Primarily, it addresses the issue of home taping and the responses of the major labels to its threat. Attempts at political lobbying and the utilisation of various rhetorical tropes and discursive repertoires in their bid to persuade the government to make legislative change (most notably, to introduce a levy on blank tapes) provide useful insights into the nature of organisational storytelling and its role in the social construction of reality. In this case, the most prominent stakeholders' voices come from the British Phonographic Industry (BPI), an organisation which putatively represented record labels of any size but was long criticised as being the mouthpiece of the majors, which reveals some of the asymmetries in the relationship between major and independent labels. The goal of the BPI's storytelling is, of course, to increase the value-perception of their economic and cultural contribution to society, and to drive the strategic decision-making of politicians.

5.1. 'Forever - for free': Blank tapes

> Britain's floundering record industry took a further heavy blow this week with the announcement of 'substantial redundancies' at WEA, one of the country's big three companies (NME, July 12 1980, p. 3).

> I do believe that - apart from the recession - that bad decisions from the A & R departments are to blame. The record companies have been concentrating their efforts on a limited range of material; latching onto trends without really believing in them. In fact, it's been the independent labels that have been

> finding the bands. The Police, Gary Numan, Joy Division - only three of the many that have found their way up through the small labels (Bruce Findlay of Bruce's Record Shops, Record Mirror, 30 August 1980, p. 15).

Analysis of discourses in the music press at the beginning of the 1980s portrays an industry facing a series of crises. Industry figures from the late 1970s show sales of pre-recorded music going into sudden and steep decline, particularly in the U.S.A and Europe. This decline followed two decades of sustained growth (driven by a variety of factors including the emergence of multiple formats in the 1950s, general economic prosperity in the Western world, and the so-called 'baby boom') and seems to have come as a surprise to an industry which had grown accustomed to ever-increasing profits and was ill-equipped to deal with a downturn. John Street observed that 5000 jobs in the manufacturing and distribution of records and tapes were lost in the UK alone during this period, with many plants and warehouses closing (Street, 1986, p. 95) and redundancies at both major and independent record labels are a recurring theme in Music Week. For example, an article from December 11, 1982, under the headline 'Relocations and redundancies at Indie: Rough Trade axes 12 jobs' reports a restructuring at Rough Trade records, described by a company spokesman as 'a trimming-down operation' designed to allow greater emphasis on a range of bands including Aztec Camera, Scritti Politti, Vic Godard, The Weekend, The Go-Betweens and The Raincoats. The unnamed spokesman continues to discuss the lay-offs in language which sounds close to that of corporate euphemism: 'all relationships with our manufactured and distributed labels will be reassessed and tightened up at a later stage once the internal restructuring is complete' (MW, Dec 11 1982, p. 1), and then proceeds to highlight another measure which will serve to streamline the operation, 'the formation of the Cartel independent distribution network will go ahead as planned, and should be in full operation soon' (MW, Dec 11 1982, p. 1). The history of the Cartel will be of substantial interest in later chapters of this thesis and, in particular, the grand narratives of ideological virtue that surround it in comparison to both major label distributors and rival independent distributors such as Pinnacle, Spartan and IDS. These narratives are prevalent in the many journalistic accounts of the independent music scene of the punk and post-punk era and are also a frequently recurring (although sometimes contested) feature of my own interviews with those involved in popular

music recording at this time. It is interesting to note, therefore, that its inception seems to have coincided with a 'streamlining' operation at Rough Trade, the prime mover in the Cartel's formation. Bottomley identifies several key factors which played a role in the industry's general malaise including macro-economic factors and the emergence of several alternative leisure pursuits to compete for consumers' time and money:

> The global economic recession of the 1970s; inflated prices and poor quality products (manufacturers turned to thinner, recycled vinyl to cut costs following the 1973 oil crisis; an over-reliance on megastars and perceived lack of exciting new artists; and competition from other media, including video games, cable television and the nascent MTV (Music Television) (Bottomley, 2015, p. 123).

The sense of popular music culture (and especially the major recording industry) finding its position as the apex predator in the leisure food chain coming under pressure, was confirmed in a Billboard article of the era, which acknowledged the rejuvenation of the cinema industry as a result of blockbusters such as Jaws and Star Wars:

> We have to face the unsettling realization that pre-recorded music is no longer the obvious best entertainment value. The resurgence of motion pictures as a major entertainment force and the proliferation of spectator sports are competing vigorously for the dollars and pounds that we routinely expected to be ours (Billboard, Sep 1 1979, p. 1).

The complacency of the recording industry in the face of competition from other leisure industries has been a recurring theme of the cultural industries and one which has tended to evince more self-pity than self-reflection. Wheeldon offers a similar set of arguments for the recording industry's relative decline at the dawn of the eighties, while also pointing a condemnatory finger at the internal culture of major record labels, suggesting that the difficulties besetting the record industry were, at least in part, due to: 'poor corporate governance in controlling the extravagance and wild excess of the late 1970s' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 39).[21] Gronow, alternatively, argues that the primary

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[21] Charges which would reappear at the end of the 90s when Napster and peer-to-peer filesharing would substantially disrupt the major record label paradigm.

cause of the industry's problems was simply market saturation, that people had already consumed enough of the product that they were offering (Gronow, 1983, p. 72). For the recording industry, however, (or more specifically, the major record labels and their various trade organisations and lobbying bodies), the chief culprit was clear and the potential consequences of inaction by the industry and, more importantly, politicians and lawmakers, were dire:

> The latest leap in technology - the development of sophisticated taping devices - threatens to undermine the very existence of the creators who have filled the airwaves and record stores with music. The technology enables the individual, in his or her home, and at the push of a button, to capture a musical performance forever - for free (RIAA statement to US congress, Drew, 2013, p. 260).

The following chapter examines issues around government policy and the recording industry, lobbying efforts of music industry trade organisations (specifically the BPI), and discourses in the popular music media around these themes. It does so by looking at debates around one of the most highly publicised and contentious topics involving the music recording industry in the 1980s; home taping.

5.2. 'Home taping is killing music'

> So, I don't buy records in your shop, now I tape them all 'cause I'm Top of the Pops ('C30/ C60/ C90, go!', Bow, Wow, Wow, 1980).

> With sales of LPs decreasing rapidly as a result of the tight financial climate which affects sales of all sorts of consumer goods, the record industry is anxious to plug all leaks of its revenue. The most serious of these leaks are bootlegging and home taping. (NME, July 12 1980, p. 12).

As Drew notes, the cassette tape was introduced in 1963 by Phillips and, in conjunction with Japanese hardware manufacturers, made tentative inroads into its target market of teenagers who were less concerned with audio quality and more interested in convenience and price (Drew, 2013, p. 254). The primary use of the new technology seems to have been taping songs from radio, and the rapid rise in sales of integrated radio and tape recorder units had already started alarm bells ringing at major record labels by the end of the sixties, as RCA marketing executive Irwin Tarr conceded in a 1969 Newsweek article: 'These combination cassette-radio units, which permit the

consumer to record as he listens… have all kinds of implications which frighten the whole music industry' (Drew, 2013, p. 254). The fears of the music industry were partly to do with the potential of the emerging technology and partly to do with the unpredictability of a factor that the record industry had always sought to control; consumer behaviour. The increasing flexibility of cassette tape technology, as well as advances in sound quality, only served to increase the desirability of cassette tapes. Wheeldon observes that by the end of the 1970s 'the radio-cassette player had already become the default standard for in-car audio' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 37), and the popularity of cassette tape was confirmed by the appearance on the market of the Sony Walkman in 1979, a move which 'transformed the consumption of music globally' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 37). Wheeldon also suggests that despite the obvious downsides of home taping for the industry, the Walkman, whose portability and convenience made it an ideal lifestyle accessory for consumers, 'undoubtedly stimulated the global demand for recorded music' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 37). Home taping was cheap and accessible and provided audiences with the means to control their experience of listening to and sharing recorded music. Playlists of favourite songs could be made and passed around, enabling consumers of music to become producers, and copies of favourite records could be made onto tape, allowing audiences to experience mobile listening (Bottomley, 2015, p. 126). The control enjoyed by the music recording industry (and, indeed, other media industries such as the film and television industries), which had always been underpinned by intellectual property law, or more specifically, copyright law, was being eroded and industry responses to this loss of control, although varied, were generally characterised by an attempt to wage a rhetorical campaign against home tapers using a set of dubious legal and moral arguments. As Drew points out the 'unknowability of home tapers' (Drew, 2013, p. 256) and the industry's inability to monitor and constrain their behaviour, was the major record companies fundamental challenge, 'what frustrated the music industry was less that they could not arrest home tapers than that they could not locate or quantify them precisely' (Drew, 2013, p. 257). Furthermore, there was a considerable grey area around the practice of home taping in relation to copyright law. Bottomley notes that, according to copyright law in the U.S. and the U.K, 'what home tapers were doing in the late 1970s and 1980s was not copyright infringement under the existing law… what most music fans were doing was not bootlegging, since it was non-commercial and conducted in the privacy

of their own homes' (Bottomley, 2015, p. 126). Despite the fact that a Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) commissioned report, carried out by economic consultant Alan Greenspan in 1981, arrived at the eye-watering figure of $900 million in losses to the record industry as a consequence of home taping (Drew, 2013, p. 257), there was a reluctance to attempt to criminalise individual home tapers by pursuing individuals in their home by means of injunction, which would have been the conventional method of dealing with copyright infringement. This reluctance can, at least in part, be attributed to the fact that various surveys suggested that the biggest group of home tapers were also the biggest consumers of the record industry's products. Perhaps mindful of the potential reputational damage of litigating against their primary market, the recorded music industry, through its various trade organisations and lobbying groups, set about a variety of alternative responses to the home taping problem.

In the week of the 1979 general election, Music Week published an election special outlining the three main policy priorities of the 'music industry' (meaning the British Phonographic Industry). These consisted of the reduction or even abolition of VAT on tapes and records, cuts to the highest rates of income tax in the hope that this would 'tempt the superstars back to this country', and, as the top priority, a levy on blank tape to compensate copyright owners for the industry's declining revenues (MW, May 5 1979, p. 1). The BPI director general, John Deacon, promised that 'Parliament will be the subject of intense lobbying in the coming months' (MW, May 5 1979, p.1). In fact, the lobbying would last throughout the eighties and would be the policy issue that the BPI would most frequently press the government of Margaret Thatcher on.

The BPI, in answer to the release in 1980 of Bow Wow Wow's 'C30/ C60/ C90, go!' which explicitly endorsed the use of audio cassette technology for purposes that infringed copyright (its release on cassette single even featured a blank 'B' side which consumers were encouraged to use for infringing), described home-taping as 'the biggest problem facing the music industry' (NME, July 12,1980). In doing so, the organisation, in characteristic fashion, conflated the music recording industry with the 'music industry'; a wilful misrepresentation which continues to be used to obscure the diverse and complex interests which constitute the field of popular music cultural

production. As Bottomley observes in relation to the BPI's U.S. counterpart, the Recording Industry Association of America:

> Trade groups like the RIAA claim to speak for the industry but, in fact, only represent a narrow set of special interests, a small (but powerful) subgroup of record labels that are focused primarily on the revenue stream earned on intellectual property rights (Bottomley, 2015, p. 124).

Powerful vested interests such as the BPI and the RIAA invoke the term 'music industry' as a kind of metonymy, a rhetorical trope which acts to not only present their own membership as something of greater scale and scope than it is, but to actively marginalise other areas in the field of popular music cultural production such as music publishing, artist management and the live music industry. Indeed, this marginalisation extends to other cultural producers in the recording industry itself; with myriad small, independent labels excluded (or, at least, made peripheral) by the BPI definition. In fact, the exclusion of independent record labels by the BPI is not merely rhetorical. Although, the organisation is and was, theoretically, open to any kind of record labels, in practice there has always been an effective top-down hierarchy whose structure has often dissuaded independent labels from joining at all, as observed by Ian McNay, founder of Cherry Red Records, when running for a position on the BPI board in 1982: 'the BPI should launch a real campaign to get all of the independent labels to become members. And at the same time, it must prove that it can be of service to those independents as well as to the majors' (MW, September 16, 1982). McNay was to be successful in his bid to win a seat on the BPI council but as Music Week observed, the majors may have been motivated more by the desire to keep an eye on the outspoken McNay than to any real interest in making concessions to the independent sector, 'cynics might suggest that he was voted on to the hallowed council because he would be less trouble in than out. But whatever, the indies do now have a voice within the industry's inner sanctum' (MW, Feb 18, 1984). As will be discussed below, despite McNay's success, the independents would make various attempts throughout the 80s to establish their own alternative trade organisation (this would culminate in the founding of the Association of Independent Music in 1998), frequently citing their lack of representation at the BPI as the guiding factor in this pursuit. The institutional power of the major labels enables them to use rhetorical mechanisms in a way which

facilitates what Wheeldon calls *paradigm reinforcement* (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 124); the major record labels become the de facto music industry and are thus able to silence other competing and, often, dissenting voices. Bottomley suggests that ‘there is a clear strategic advantage to them attempting to monopolise the industrial discourse’ (Bottomley, 2015, p. 124) and, indeed, the attempt to prevail on the rhetorical battleground is designed to arm this small but powerful subgroup of record labels with the ideological weapons with which to prevail at a political level; most crucially, to lobby governments to protect their intellectual property rights through copyright law, and where necessary to adequately enforce those laws against infringers. This rhetorical struggle played out in the pages of Music Week throughout the 1980s but was particularly prevalent during the early years of the decade before the advent of CDs would serve to allay major record label fears over declining record sales and, ultimately, shift copyright protection priorities elsewhere. One of the most frequent arguments raised by the collective voice of major record labels to counter home-taping (and supposedly, therefore, declining record sales).in the UK during this period was the need for a levy on the purchase of blank tapes:

> The BPI is pressing for a levy on blank tapes; say 10p on every cassette sold which will be divided up between the record companies which are members of the BPI… the government is pledged to introduce changes in the law regarding home taping as part of wider changes in the existing copyright laws. A Green Paper which is a sort of preliminary discussion document is due to be published by the end of the year (NME, July 12 1980, p. 12).

Music Week in June 1981, somewhat inevitably given its role as mouthpiece for major record label concerns, looked forward to a ‘Green Paper’, due to be published by the Department of Trade and Industry the following month, which they hoped would take the first step towards ‘approving a levy on blank tapes to compensate for losses through home taping’ (MW, June 20 1981, p.1). These losses amounted to around 200 million pounds according to the record industry’s lobbyists (although accounting methods were not exactly transparent), which Music Week regarded as a ‘powerful argument.’ The article noted the general lack of sympathy amongst consumer media as well as the inevitable counter campaign by the manufacturers of blank tape, who had themselves established a pressure group lobbying against the levy, known as the Tape

Manufacturers Group, a group which, according to an article elsewhere in Music Week (which bore the headline 'Tape men come out fighting to stop the levy'), comprised of most of the major players in the blank tape industry:

> The group is headed by Sony UK managing director Bill Fulton and includes BASF, 3M, TDK, Maxell and Memorex. But it does not represent an entirely united front- notably, but not surprisingly, missing from its ranks are EMI and Philips (MW, June 27 1981, p. 1).

The Tape Manufacturers Group had hired a PR company called Marcom Public Relation to conduct a media campaign, as well as a public affairs consultancy, Salingbury Ltd, whose role was to lobby members of Parliament in a counter measure to the intensive lobbying of the BPI and its allies. They would also seek to gain the support of other 'affected groups', for example, businesses who made use of tapes as a means of documenting meetings, to strengthen their case. Central to the arguments made by the Tape Manufacturers were the findings of a specially commissioned market research group which contested the figures relating to losses to record companies which had been attributed directly to home taping by the BPI, as stated by the Marcom PR managing director:

> A lot of the facts and figures put out in the record industry's booklet on taping simply do not stand up to close scrutiny. We are doing our own research to challenge those assumptions. We simply do not believe the extent of the problem is anything like the scale the record industry claims (MW, June 27 1981, p. 1).

Furthermore, Lloyd continued to outline alternative reasons why revenues of major record companies might be suffering, factors which placed the onus of responsibility on the record companies themselves and suggested that the record industry's own complacency was as responsible for their struggles as any external issues: 'we maintain that it is not home taping in isolation that is responsible for falling record sales, but that high prices, poor technical quality and artistic quality are also major contributory factors' (MW, June 27 1981, p. 1).

In addition to the opposition the BPI and other interested parties faced from the Tape Manufacturers Group, a lobbying group representing consumers entered the fray, also

seeking to oppose the blank tape levy on the grounds that it would be 'unfair and unworkable' (MW, Sep 3 1983, p. 1).The Consumers in the European Community Group (CECG) issued a paper in August 1983 aimed at the EEC committee which was, at that time, working on a memorandum on copyright reform which, according to leaked reports, contained proposals for some kind of compensatory levy for copyright holders. The CECG put forward the eminently sensible argument that a levy applied across the board would represent an injustice to those consumers who did not use blank tape to infringe on copyrighted material, and as with the Tape Manufacturers Group, implied bad faith acting on the part of the BPI in arguing that copyright infringement was at the root of their financial woes:

> A levy would put up tape prices to protect the record industry in the guise of seeking so-called justice for copyright holders. It is a classic example of one industry trying to protect its own interests not by improving its product or competitiveness, but by attacking a more successful rival, with the consumer picking up the bill (MW, Sep 3 1983, p. 1).

A similar argument was made by Times correspondent Bernard Levin in the pages of Music Week where he argued against the support of Robert Montgomery, managing director of the Mechanical Copyright Protection Society (MCPS) for the abolition of the amateur recording license (the purchase of which allowed individuals a limited set of home recording rights) and for the introduction of a blank tape levy. Montgomery, whose organisation represented - and continues to represent - music publishers and songwriters, argued that those who infringed upon the copyright of rights holders in recorded music invariably infringed upon the rights of composers and publishers. Citing research that demonstrated a 'dramatic' year-on-year increase in the sale of domestic tape recorders capable of recording from radio or vinyl records from 1975 onwards, as well as consumer behaviour studies which charted a substantial increase in home taping, Montgomery suggested that, whether or not BPI estimates that the UK music industry had lost over two million pounds in revenue were accurate: 'There is no doubt that a large amount of domestic recording takes place, and that the copyright owners in both the record and the music suffer a loss of protection and income' (MW, June 20 1981, p. 4).

Montgomery then provided a warning to consumers regarding the potential consequences of a failure to remunerate recording copyright holders for losses sustained as a result of home taping, ‘the record industry over recent years has been sufficiently buoyant to enable it to offer a very broad catalogue, particularly in the field of serious music, which it may not be able to offer in the future’ (MW June 20, 1981). Levin, however, dismissed the suggestion of the MCPS that the only effective means at their disposal of protecting their copyright was a ‘copyright royalty’ on blank tape. After noting that he was asked by the MCPS to press their case for a levy - alongside an abolition of the amateur recording license- with his local MP and, indeed, the Copyright Department of the Department of Trade, he responded:

> I shall certainly write to both, indicating my strong dissent from the proposal. I hope that the Department of Trade, and Parliament, will pay no heed to the demand, and indeed tell the MCPS that it will not even be considered unless the license is at once restored for those who are willing to pay their proper due. *A tax designed to catch the law-evading which is also levied on the law-abiding is an unjust law (*emphasis added*),* and doubly so in this case since there are two kinds of law-abiding folk - those who want to record copyright material and are willing to buy a license to give them the right to do so, and those who want to record only non-copyright material and should not be made to pay anything at all (MW, June 20 1981, p. 4).

Levin’s remarks recognised a fundamental weakness in the argument for a levy on blank tapes; that in order to compensate the record industry for losses due to the illegal behaviour of a limited number of individuals, the government would be required to penalise those who had no intention of engaging in criminal activity. The record industry, following Levin’s counter argument on Montgomery, was overplaying its hand and wilfully overlooking the many uses blank tapes could be put to without infringing upon copyright. Another Music Week article from November the following year confirmed the reluctance of the Conservative government to enact legislation that would be ‘unfair’ but perhaps, more importantly in the run-up to a general election, unpopular:

> Hopes faded last week that the government may have been influenced to favour a blank tape levy, following the intense lobbying and many submissions during

> the copyright reform Green paper consultative period. Answering a question on the subject in the House of Commons, consumer affairs minister Gerrard Vaughan said that the government would be reluctant to bring in a levy unless it was sure that it would be of benefit. 'At the moment that does not appear to be the case' he added. And he reiterated the point that will obviously become a very important factor as the next general election approaches - the Government's fear that a levy would impose 'an unfair burden on a large number of private individuals' (MW Nov 20, 1982).

Moreover, dissenting voices from leading figures in the industry further undermined the BPI's case for punitive measures against consumers. Simon Napier-Bell was roundly condemned by the BPI in the same week that the organisation released figures claiming that the industry in the UK had lost 304.9 million pounds to home taping in 1981 (a significant increase on their estimates of a 200-million-pound loss in 1980).after the announcement that Japan's UK tour was to be sponsored by tape manufacturer Maxell under the banner of 'Maxell presents Japan'. According to a BPI spokesman, 'we are extremely disappointed that Japan should choose to have a commercial link-up with an organisation whose products jeopardise the act's future in the recording industry. Japan appear to be biting the hand that feeds them' (MW, Nov 6 1982, p. 1).
The statement, which seemed to serve as a thinly veiled threat, illustrated the BPI's inherent logic that the recording industry was pre-eminent in or, indeed, synonymous with the music industry. The recording industry is the 'hand that feeds' according to this paradigm even though the story itself involves two other potentially significant revenue streams in touring and sponsorship (music publishing was presumably also a significant source of sustenance for Japan during this period). The Music Week article opens with an account of tape manufacturers 'aggressively' moving into the live music market as well as warnings over several major manufacturers 'running full-page advertising campaigns in the consumer music papers, the Sunday colour supplements and elsewhere' (MW, Nov 6 1982, p. 1). The use of the rhetoric of conflict creates a narrative of good versus evil, of protagonists and antagonists, with a simplistic, underlying moral of virtuous, deserving record labels who are committed to the fostering and development of musicians, being threatened by the rapacious infiltrators of the tape manufacturing industry. According to this dichotomy, it is self-evident which

side has the moral high-ground. It is, therefore, deeply unfortunate when the putatively unassailable, the artist (in this case, Japan), undermines this paradigm and it becomes necessary to subject them to public disapprobation, in order to discourage others from following suit. However, Napier-Bell, a record industry veteran, was unrepentant in the face of the BPI's chiding:

> We dispute the assertion that blank tape sales harm the sales of records. We have studied several surveys and believe that most record buyers buy both records and blank tapes-for various uses. When it comes down to it the record buyers-the fans will always want the original packaging that comes with the album (MW, Nov 6 1982, p. 1).

Supporting the view of Napier-Bell was Genesis manager Tony Smith who argued in similar terms that the primary cause of the record industry's problems was their own inability to create a product which appealed to the market: 'People are screaming about home taping. I don't believe that home-taping is that big a deal. If you produce good product with good packaging with an emotional connection, then people are going to buy it' (MW, Nov 6 1982, p.1). Indeed, Chris Blackwell, label owner at Island records, took an innovative approach to the 'threat' of home taping, and, in doing so, incurred the chagrin of the BPI, who collectively undertook to discipline him and his record company (which was a BPI member), in order to force him into line and presumably *pour encourager les autres*. Under the marketing slogan of One Plus One, Island released various artists (including albums by J.J. Cale, Bunny Wailer and Todd Rundgren in 1981) on cassette tape, with one side left blank to enable consumers to make recordings of their favourite artists. The rationale behind this approach was explained in terms of responding to consumers' needs. After observing that sales of cassette players were outstripping sales of record players in the UK, a trend which Island argued the record industry had failed to respond to, an official record company statement explained:

> One plus One tapes are cheaper and because of the chrome tape, provide better sound quality than any other pre-recorded tapes, and the blank side is a major bonus. We believe that One Plus One will take sales away, repeat away, from the blank tape market. If One Plus One was adapted to the standard cassette system in the UK, we believe the income generated would compensate for the

> industry's potential losses. One Plus One is an important contribution to boosting sales of prerecorded music and has already met with approval from both the trade and consumers (MW, May 2 1981, p.1).

The BPI, perhaps correctly, regarded this move as one which would undermine the legitimacy of their ongoing campaign against home taping and, for a period of time at least, Blackwell came to be seen as 'the enemy within' and was publicly cast as such in Music Week. Insisting that Blackwell and Island 'cease this practice forthwith', BPI chairman Chris Wright, after calling an emergency meeting, denounced the label's inventive strategy in typically lurid, apocalyptic terms, in the process revealing the underlying anxiety that Blackwell's initiative was undermining the BPI's lobbying efforts:

> The council unanimously expressed their abhorrence of the practice of providing blank tape to the music consumer in this manner. Home-taping is gradually killing the music industry in this country, and it is particularly unfortunate that Island should embark on this venture at this time; the record industry's campaign to impress upon the public, the Government and Parliament that rights owners should be compensated for the theft of their property is reaching a critical stage (MW, May 2 1981, p.1).

Wright praised the BPI council for its unanimous condemnation of One Plus One and continued with the theme of imminent demise, although this time substituting the term 'music industry' for 'record industry' demonstrating their interchangeable nature in the eyes of the BPI:

> We cannot be seen to condone such actions by a BPI member company when we, as in industry, are fighting to combat home taping. We must be seen to be acting to halt the deplorable spread of home taping. It is a worldwide crisis that is killing the record industry (MW, May 2 1981, p.1).

Blackwell's response was to outline a vision where the tape cassette would be the dominant format in the recorded music industry, forecasting that: 'currently, cassettes account for around 15 to 20 per cent of the market. In five-years' time, the situation will be reversed' (MW, May 9 1981, p. 1).

Noting that record company marketing activities tended to be almost exclusively orientated towards vinyl, that record companies were over-pricing cassettes despite them being inferior in sound quality and packaging and artwork to vinyl, and that typical release schedules meant that the cassette tape came out later than the vinyl record thus minimising its impact in the marketplace, Blackwell made an interesting prediction with regards to the potential future co-existence of the two formats, 'albums should be like hard backs, first editions, something to collect, while cassettes, like paperbacks, should be a cheap… alternative but with quality content' (MW, May 9 1981, p. 1).

The controversy also led to an uncomfortable conflict of interest for EMI who were responsible for pressing and distributing Island product at the time. Having been one of the 16 record companies who participated in the BPI council which 'unanimously declared war on One Plus One' (MW, May 16 1981, p. 1), EMI initially refused to comment on the situation, instead issuing a terse statement indicating that they would be 'honouring contractual obligations with Island while talks were continuing' (MW, May 16, 1981, p.1).

The ambivalence of EMI's position is, perhaps, indicative of the situation many of the major labels found themselves in, despite the putative united front of the BPI. Napier-Bell certainly thought as much when responding to BPI criticism over Maxell's sponsorship of Japan, 'Home taping is not killing music and, anyway, the majority of major record company executives are hypocrites. Name one that isn't involved with a blank tape company in one way or another' (MW, November 6 1982, p.1).

The BPI was to launch a notorious campaign around the slogan 'home taping is killing music and its illegal' later in the same year, and it is apparent from Wright's rhetoric that the narrative was already being managed at this point. The campaign ran with a skull-and-crossbones logo which was eventually featured on the inner sleeve of the majority of vinyl records pressed in the UK and had the clear intention of equating the habit of domestic copying with the more serious conduct of bootlegging (i.e. piracy). The fact that the practice of home taping itself wasn't actually illegal at all was of little concern to the major record labels and, neither was the preposterous nature of the contention that *music* itself was under threat (rather than merely large corporations'

profits). The ineffectiveness of the campaign (which would go on to be widely lampooned) was lamented in a Music Week editorial roughly a year after its launch:

> Most consumers simply do not understand how home taping can kill music; the minority who have some tenuous grasp of the issues involved believe that the campaign against home taping is just another conspiracy to make already filthy rich record companies richer still (MW, October 2 1982, p. 4).

Bottomley suggests that although home taping was the specific issue at hand for the recording industries', the ulterior and much wider motive was to establish effective control over discourses around copyrighted material in order to push for legislative change: 'The recording industries 'piracy' narrative can be viewed as a precursor - a smokescreen even - for a larger push to implement more restrictive copyright legislation' (Bottomley, 2015, p.130). Simon Frith, writing in 1987, pointed out that the difficulty the record industry faced in convincing the public of the evils of home taping was that it usurped 'common sense' assumptions of ownership and control:

> Its underlying slogan, Home-Taping is Theft, is unconvincing in terms of most consumer's ethical common sense. They own record/ radio/ cassette players, so why can't they do what they like with them? Copy a record for a friend? Tape the best tracks from a John Peel show? (Frith, 1987, p. 60).

This common-sense logic was echoed by Bill Bennet who, on reporting on copying in the computer software industry, drew comparison with debates in the music recording industry:

> My blood boils when I see the 'Home Taping is killing music' sticker. What nonsense. It is the greed of the record companies that is killing music. They fall over themselves to pay huge sums to big name recording artists and then wonder where they are losing money. I buy a lot of records and I tape them. I do this because a constantly played record gets scratched and damaged, but a tape doesn't and, anyway, it can be cheaply replaced. I feel that the 5 pounds I pay for this disc entitles me to do this' (MW, Feb 25 1984, p. 21).

Consumer behaviour concerning home taping was, as in any case, dictated by consumer attitudes. Consumer attitudes were informed by narratives played out in various

discursive domains (most commonly the various forums of the media but also in, for example, parliamentary political debates), and involved a familiar cast of protagonists and antagonists and, of course, the obligatory underlying moral. The 'home taping is killing music' campaign was an attempt at narrative management by the recording industry (specifically the major record labels and their trade organisations) which relied on casting home tapers as 'thieves' and, indeed, 'murderers' with the sympathetic figures of the struggling musician and even music personified as the victims. These victims operated as persuasive devices, designed to elicit sympathy and support and, ultimately, to produce changes in consumer behaviour and political opinion. Unfortunately for the industry, competing narratives were in cultural circulation at the same time, coming from various sources, including rival lobbying bodies such as The Tape Manufacturers Group and the Consumers in the European Community Group but also from dissenting voices from within the recording industry. Furthermore, as outlined in the quotes from Frith and Bennett above, industry narratives often ran counter to a set of 'common sense' assumptions around ownership of products and the right of consumers to use such products in whichever ways they desired. In Bennett's case, the paradigm is subverted so that the antagonists are profligate, avaricious record labels rather than 'thieving' home tapers and the image of the struggling musician becomes 'big name recording artists', which, in the process serves to transform the primary underlying moral question to one of corporate greed and excess. Bennett also succeeds in presenting the consumer, generalised from the example of himself, as someone who contributes significantly in a financial sense to the recording industry and is forced to resort to home taping because of the poor quality of the product he must pay a considerable price for. A survey carried out in 1986 by the Tape Manufacturers Group came to the same conclusion in responding to a government proposal to introduce a 10 per cent levy on blank tape:

> The survey found that the majority of people tape albums either to preserve an LP's pristine condition or to allow them to play their music in their car or personal stereo. When a record is bought, the consumer has paid for the right to listen to that music as often as he or she pleases (MW, May 24 1986, p. 1).

Debates around the ethics of home taping and industry attempts to impose a blank tape levy would continue throughout the decade, with the Conservative government

and, more specifically, the Department of Trade and Industry, at various strategic times, signalling to the BPI lobby that their proposals might be implemented. Simon Frith and Jon Savage, writing in the Observer in 1987, speculated that the presence of Norman Tebbit at the BPI's annual awards ceremony the year before, was one such coded message, although in doing so, they raise a significant question in relation to the Tories free market ideals and such a protectionist measure: 'The subsequent accord between the Tories and the record biz was decidedly odd. Why should a market force government allow this particular industry to protect itself from the effects of technological change and competition?' (Frith and Savage, 18 Oct 1987). Furthermore, the authors argue in a similar fashion to Bottomley, that the 'industry' was using debates around a blank tape levy as a kind of test case for potential future threats to their revenues in order to establish legal precedents which could be instrumentalised at a later date:

> What is at stake here is not income (a levy wouldn't raise that much) but legal principle, and what the music industry desperately needs is not something to cover their present 'losses' but a protective device against the threats to rights income to come. The tape levy campaign may have looked back to the nineteenth century in its imagery of the poor Romantic artist, but its object is legislation to protect the record industry from the future (Frith and Savage, 18 Oct 1987).

Despite the hysteria inherent in the response of the major labels to increased home taping in the late 70s and 80s, it seems reasonable to suggest that the opportunities facilitated by cassette technology (including, of course, the far more significant threat of bootlegging), did conceivably pose a threat to record industry profits and, therefore, it was natural for them to pursue ways in which to counter this. The primary approach by which they attempted to achieve this was to use their institutional might (and appeals to historical importance) to lobby governments for legislative change, a policy which would become more orchestrated and targeted in ensuing decades. Despite interventions from various Conservative political figures in support of a levy, Margaret Thatcher herself seemed generally resistant to the idea of a tape levy, even if mainly for

pragmatic reasons, as acknowledged in Music Week, 'The Prime Minister is known to have her mind set against the prospect of a vote-losing levy.'[22] (MW, Nov 20 1982, p.1). The narrative of existential crisis, of an industry fighting for its life, was not exclusive to organisations such as the BPI, or even to those sympathetic to major labels, as a 1980 NME article by Mick Farren makes clear:

> Neither copyright laws made for the era of printed books, nor a levy on blank tape are going to save the record industry from being bled white by home-made tapes. In the long run, it could be that popular music will become something that is mainly played or broadcast. An incredibly contracted record business might only service specialists and collectors. This might sound far-fetched, but it is the logical outcome of a seemingly irreversible rot that has long since set in (NME, Nov 1 1980, p. 9).

Such pessimistic forecasts would gradually disappear from media reports from around the middle of the 1980s only to resurface with a vengeance with the arrival of Napster in 1999, when the disruptive potential of digital technology would become apparent. In the meantime, new technological developments in the laboratories of Sony and Phillips, would come to increasingly dominate recording industry discourses. For example in 1983, Clive Swann, the managing director of Polygram outlined his conviction that CD would come to dominate the recording market: 'We believe CD is the big selling music carrier of the future. We are deeply committed to this; we believe it will happen' (MW, Feb 26 1983, p. 1). Swan's prediction was prescient as by Christmas 1989 the CD had overtaken vinyl LPs as the bestselling format in the UK and would generally fuel a decade of excess in major record labels as profits soared (Knopper 2009, Wheeldon 2014). Nevertheless, as Drew points out, inherent in the redemptive promise of the new digital technology, was the potential for paradigm disruption which would far exceed the threat of home taping and would be met by the major recording industry with similar rhetorical posturing and legislative threats:

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[22] The Prime Minister demonstrated very little commitment to resolving issues around blank tapes and the music industry although she did stage an intervention in the House of Commons on behalf of the producers of video cassettes: 'It is vital to stop the pirating of cassettes. Such pirating is totally unfair to those who produce cassettes. The government will do everything possible to ensure that the pirating is stopped.' (MW, June 10, 1983, Video Extra).

> The many ironies of the home taping controversy become clear in retrospect, with the forward march of time and technology: the fact that the music industry sought to limit a practice it had implicitly condoned just a few years before; that it was driven to distraction by the problem of analogue copying; and that the medium the industry embraced to revive its fortunes, the compact disc, would ultimately contribute to the industry's headaches in its recordable forms (Drew, 2014, p. 253).

This chapter examined UK record industry responses to the issue of home taping and, in particular, the ways in which discourses around this issue in UK trade magazines of the period reveal disparities in the relative political and economic status of major and independent record labels. Central to these discourses is the contribution of the BPI which, although notionally representing both major and independent labels, can be seen in this time of 'crisis' to have prioritised majors and peripheralised independents. This serves as a useful example of the uneven power relations which contributed to repeated attempts in the independent sector to set up their own trade organisation, a process which culminated in the formation of AIM in 1998 (which will be examined in chapter 9). More generally, this chapter looked at an example of how organisational discourse is utilised to influence the strategic decision-making of key stakeholders (in this case, the UK government).

Chapter 6: Government Policy and Popular Music under Margaret Thatcher

This chapter will examine a key policy of the Thatcher era, the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which played a significant role in many cultural industries' enterprises during the 1980s.

6.1. 'We were children of Thatcher': The Enterprise Allowance Scheme and the Independent Popular Music Recording Sector

> The take up was huge - nearly every label I knew in that era was formed that way, C.O.R records, Rise above etc. It was really successful because it offered a way for many would-be musicians, comics, designers, artists etc. to get the jobless tag off their backs and so have time to concentrate on building a business (Digby Pearson quoted in Mudrian, 2004, p. 121).

> The Tories, I hate giving them credit for anything, but they had this thing called the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and basically, I was part of that, and I got a thousand-pound bank loan off the Nat West Bank, blagged it, and got an extra five pounds on the dole. Didn't have to kid on I was a painter and decorator, and Creation records was formed out of that (Alan McGee in Stand down Margaret, BBC Radio 2, 2009).

The Enterprise Allowance Scheme was an initiative instigated by the Conservative government in order to support small businesses and help create the 'enterprise culture' that Thatcherism so venerated, proved invaluable to numerous start-up record labels during this period including three of the most significant and enduring: Creation (1983), Earache (1985) and Warp (1989).

The 1986 government report *Allowing for Enterprise: A Qualitative Assessment of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme* observed that, 'in essence, the EAS represents an open invitation to Britain's unemployed to create their own jobs' (Beckett, 2015, p. 211). On one hand, this would serve to mitigate the effects of the rampant increase in unemployment (particularly youth unemployment) which had resulted from the government's economic policies, and on the other it would encourage self-reliance and innovation and diminish Britain's sense of dependency on heavy industry and state support. Superficially, at least, the EAS could be regarded as classic Thatcherism. The

Prime Minister had outlined her vision of entrepreneurship in the enterprise culture in an interview in 1982:

> We are looking for self-starters. We are looking for princes of industry, people who have the fantastic ability to build things and create jobs. Some of the key elements of the enterprise paradigm are to be found here: the importance of 'standing on your own feet', taking the initiative, getting things done. 'Self-starters' make their own luck and are vigorous individualists (Daily Express Jul 23, 1982).

The scheme, as framed by the under-secretary of state for industry John MacGregor at its inception, carried within it the emancipatory promise at the heart of the New Right's economic philosophy; autonomy (although the freedom to work day and night was somewhat ambiguous). It is also notable that many of the positive value concepts attributed to independent record labels in popular music discourses were in evidence here:

> It requires willingness to work night and day, if necessary, to meet a customer's requirements, because proprietors have a stake in their own business. It also requires lack of restrictive practices, good industrial relations, flexibility and speed of response to a market opportunity, innovativeness and resourcefulness - much of which I have seen in the past 10 months - but, above all, recognition by owners and proprietors, as well as by all those working in small firms, that meeting customers' needs alone ensures not only growth but survival (Macgregor, 13 Nov 1981).

'Flexibility', 'speed of response, 'innovativeness', resourcefulness'; all traits traditionally presented as virtues of the small record label in contrast to the corporate majors. McGregor also emphasises two areas which were central to Thatcherism's new industrial paradigm; a 'lack of restrictive practices' and 'good industrial relations', widely understood codes for deregulation and the absence of trade unionism. Key to the rhetoric of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme was the sense of people 'having a stake in their own business' and thus having control (the flipside of which, of course, was precarity). Indeed, around half of applicants surveyed in the 1986 report when responding to a questionnaire on their reason for applying for the scheme, cited 'independence', self-actualisation', or the 'desire for control' (the familiar terms of

autonomy) as motivating factors, rather than more prosaic objectives such as to make money or to get a job (Beckett, 2015, pp. 211-212). The conditions were relatively straightforward; if you had been out of work for thirteen weeks; could present to the government a 'valid business proposal'; could 'undertake to work solely for the business' for at least 36 hours per week; and (significantly) could access £1, 000 to invest in the business then you were eligible.

Although open to anyone from 18-65, over half of applicants were in their early thirties or younger (Beckett, 2015, p. 211). The scheme was piloted in 1982 in a variety of areas that had been particularly affected by increased unemployment (these included Coventry, Wrexham, north Ayrshire and north-east Lancashire) before being rolled out nationally in August 1983. It represented a curious mixture of government subsidy and light-touch regulation and was successful enough that the Prime Minister could claim in a speech the following year that it had allowed 23, 000 people who were unemployed to become self-employed. A further 18 months down the line (in October 1985) she would continue to be enthusiastic, telling the Sunday Mirror:

> 'We have got something called an Enterprise Allowance which we are quite excited about. Young people who become unemployed, who want to start up a business of their own - that is exactly the kind of person we want to encourage' (Sunday Mirror Oct 1, 1985).

That such young people would include the founder of a record label that would unleash Extreme Noise Terror and Napalm Death on the British public was possibly an unintended consequence. The Conservative Party had shown little interest in the arts, however, as Norman Tebbit, who was the Government's employment secretary when the Scheme was introduced, observed:

> It is slightly ironic but, of course, in some cases they found themselves as entrepreneurs in a nice, free-market liberal capitalist system where they were able to earn money and get away and build themselves a business. If they were doing performances at the local pubs and things like that and they were earning money and keeping themselves - and in some cases beginning to employ somebody else - and getting a way to an honest living - well, great (Stand Down Margaret, BBC Radio 2, 2009).

Ken McCluskey, lead singer of the Bluebells, took advantage of the EAS at a crucial juncture in his musical career, positioning himself as an 'urban crofter', a move which enabled him to gain invaluable time to develop musically:

> I got into trouble signing on with the local buroo[23] in Uddingston and I was offered the 'chop' or the chance to join the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. So, I joined the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, just to give myself a break and continued to do my part-time jobs. I called myself an urban crofter because I did all sorts of wee jobs like digging gardens just wee bits of painting, painting fences and whatever and also playing the occasional gig… so, it was total freedom. It gave you space to rehearse, to do gigs, to have your picture in the local paper (McCluskey, 2016).

Another such young entrepreneur was the 19-year-old DJ and producer, Jazzie B, who would use an EAS grant to set up a sound system business that would eventually lead to the globally successful Soul II Soul:

> Round about '82 there was this whole thing with the… Enterprise Allowance Scheme where you had X amount of money and they'd match that money for you to go into business. We took that opportunity. We just piled the money together, went down to the job centre, presented the documentation or whatever. They came back with a letter, we went to the bank, opened an account, they put in the rest of the money... the rest is history (Stand down Margaret, BBC Radio 2, 2009).

Jazzie B then can be seen to epitomise the Thatcherite model of the self-made entrepreneur, resourceful and self-reliant, creating jobs and wealth. However, the ambiguities and tensions inherent between Thatcherism in theory and government policy in practice reveal themselves upon closer inspection. The Conservative Party's Arts Policy in the 80s was effectively that the state should not be involved at all and that the Arts should rely on private sponsorship for funding. The EAS became by accident or design a successful example of state sponsorship of the arts and the springboard for a great many cultural ventures beyond the sphere of popular music.

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[23] 'Buroo' is West of Scotland slang for the Job Centre (or Labour *Bureau*).

Furthermore, various accounts suggest that the scheme was inherently susceptible to scams. Jeff Barrett, who would go on to found the successful record label Heavenly, recalls his role at Creation, which involved a variety of general tasks (including PR and liaising with manufacturers), who received, instead of wages, a loan of £ 1,000 from McGee in order to place in his bank account in order to qualify for the Enterprise Allowance: 'I was a 'consultant'. There were many of us - all setting themselves up as consultants to the music business. It was Alan's scam' (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 155).

The Conservative Party had positioned itself throughout the 1970s as the party of law and order, however, Norman Tebbit takes a perhaps, surprisingly, philosophical view of the black economy, in fact, defending it in terms of the Conservative Party's valorisation of free markets and self-reliance:

> It was always going to happen in the early 80s, wherever the welfare claimant levels were high. Of course, there were blokes working down the market… But they were actually contributing to GNP. I still get letters from people now, writing to me about something or other, and at the end they say, 'I got on my bike…' I know guys who just got themselves a ladder, and a wash flannel, and a bucket - and then they were *doing better*. It was wonderfully unregulated (Beckett, 2015, p. 208).

The consequences of the new labour market arising from the government's economic policies were explored in the BBC TV series 'Boys from the Blackstuff' from 1982, which depicted the fortunes of a group of unemployed men from Liverpool who are forced into the taking up of casual, 'cash in hand' work as a result of the economic devastation of the city. Sean O'Sullivan regards it as an 'allegory of a dysfunctional society' (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 226) and the series provides a vivid portrayal of the collapse of any notion of the working class as an organised and collectively powerful force. The sense of class antagonism and bewilderment in the face of the government's assault on working class communities is articulated most clearly by Snowy Malone, a plasterer by trade who has been blacklisted for membership of the Workers Revolutionary Party and laments the 'swing to the right, tax relief for the rich, redundancies for the poor, mass unemployment, poverty, the curtailing of freedom startin' with the unions' (Bleasdale, 1990, p. 47), and the malign atomising effect this has on society:

> Everything's gone sour, everyone's lockin' the door, turnin' the other cheek, lookin' after number one. But now's the time when we should all be together. Now's the time when we need to be together, 'cos…'cos well we're not winnin' anymore. Don't you see that?' (Bleasdale, 1990, p. 47).

The dominant theme of 'Blackstuff' is disintegration: of the individual, such as in the case of the title character of the series' most influential episode, 'Yosser's Story'; of family, as the tensions created by poverty and instability tear at the domestic lives of central characters Chrissie Todd, Yosser Hughes and Tommy 'Dixie' Dean; and of community as the collective identity of the working class disintegrates amid anger and despair. Similarly, the show is pervaded with a sense of isolation, of separation of the individual from the social. Chrissie, regarded by writer Alan Bleasdale as the show's 'everyman' and moral centre (Bleasdale, 1990, p. 15) gives voice to the 'boys' desire for a sense of dignity in their work as he pleads with building contractor Malloy to make his employment official:

> I know I'm losing money asking you this, but I'd rather be legit on a lot less. I wanna be a working man again. I wanna come home with dirt on me hands and not have to hide it from anybody (Bleasdale, 1990, p. 66).

Malloy's response that 'this is the building game, this is Britain in 1982. It's … just … not … worth … my while' (Bleasdale, 1990, p. 67), underlines the increasing instability in the labour market and the shift in power away from workers. As Beckett notes: 'Cash in hand, irregular hours, no loyalty, every man for himself: these were becoming workplace norms' (Beckett, 2015, pp. 209-210).

John Marek, the Conservative MP for Wrexham, was still expressing reservations about the intersection between the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and the black economy in 1986, asking of the Under-secretary for state, David Trippier:

> When will the Minister realise that he cannot have a flourishing private enterprise scheme in a massively deflated economy? Does he agree, in line with recent studies, that the present enterprise allowance scheme lends support to the black economy? If so, what will he do about it? (Marek, 16 Dec 1986).

Trippier answers in terms of substitution and displacement; that at some future point the Enterprise Allowance Scheme will displace people who are in the black market but evades the question on the extent to which it supports the black market at present. Even for a government who fanatically idealised the free market, the black economy had its downside, and ran counter to the rhetoric which had served the Conservative Party well while in power, as Beckett notes: ‘It generated no tax revenue. It sometimes intersected with more serious criminality. It was after all, illegal- awkward for a Tory Party that since the early 1970s had claimed insistently that it was uniquely tough on law and order’ (Beckett, 2015, p. 210). Indeed, Beckett argues that the EAS was effectively a legitimation of the black economy which had arisen as a result of high unemployment, a view supported by Jazzie B in an interview in Uncut in 2013:

> We were children of Thatcher, and for us Thatcher legitimised a lot of things. In the old days, Arthur Daley figures were seen as rogues. But they became respectable, and so did we. The kind of parties that might have been illegal in the old days were now legitimate (Stand down, Margaret!, Uncut, 2013).

As many who took up the opportunity presented by the EAS noted, one of the principal goals of the Scheme was to reduce the ever-increasing unemployment figures engendered by the government’s monetarist policies:

> Initially, it was a way to get off the dole in England. Back then, in the ‘80s, when you were unemployed in the UK, you had to go to visit the unemployment office every two weeks, and I didn’t fancy doing that. If you start a company, you get the same amount of money and you don’t have to visit the unemployment office every two weeks. You’re not unemployed anymore, so it’s a method for the government to reduce the jobless figures. It was called an ‘Enterprise Allowance Scheme.’ They didn’t care what business you did, as long as you did something, and that meant you were no longer unemployed. And it was an excuse to say, ‘Wow, I’m a record company!’ But the truth is I had no plans, nothing really (Mudrian, 2004, p. 121).

The EAS then can be regarded as a quintessential Thatcherite policy, in that it embodied a variety of the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the political philosophy of Thatcherism, particularly the recurring conflict between free market economics and Victorian values.

According to David Harvey, this paradox is an inherent factor in neoliberalism:

> The scientific rigour of its neoclassical economics does not sit easily with its political commitment to ideals of individual freedom, nor does its supposed mistrust of all state power fit with the need for a strong and if necessary coercive state that will defend the rights of private property, individual liberties, and entrepreneurial freedoms (Harvey, 2007, p. 21).

What is apparent is that, inadvertently or otherwise, the Thatcher government, frequently reviled in popular music circles, introduced legislation based on fundamental Thatcherite principles that significantly helped many important and profitable popular music ventures. Pete Waterman, of Stock, Aitken, Waterman, the most successful UK independent label of the decade, acknowledged the help of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme in the early stages of the career of Rick Astley: ‘He got 40 quid a week - what an amazing deal that was. The kid did a year at 40 quid a week, ended up, you know, being a millionaire, multimillionaire. And we had quite a few kinds on that scheme’ (Stand down Margaret, BBC Radio 2, 2009). Jazzie B saw in the rhetoric of Thatcherism, a reflection of his own entrepreneurial instincts as well as an echo of the philosophy that had driven independent record label cultural production in the punk and post-punk era: ‘For me, Margaret Thatcher was quite important because she helped to legitimise exactly what we were doing. Her whole ethos was about you being more enterprising and getting on with it and doing your own thing’ (Stand down Margaret, BBC Radio 2, 2009).

The ambiguities inherent in the EAS particularly with its curious blend of free market economics and state subsidy is summed up in remarks made by Factory records founder Tony Wilson in a 2000 interview in Uncut: ‘I wonder how many lefties like myself, look back now with misty eyes on the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, that great nurturer of the young’ (Stand down, Margaret!, Uncut, 2013).

Alan McGee, in condemning the Workfare policies of the government of Tony Blair in 1998 also recognized the importance of the scheme in allowing space to develop popular music enterprises:

> The last time I was on the dole for any considerable period of time was 1978. Then I was on an Enterprise Allowance Scheme for a year after I worked on British rail and that's how I got Creation together in 1983. If I had been forced to take a job, then I would probably still be at British Rail now (NME, March 13 1998, p.34).

The government of Margaret Thatcher from 1979 to 1990 broadly overlapped with a boom in independent record labels in the United Kingdom. This boom was characterized by an implicit ideology, one that manifested itself in terms of opposition to the corporate world of major labels, as well as a rhetorical (and sometimes organised) resistance to the government's policies and political philosophy. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe areas of significant compatibility between the economic liberalism of Thatcherism and its promotion of an 'enterprise culture', and the proliferation of small business start-ups that occurred in the independent popular music culture of the period. This can be most notably observed in the influence of the flagship initiative The Enterprise Allowance Scheme on the establishment of various independent record labels.

The scheme appeared in response to the problem of widespread youth unemployment engendered by the government's own economic policies. As such, any praise of its achievements, which can only be regarded as partial, anyway, must be tempered. Unemployment in the United Kingdom in 1990, although lower than its mid-1980s peak of over three million, was still significantly higher than when Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 (Flanders, BBC News, 10 April 2013).

This chapter has examined the impact of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme on entrepreneurial music businesses and, therefore, on UK independent popular music culture in the 1980s. In doing so, it has provided useful insights into the degree to which the political philosophy of Thatcherism facilitated the development of independent record labels during the period. The Enterprise Allowance Scheme has been cited by a variety of key music industry practitioners as pivotal in the development of their

organisations and its role in enabling some of the most significant independent labels of the 1980s is an example of the sometimes-ambiguous nature of the relationship between UK independent popular music culture and Thatcherism.

Part 3: Discourse and Distribution

Chapter 7: 'I could do whatever I wanted to do and that's something': Discourses of independence in Music Week and the New Musical Express in the late 1970s and 1980s

This chapter will provide an examination of discourses in popular music journalism and academic writing concerning independent record labels in the UK in the 1980s, particularly those regarding the independent sector as a site of opposition to the policies and political philosophy of the government of Margaret Thatcher. The stakeholders' voices considered here are predominantly those of musicians, although other industry professionals such as label owners and artist mangers are also represented. Various accounts illustrate the provisional and mutable nature of definitions of independence despite an almost unanimous consensus around its cultural value[24]. A characteristic feature of most stakeholders' interpretations is that - however they define independence - the definition is flexible enough to include them, regardless of record label affiliation or any other industrial or organisational feature. In fact, those artists who were signed to major labels (for example, Dexys Midnight Runners on EMI) or large independents who are distributed through majors and are often portrayed as de facto majors (such as Simple Minds who were signed to Virgin) go to considerable lengths to redefine independence in terms of other factors, such as creative autonomy. The conceptual elasticity of independence is a consequence of its desirability, and the significant role it played in creating and maintaining positive value-perception. General perceptions of independent labels existing apart from and in opposition to the major label system are examined in this chapter, as well as areas of synergy and complementarity between indies and majors.

The corporate nature of major record labels has resulted in them being routinely depicted as overly bureaucratic, as profit-oriented to the detriment of creativity and instinct, as dinosaurs heading for extinction, as not populated by *real music people*, and various other clichés. This characterisation was acknowledged by Rob Dickins, the UK chairman of WEA, when addressing the New Music Seminar in New York in 1984:

[24] Occasional contrarian voices such as that of Malcolm McLaren, notwithstanding.

> There is a popular perception of corporate record companies as being infested by lawyers and accountants who run their businesses with a budget and a balance sheet. Well … this is true. But if corporations do not see the need for music people -the ones who are prepared to take risks and back them all the way - then these corporations are lost and the popular mythology of the corporate record company as a blind, stumbling, out-of-date enterprise will come true. This must not be allowed to happen - not just because of new music but for all music. Corporations must learn that talent comes with and without a law degree. Because of the international and economic power of corporate record companies we all need to foster and develop all forms of music. But because of those armies of accountants, we must also be right (MW, Aug 4 1984, p. 4).

Dickins rhetorically deploys an ironic subversion of expectation ('well… this is true').and self-effacement to make the point here that it is important for decision-makers at 'corporate record companies' - i.e. majors - to support and nurture talent in a manner traditionally associated with independents. The trope of 'risk-taking music people' makes this explicit in contrast to the balance sheet-preoccupied accountant typical of the majors and the use of the verb 'infest' which carries unpleasant connotations of, for example, sharks or insects (certainly not anything desirable) reinforces the negative paradigm of the major label. However, Dickins also points out that the financial power and international reach of the major label network is a significant advantage in the development of new artists and seems to suggest that a more synergistic approach between independents and majors would be desirable for all sectors of the recording industry. Indeed, Dickins goes on to dispute the claim that innovation only originates from independents and urges against what Music Week calls the ghettoization[25] of new music:

> The important thing is not where the music comes from, but that new music succeeds and develops. Whatever the best environment for the act differs from

[25] 'Rob Dickins made an impassioned plea for new music not to be ghettoized by believing it is the exclusive province of the independent record company' (MW, 4 Aug 1984, p. 4).

> case to case, but the good thing is that acts have a choice. New music is not the property of any special breed (MW, Aug 4 1984, p. 1).

Anti-corporate sentiment in the form of hostility to major record labels is also a frequently recurring theme of interviews carried out in by the NME in the late seventies and early eighties. The major vs indie dichotomy is presented as a choice between subordination and autonomy and reproduces culturally widespread discourses of power. Ian Curtis alludes to this paradigm in 1978, outlining the benefits to his band, Joy Division, in staying with Factory Records rather than seeking a major label deal:

> We don't want to get diluted, really, and by staying at Factory at the moment we're free to do what we want. There's no-one restricting us or the music-or even the artwork or promotion. You get bands that are given huge advances-loans really-but what do they spend it on? What is all that money going to get? Is it going to make the music any better?[26] (NME, Sep 23 1989, p.23).

Several aspects of the decision-making processes of musicians in choosing to sign to record labels are brought to the fore here: the incentive of creative authenticity, free from 'dilution' or 'restriction', of autonomy ('free to do what we want'), as well as the idea that the primary attraction of major labels is financial, in the form of 'huge advances'. Nevertheless, Curtis speaks of staying at Factory 'at the moment' suggesting that the desirability of being at an independent is provisional and a move to a major label may be prudent at some future point given the right set of conditions; the career path from independent to major was to be well-trodden throughout the 1980s, generally, at the point when a band decided that the superior resources of the majors had become desirable or necessary. Similarly, in an interview given to NME in July 1980, UB40 outlined their reasons for eschewing the financial resources of the majors, at least for the time being. Having recorded 'King'/ 'Food for Thought' on an eight-track in the home studio of producer Bob Lamb described as 'a room so small that not all of them could fit in' (NME, 19 July 1980, p.17), the tracks were released as a single on a small, local independent label, Graduate records, which was based in Dudley and owned by David and Susan Virrs. Distribution was handled by Graduate and

[26] This article was part of a series of 'From the Vault' articles, re-published some years after their initial publication.

independent specialists Spartan and the single would go on to be the first record released completely independently of the major record labels to reach the UK Top Ten, a success which the NME suggested was not universally celebrated: ‘Not that UB40 themselves are that popular in the business. Their success on the tiny, Dudley-based Graduate Records seems to have upset a few people’ (NME, July 19 1980, p. 17). Norman Hassan cites the limited appeal of a big advance, particularly, when it would probably entail the loss of creative autonomy, as well as demonstrating a financial shrewdness in understanding the importance of retaining a sizeable share of record royalties:

> Several of the majors such as EMI made offers, but all were refused. They all offered huge advances and small percentages, and that won’t pay your wages for five years. We negotiated with Graduate, the first people to show interest in us, and got the terms we wanted as well as complete artistic control, so we signed (NME, July 19 1980, p. 17).

Hassan demonstrates an awareness of the potentially negative financial ramifications of signing to a major, with the structuring of the deals meaning that long-term security would be sacrificed for short-term gain. Moreover, he emphasises that not only does the deal with Graduate offer exemplary terms, but they have also succeeded in the grail quest of the serious artist, securing ‘complete creative control’. Thus, on both fronts, UB40 have preserved legitimacy. The decision-making of artists around record deals will now be further interrogated using three examples from my own interviews.

7.1. ´Where the money was’: Billy Bragg, The Pastels, and Bourgie Bourgie: Decision-making Processes around Record Deals

A significant area of interest for my research was the extent to which musicians actively sought to sign to major or independent record labels and, if so, what was the rationale behind the decision. It occurred to me that, in many cases, artists might simply have taken the first available option or, if they had a choice, signed to a label for reasons other than its industrial status (for example, having a rapport with label personnel or knowing a band or artist already signed to the label). Being aware that most of Billy

Bragg's 80s output was on the independent record label Go! Discs, I asked him if he had consciously chosen to sign to an independent and if so why, to which he insisted:

> It was purely pragmatic. I'd been signed to, well, Utility Records which was a label invented for me by a guy named Peter Jenner who was my manager - eventually my manager - but he was A& R man at Charisma, and he again was a creature of 1968, you know very political, and he signed me for one record, didn't cost him nothing and he signed me for one album. You know, no advance, nothing. Really, just get the record out there. Which was cool by me, I didn't have a problem with that, but what happened was after the record had been out a couple of months, Charisma was bought by Virgin records and Pete hated Richard Branson. He got sacked anyway. I went in one day and he was emptying his desk. I'm like 'what's going to happen now?' and he's like 'well, come on we'll go and do something somewhere else', and I was like 'but what about my record?' So, a guy named Andy McDonald from Go! Discs was sort of following us around and so he went to see Charisma and they said no 'Billy Bragg is a Charisma artist' and Andy McDonald said, 'I'll give you a thousand pounds' and they said 'alright' and that was it - I got transferred like a football player to Go! Discs. So, I liked being on an independent as well. In the early years Go! Discs was kind of like, all of us in it together thing. It kind of went a bit corporate towards the end. I liked being on an indie and it was the sort of place where I could do whatever I wanted to do and that's something. I never had any pressure to, you know, conform, to make what kind of records, to not be political, you know, some of the Red Wedge artists got a little bit of grief from their labels so, you know, I didn't have that (Bragg, 2018).

In Bragg's case there was no premeditation to his decision to sign to Go! Discs, in fact, as he presents it, there was very little volition involved at all, with the decision being made for him by his manager and negotiating parties at the labels. Nevertheless, in recalling his experiences at Go! Discs, at least in the initial stages, he describes the artist-label relationship in terms which are typically used to support the argument of independents being a collaborative, less hierarchical environment. When I asked Stephen McRobbie (AKA Stephen Pastel) whether the decision to sign his band, The Pastels, to Rough Trade was based on the label's status as an independent, he was unequivocal in his response:

> Very much so. We felt that was what we fitted into, and I was really such a big fan of both Dan Treacy and especially the first 100 Rough Trade singles were just such an amazing education and I really wanted us to be part of that world. That was what I wanted… I very much wanted us to be on an independent. You know we were, when we were playing in London, we were being scouted by major labels, but I didn't really care that much. It wasn't what I wanted at the time and didn't especially want to do the group full-time. We wanted to develop and be in control of what we were doing even though we did lose control of what we were doing at several points on independent labels in different ways (McRobbie, 2017).

McRobbie, in contrast to Bragg, suggests a clear focus in the decision-making process around securing a record deal as well as, in common with Norman Hassan, a vision of being allowed to develop over time, which may not have been possible on a major. Similarly, the desirability of 'control' is emphasised (with the acknowledgement that control was lost on occasion on independents). McRobbie describes the independent record label sector as a 'world' which echoes the framing used by Geoff Travis with regards to the independent chart ('we were happy in our own world'[27]) and sets it outside of the world of the majors, reflecting Gabriel's identification of the tropes of framing and focusing in narratives.

Mick Slaven presents a third example of how musicians make decisions around record deals, in discussing the preconceived plan of Ian Burgoyne and Keith Band of the Jazzateers, who were signed to Rough Trade, to form a new band (one which featured Mick) and sign to a major label:

> They had a long-term plan where they were going to do this one album for Rough Trade with Skin singing and then, they were going to stop doing that, change the name of the group to Bourgie Bourgie and get Paul Quinn in to sing and pursue a major label. They were going down a sort of mainstream route. Paul was a great singer, with very much a kind of souly voice, and I think it was always on the agenda that it would be a major label that we'd sign to and not an

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[27] See chapter 9, p. 221.

> indie. They'd done this album deal with Rough Trade, and I think that was really critically well-received and everything but, you know, like, the major label way really because that was where the money was and at that time Glasgow was hot. Major labels were throwing money at Glasgow bands. You more or less just had to form a band and, if you were half-decent, you'd get signed up. We got signed quite quickly to MCA (Slaven, 2016).

The goal of signing to a major label was in part financial - 'that was where the money was' - and was also driven by the context of being in Glasgow at a time when Glasgow was 'hot'. There has often been phases in UK popular music history where, generally because of the success of a particular band, a city or scene has received the inordinate attention of major label A & R people for a, sometimes brief, period of time.[28] This occurred in Glasgow as a result of Orange Juice going overground in signing to a major label. Douglas Macintyre locates this as marking a significant shift in the cultural value-perception of independent labels generally in Glasgow: 'I think where the story of that independent spirit ends is when Orange Juice signs to Polydor' (Macintyre, 2016). As well as a financial incentive in signing to a major there is a suggestion that the type of band that Bourgie Bourgie were, was more suitable for release on a major, with Quinn's 'souly' voice being less complimentary to the aesthetics of the independent sector at the time.

In the cases of McRobbie and Slaven there was a conscious decision, not just to choose a particular label, but a particular *type* of record label, one defined principally by its organisational structure; The Pastels consciously pursued a deal with an independent label and Bourgie Bourgie with a major. Of course, there are always opportunity costs in such decision-making, the costs incurred in foregoing one option for another, and therefore, a set of priorities have to be constructed based on what factors are most important for the decision-maker. McRobbie expresses the belief that signing to an independent would allow his band more time to develop, presumably with less

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[28] So, for example, Manchester in the late 80s and early 90s as a result of the success of the Stone Roses and the Happy Mondays, Bristol in the early-to-mid 90s after the success of Massive Attack, Portishead, and Tricky and Glasgow again around 2003 upon the success of Franz Ferdinand.

pressure to achieve commercial success, which reinforces the point made by Geoff Travis in a Guardian interview regarding the difference between indies and majors:

> The independents breed a mentality of growth and nurturing. So, you get a garden system which the majors can then exploit. They save huge amounts of work, time, and money because they can just wait until a band fully emerges fully fledged from the independent network and then offer them the capital investment which the independents don't have (Cooper, Feb 30, 1987).

Although for Slaven and Bourgie Bourgie the capital investment a major could provide was important, the decision was not purely financially motivated; when he proposes that the band wanted to go down a 'mainstream route' there is an implication that they wanted to reach a wider audience and that they believed that the band was equipped to have success on those terms. In Bragg's case, there is a sense that he was less actively involved in the decision-making at this stage of his career, however, he does outline his enjoyment of being on an indie label and the diminishing of this feeling as the label became more like a major.

As mentioned previously, where musicians consciously choose between an independent and a major, there are inevitable opportunity costs involved. These costs can be financial, they can encompass creative freedom, they can relate to a participative feeling or the absence of it, or they can be guided by how the musician feels their choice will be perceived by others including peers or fans. The importance of not relinquishing creative control is a frequent theme in discourses around independence in numerous interviews in the NME during this period, including even those involving bands who signed to majors, such as Dexys Midnight Runners, whose singer Kevin Rowland defended their decision to sign to EMI on the grounds that they will retain control:

> The reason we signed with EMI was because they've got absolutely no image and our group's got a very strong image. We've got total control at EMI. We could have had our own label but there seemed to be no point. We signed for an advance of £10,000 and we had to really hustle for that, they asked for specific breakdowns of how the money would be spent. We lost £4, 000 on the

> tour and even before the tour began, we had incurred loads of bills (NME, 14 June 1980, p. 29).

Rowland seems to be arguing that despite his band signing to a major, they have retained credibility on the basis that they haven't received a large advance. That is to say, they signed to EMI for *creative* reasons (around image) rather than *materialistic* ones.

Jim Kerr of Simple Minds explains that while money was a factor in the band's signing to Virgin records, the money was required for a creative purpose, the desire to make a record that sounded as good as records by artists such as Donna Summer and the Ohio Players, that the band had heard in clubs, while touring in Europe:

> That was why it was important to have a really good drum and bass sound, which you couldn't get by doing an album for £200 and releasing it on your own label… Well, *if you want as much control as possible you need money* (emphasis added). If you've got it, you're no longer in the company's debt. Even if you don't hate them, there's this mental barrier which says if you don't please them they'll treat you tit for tat and say you'll not get this or that. It is a struggle because we do want to remain 'contemporary' and use the channels already provided. And because it's 'contemporary' we do make concessions. We *are* ambitious (NME, October 4, 1980, p. 9).

Kerr argues that 'control' without money is illusory, and that the financial resources of the majors facilitate creative freedom rather than restricting it. Indeed, he goes further in arguing that being satisfied with making records on a low budget betrays a lack of ambition, a charge frequently levelled at those seen to have an indie mentality. David Byrne also observes the paradox of 'independence' without money:

> For emerging artists, this can mean freedom (nice!) but without much in the way of resources, so it's a pretty abstract sort of independence. What good is freedom, many argue, if no one gets to hear your music because you can't afford to market it? (Byrne, 2012, p. 238).

Sharing Kerr's ambition, although looking to achieve their goals through different means, were fellow Scots Alan Horne and Edwyn Collins, the founder of Glasgow-based Postcard Records and lead singer of the labels' first signing, Orange Juice, respectively. Collins, in the same October issue of the NME set out clearly the extent of their aspirations:

> We put the record out and then we thought, 'The Charts'- and that is the best thing ever. Going for the charts in a really positive way, instead of being defeatist and thinking 'Aw, we're an independent label', and putting ourselves down all the time (NME, October 4 1980, p. 24).

The pursuit of chart success was not unequivocally shared throughout the world of independent record label cultural production and, indeed, the perceived attempts by Geoff Travis to have hits with Scritti Politti led to a major rift between the distribution side of Rough Trade - lead by Richard Scott - and the record label (King, 2012, p. 130).

Horne had no such reservations about achieving the type of mainstream success eschewed by some in the independent camp:

> Music should always aim for the widest possible market. The charts are there. That's where you need to be. Postcard was not really that well organised, it was just at the back of my mind that the punk ideal had failed, all dropped away. Groups like Buzzcocks who knew the importance of getting into the charts, could have been so powerful, so strong, and they could have led the way for other groups. They didn't (NME, Oct 4 1980, p. 24).

Horne's rhetoric is a curious mixture of unashamed commercialism and belief in the 'indie' ideal. In terms which seem to involve a swipe at established independent label owners such as Travis and Tony Wilson of Factory, he sets out Postcard's credentials as *the* authentic indie:

> I consider that we're the only punk independent because we're the only ones who are doing it who are young. Everybody else has come from the back of a record shop or are businessmen. We started with no money and just built it up from Orange Juice's first single. And if we hadn't been able to get Rough Trade's

> support, we'd have been wasting our time. Just putting out 2, 000 of this and 2, 000 of that, in nice fancy sleeves to sell it, which I hate (NME Oct 4, 1980, p. 24).

For Horne, the goal was autonomy from the majors, circumventing the need to go through the majors at any stage of the process of releasing records, and ensuring complete creative control:

> We want to get our records out as we want them, cut out the majors, all the old middlemen, and get into the charts. There'll be no money going to old men, it will be totally independent. That will be the ultimate achievement (NME, Oct 4 1980, p. 24).

Bernard Rhodes, erstwhile manager of the Clash, echoes Horne's insistence on the desirability of operating outside of the corporate world of the majors, while drawing upon Marxist political theories:

> UB40 can say isn't it great, an independent at the top of the charts. But what does that mean? An independent-you mean a small business. If you don't have access to gain the means of production, whatever you do is peripheral. So, what I'm saying is - and this is the problem all over pop - if these fellows take a united stand to gain the means of production, their statements will be effective, and not peripheral (NME, August 9 1980, p. 29).

The political goal of establishing an independent network of cultural enterprise outside of the mainstream underpinned much of the discourse of 80s popular music and lead to the establishment of the Cartel, a UK-wide distribution network that linked independent labels with independent retailers. Owning the means of production and distribution meant political autonomy and resistance and empowerment could be achieved, not simply by making 'statements' but by creating an alternative public sphere which was not bound up in corporate logic. This alternative sphere comprised labels, distributors and retailers but also a variety of other types of cultural production including local music promotion and the publication of numerous music-related fanzines. Richard Boon, who as manager of Buzzcocks had orchestrated the release of the influential Spiral Scratch EP, regarded the Cartel as an important step in overcoming the challenges faced by independent retailers and record labels in terms of distribution:

> You'd have a shop like Probe in Liverpool, who'd phone all these other people saying "Well, I've got this, listen." If you're developing a programme or policy of access, decentralisation is something to support and encourage. There was a sense that there were people out there on the same wavelength who would talk to each other and there was a community of interest, even if you didn't necessarily like what someone else in the community was doing (King, 2012, p.127).

Hesmondhalgh notes that by 1988 the Cartel was thriving and had managed to achieve a small but significant share of the UK distribution market. The establishment of high street retailers such as Our Price and HMV had negatively affected many of the specialist, independent record shops that had originally constituted its base, however, the Cartel (along with other independent distributors such as Spartan and Pinnacle) had managed to integrate itself into the new stores and, in terms of sales, was as successful as it had ever been.

Despite, the Cartel's eventual collapse, the organisation can be considered to have presented a significant challenge to the traditional dominance of the majors. For its founders, the organisational forms of the independent recording sector were as important, if not more so, than the music's political content, as emphasised by Geoff Travis:

> It was a political thing. Why are the Clash so stupid? Why have they signed to CBS? When the thing to do is to get your own distribution network, then you've got control, you've got power. You can decide with musicians what gets out to the country and give people alternate means of information (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 257).

Nevertheless, while Travis espoused the importance of independence in the familiar terms of autonomy, the compromises often necessitated by the logic of the marketplace are evident in his involvement along with Mike Alway of Cherry Red and Rob Dickins (WEA).in establishing Blanco Y Negro in 1982. The response of the NME to the news serves to underline the perceived dichotomy between independence and corporate power, as observed by Neil Taylor in *Document and Eyewitness: An Intimate History of Rough Trade*, who wrote:

> At the turn of the still-politicised 1980s, the land between major labels and independents was seen as scorched earth. The music press dubbed the trio 'the gang of three' and at Rough Trade there was a degree of misplaced suspicion over motives behind the label (Taylor, 2010, p. 345).

The motives for both sides of the arrangement were apparent. For Dickins and Warners, the collaboration allowed them to tap into and exploit the indie credibility that Travis, in particular, had accrued. For Travis and Alway, the latter of whom was to be swiftly side-lined citing the 'traditionalist' attitude of Travis as the reason (Cavanagh 2000 p. 104), Warners simply represented the superior resources and financial power that the majors had always possessed. Rough Trade had lost, and would lose, several key acts to the major labels (for example, Scritti Politti and Aztec Camera) and the setting up of Blanco y Negro was designed to alleviate this by tapping into funds made available by WEA. A few years later, Dickins, who had become the youngest managing director of a UK major label on the event of his appointment in 1983, discussed the rationale behind the collaboration:

> I wanted to avoid the policy of my predecessors by keeping away from licensed labels. But I did break the rule once in order to obtain the unique talent of Geoff Travis. Geoff, 'the Godfather of independent labels' and the owner of Rough Trade records, has been instrumental in discovering many great British bands such as Scritti Politti, Aztec Camera and The Smiths. I had known Geoff over the years and had persuaded him to join the world of major record companies with his label Blanco Y Negro, a joint venture with WEA. Geoff has brought to us Everything but the Girl, the Dream Academy, the Jesus and Mary Chain and new signings, Sudden Sway. Blanco has its own identity but is very much part of our A & R philosophy (MW, Jan 25 1986, p. 9).

The rationale behind this arrangement became evident in the case of The Jesus and Mary Chain, who, according to Travis, would only sign to Blanco Y Negro because of the involvement of Warners:

> The Mary Chain knew they were good. They didn't know how they would fare in the commercial world, but they definitely knew they were good. So, they probably thought, Indie, Schmindie, what's that got to do with us? Fair enough.

> Jim and William had bigger ambitions. If we didn't have that hybrid with the major label, maybe, they would have signed with someone else (Howe, 2015, p. 64).

Alan McGee, who was manager of the Mary Chain at this time, confirms Travis' instinct regarding the deal: 'We were like "just show us the fucking money!" Everybody else was being really indie; we couldn't give a fuck about indie. We were influenced by punk' (Howe, 2015, p. 64).

McGee makes the distinction between 'punk' and 'indie' suggesting that 'punk' had no political or philosophical aversion to money and involves, somehow, a different set of attitudes. This runs contrary to the narrative of the independent sector of the 1980s emerging from the DIY ethos of the punk and post-punk era, however, it's an attitude which most probably has its roots in the ostentatious behaviour of McGee's hero Malcolm McLaren, while manager of the Sex Pistols, an idea that's supported by Mary Chain singer, Jim Reid:

> The thing was, Warners or Rough Trade. Geoff was obviously trying to get us onto Rough Trade at first, but at the time it was like, you've got to be 'indie', and we were thinking 'why?' To me at that time, the indie scene represented failure. The Sex Pistols were on Virgin records, The Doors were on Warners … everybody that made me want to make music was on a major label, so I sort of thought, well, we need a bankroll (Howe, 2015, p. 66).

Reid would subsequently express some regret at not signing directly to Rough Trade, particularly when recounting that everybody at Warners 'would utterly despise us'. His brother, William, the band's guitarist, would also lament the characteristic interference of the major in the band's creative process:

> I came into the industry as an idealist. I thought I was going to make art, but I got that kicked out of my system after about ten minutes, when we did our first single for Warners and they asked us to turn down the feedback and turn up the voice and drums for a radio mix (Howe, 2015, p. 66).

Malcolm McLaren, in typically contrarian fashion, was an early critic of the emerging independent sector. In an interview with Paul Rambali in August 1980, he compared the

founders of the new record labels to Margaret Thatcher, another example of the *Comparison to Recognised Evil*:

> Rambali: There is a huge groundswell of bands, independent labels, local scenes, people are making the effort.
> McLaren: Yeah, I think that was terrible, that was the end when that Indie label thing started…you get hundreds of grocers.
> Rambali: You were a young entrepreneur, same thing.
> McLaren: I was never a grocer, though that mentality of feathering your own nest, dig your little garden patch. They're better keeping with EMI (NME, Aug 9 1980, p.26).

Intrinsic to debates around independents and majors are debates around the nature of art in a capitalist society and, more specifically, in the case of the independents of the punk and post-punk era, the type of capitalist economic system advocated by Margaret Thatcher and the New Right. Linton Kwesi Johnson addresses the problem of 'art in a capitalist society' in an NME interview from 1979:

> You see; I take a realistic view on all this. One has to realise that art in a capitalist society is only available in the commodity form. Therefore, it's subject to all the laws of capitalist production. Of course, it will be processed and packaged just like anything else. Small record labels are, however, very healthy and necessary. In fact, most artists should ideally aim to be independent of record companies. If only they can raise enough money and sell enough records to live that should be the logical process… I don't want to have to keep coming to big companies. I would like to launch my own small label as I insist in being involved with my work at all stages (NME, April 21 1979, p. 52).

The ideological goal of establishing a network of recording sector cultural production outside of the framework of a capitalist economic system would still figure in discourses around independence in the NME a decade later. In a feature on Madchester in December 1989, Factory founder Tony Wilson would muse, somewhat pessimistically upon the attempts to create an alternative: 'Can an alternative culture survive without building an alternative economy, an infrastructure of record companies, distributors

and such? Does capitalism *tolerate* an alternative economy? Does it fuck!' (NME, December 2 1989, p. 32).

This chapter has sought to examine discourses around independence in the NME in the 1980s in order to reveal some of the ambiguities around the ideology of independence, and indeed, the frequent gap between the rhetoric of independence and the reality of operating in a corporate world. Looking at a case study of the depoliticisation of the NME through the 1980s and the role played in this process by the paper's publisher, IPC, will provide further insights into the complex relationship between independence and corporate power.

Chapter 8: 'I don't have to sell my soul': IPC and NME

> You got to understand three things really. The editors of the weekly music papers in 1984 were children of 1968… all of them really. So, they all believed that music should say something and if you're going to talk about politics, they would give you a platform to let you talk about it. They might not agree with you, but they were willing to let you do it and you've also got to understand that *back then being a musician was actively being part of an alternative society* (emphasis added). Music wasn't ubiquitous in the way that it is today. So, if you were a musician you needed to have a view on drugs, you needed to have a view on the issues of the day that concerned young people. It wasn't enough just to talk about guitars so, you know, there was that aspect and thirdly in the 20th century music was our only social medium so it had to encompass everything and not just the music we were making, it had to encompass everything, have a view on youth experience but *the music press was the place where we would thrash all that stuff out* (emphasis added) (Bragg, 2018).

> When IPC who owned us put us in the tower at Blackfriars on the 26th floor that was quite vexating - that was very difficult - because we absolutely had to get out of there. It was going to kill the paper. So, we somehow managed to persuade them that *we were a case apart from all their other papers* (emphasis added) and so we got the place on Carnaby Street. And Carnaby Street was a lot of fun (Spencer, 2018).

The previous chapter examined discourses around independence in the discursive forum provided by the NME and specifically the ways in which independence, despite being a frequently contested and disputed concept, was venerated in the field of popular music recording and was intrinsic to the creation and management of the value-perception of cultural products. This value-perception was a significant driver of the economic behaviour of consumers and investors and, thus, served a commercial purpose, although it was generally framed in terms of the ideology of independence; that is, a resistance to the profit-oriented, corporate world of major labels. Billy Bragg's observation that 'back then, being a musician was actively being part of an alternative

society' echoes Johnny Marr's suggestion that it was 'a given' that you were political as a musician (or, at least, a certain kind of musician). Marr, as observed previously, expanded on this by stating that, in the specific context of the UK in the 1980s, 'you were either mainstream, or anti the government.' Opposition to the government of Margaret Thatcher, then, as well as anti-corporate sentiment, was an inherent part of the alternative to the mainstream. The music press - 'the place where we would thrash all that stuff out'- served as something akin to Arendt's 'public realm', as a 'marketplace of ideas' (to use the metaphor of the free market economy), where robust, transparent and open public discourses would ultimately see truth and rational thought prevail. The NME (or its editors and journalists) posited itself, not merely as a neutral venue for such discourses, a kind of *tabula rasa*, but as an active participant in what Neil Spencer describes as 'the culture wars' (Spencer, 2018). This participative urge, Bragg proposes, had its roots in the counter-cultural movements of the late 60s and early 70s, which saw the emergence of underground press publications such as IT (1967), The Ecologist (1971).and Spare Rib (1972). Spare Rib, established under the editorship of Rosie Boycott and Martha Rowe, was at the vanguard of the burgeoning Feminist movement while the Ecologist provided a voice for environmentalism and the recently founded UK chapter of Friends of the Earth (Long, 2012, p. 53). The ethos of IT was explained by Mick Farren (who would be a frequent contributor to NME after his recruitment in 1973).to the Radio DJ John Peel in a 1967 interview for Dutch television in terms which would be echoed in the DIY ideology of punk and post-punk cultural production a decade later, 'the policies behind the newspaper are to provide a forum for people who are excluded from mass media… if you want to be a journalist, normally you went along with some sort of training at Beaverbrook newspaper and you worked your way up. Now it's possible to start your own newspaper and do your own thing immediately' (Long, 2012, p. 47).

Access and democratisation are key principles here, as is the progressive and emancipatory potential of the new technology which facilitated the emerging underground press, potential which enabled those traditionally excluded to engage in the print media industry and present information which challenged the dominant, corporate publishing paradigm, as exemplified by the figure of Beaverbrook. There are clear parallels here with developments in the field of the independent popular music

recording sector from the mid-to-late 70s and through the 1980s, which would engender similar discourses around ideology and power. NME was a crucial site of such discourses, but as alluded to by Spencer, there was a constant and never fully resolved tension between its prominent role as a champion of the independent movement and its industrial and organisational status as part of the International Publishing Company (IPC). Spencer depicts NME as 'a case apart from the other papers' and a sense of this is frequently conveyed by former NME journalists and musicians who featured in the publication, however, the ambiguity inherent in NME's position was a theme which arose various times throughout the 80s, often in its own pages. As such, an examination of the relationship between IPC and NME will provide us with various insights into the complex and contested relationship between the aspirational claim to independence and the reality of operating in a world dominated by corporate interests.

In a 1987 parliamentary debate on the issue of moral standards and the tabloid press, Viscount Buckford, a prominent member of various conservative pressure groups (for example, The Conservative Family Campaign, the National Campaign for the Family, and Family and Youth Concern), criticised the content of what he referred to as 'teenage tabloids' on the basis that, in promoting aspects of sexual behaviour and human relationships which differed from traditional - i.e. Christian - moral values, they were subverting the nation's youth. He picked out six contemporary publications for especial opprobrium, making the apparently significant point that they were 'particularly devoted to young girls' (Buckford, Feb 18, 1987), the morals of young girls being particularly susceptible to corruption, presumably. Three of these titles (namely, Loving, Honey, and 19), were published by the International Publishing Company, a media conglomerate which had emerged in 1962 after a process of rationalisation within the Mirror Group (Long, 2012, p. 26). In the same year, the NME owner, Maurice Kinn, was persuaded to sell his magazine (which although still profitable was experiencing declining sales) to IPC, which was just one of a series of acquisitions made by the newly formed company. The move was one that Kinn would soon come to regret, with the meteoric rise of The Beatles and the subsequent emergence of The Rolling Stones pushing sales of the paper to a record high in the first half of 1964 thus providing an immediate and handsome return on IPC's investment and getting the decades-long relationship between IPC and NME off to a flying start (Long, 2012, p. 29). The

relationship, however, would not always prove to be plain sailing with periodic tensions arising between the reality of the music publication's status as one of many parts of a large and, generally, conservative international conglomerate and the desire of the paper's journalists and (sometimes) editors to promote counter-cultural values. This tension was particularly pronounced during the punk and post-punk era and was intrinsically related to the burgeoning cultural importance of notions of independence and a rhetorical resistance to corporate power. Pat Long, in his history of the NME, describes the IPC using familiar anti-corporate imagery while simultaneously providing a sense of the scope and scale of the organisation:

> The new company was a *behemoth* (emphasis added): from their head office in Fleetway House, Farringdon, IPC presided over an empire of holdings that included 12 British newspapers, 11 overseas titles, 75 consumer magazines, 132 trade and theatrical journals, plus interests in book publishing, printing and television (Long, 2012, p. 26).

To ensure the avoidance of doubt over IPC's status, Long goes on to extend the 'behemoth' metaphor by depicting the company as a 'monster' (Long, 2012, p.26), another frequently deployed collocation with 'corporate', intended to evoke negative associations akin to the Goliath trope; and something of the scale of the new corporate entity and the changes which the new ownership model would inevitability bring to the NME is conveyed in the observation that, 'Overnight, the New Musical Express moved from being an independently published publication run by a music business impresario to part of a portfolio of specialist interest magazines owned by the largest media conglomerate in the world' (Long, 2012, p. 26). Gopsill and Neale in their history of the National Union of Journalists, go further in portraying the transformation wrought to the organisational paradigm of the book and magazine publishing industry as a whole: 'What had been principally a small-business industry became part of the global media as magazine publishers - notably IPC and Thomson's - bought companies up' (Gopsill and Neale, 2007, p. 33).

The process of acquisition carried out in this era of the print publishing industry finds parallels in the music recording industry at various points in time and tends to raise similar anxieties over the loss of diversity and autonomy amongst independent companies and the potentially restrictive and censorial repercussions of the corporate

consolidation of power. Certainly, the influence of IPC would be a recurring theme in discourses around the independence of the NME, especially in the period from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s and would form part of a general examination of the relationship between independence and corporate interests.

To return to Viscount Buckford's excoriation of the moral laxity of various teenage-oriented publications, it is perhaps surprising to see the IPC being cast as the corrupter-in-chief of Britain's young minds, especially given Neil Spencer's depiction of it as irredeemably conservative and reactionary:

> IPC was a sort of anaemic organisation. I mean, when you look at their titles: Country Life, Horse and Hound, the women's magazines, of course, which were the real money-spinner. Women's Own, Woman, Woman's Realm, whatever… You know, it wasn't a hothouse of forward-thinking publishing. This wasn't an organisation that was creating, inventing great new magazines (Spencer, 2018).

Nevertheless, for Buckford, the content of these magazines was not only unseemly but, indeed, a danger to the fabric of society, with one publication singled out for particular opprobrium in a speech which utilised the rhetoric of moral panic:

> What are the main themes running through those magazines? They seem to me to be the assumption that premarital sex, even if the participants are below the legal age, is normal, natural and right; that contraception is an absolute must; the promotion of abortion without discussing the serious moral implications of destroying life in the womb; a bizarre fascination with witchcraft and the occult; and the promotion of the idea that homosexual relations are just as acceptable as heterosexual relations. The main offender here seems to be New Musical Express which is probably the most widely read of the various pop magazines (Buckford Feb 18, 1987).

The Earl of Halsbury pessimistically took up Buckford's theme of moral decline and, in lamenting the general state of things in the 80s, drew a link to the counter-cultural challenge to conservative social mores which began a couple of decades previously:

> My Lords, I have not the slightest idea whether or not Her Majesty's Government are satisfied with the moral condition of the tabloid press. I can say

> for my own part that following the permissive 'sixties I am totally dissatisfied with the moral condition of almost everything (Halsbury, Feb 18, 1987).

In Buckford's account (and to his evident displeasure), the NME served a purpose that went beyond that of a mere 'pop magazine' and, instead, acted as an active promoter of discussion around progressive political values such as sex education and contraception, abortion rights, and the challenging of hetero-normative ideas of sexual relations. My own research supports the argument that these were prevalent and important political themes in the NME during this period (although I found that references to witchcraft and the occult were somewhat thin on the ground) and, in supporting such values, the magazine can be viewed as acting in opposition to the dominant values of the Conservative Party, or at least, of its 'moral majority' socially conservative wing. The paper would also reflect on and endorse a variety of political positions throughout the decade, from condemnation of the racially-motivated policing of British inner cities in the early 80s, through support for the striking miners in 1984, to prominent discussions around the global anti-apartheid movement in the latter part of the decade and would, in all of these occasions, take up a position which was antagonistic to the government[29]. Indeed, as the decade progressed the NME increasingly adopted a party-political stance, providing support to Red Wedge in its attempts to help oust Margaret Thatcher from office, and urging its readership to vote for the Labour Party of Neil Kinnock in the 1987 general election (despite significant reservations around the policies of Labour on a variety of social and political issues). The tone of the message around the election was 'anyone but Thatcher' and in this regard the NME clearly established and maintained a specifically anti-Thatcherite position both in terms of the political and moral philosophy of Thatcherism and the active policies of her government.

[29] Nicholas Fairbairn, the Conservative MP, for Perth and Kinross gave some sense of his party's position on South Africa when lambasting some compatriots for appearing at a concert in Wembley Stadium celebrating Nelson Mandela: 'They're just scum. Left-wing scum…These so-called stars like Annie Lennox and Jim Kerr are just out to line their own pockets.' Like many MPs, Sir Nicholas slated the BBC for covering the event live, but he is the only person to attack individual performers for taking part. 'Mandela is a terrorist. We are paying a license to the BBC to support terrorism,' he continued. 'And what Annie Lennox and Jim Kerr said at Wembley came out of no love for Nelson Mandela. It came from a desire to make money' (NME, 25 June 1988, p.3).

Bragg makes the point about the NME being a successor of the counter-cultural press of the 60s in terms of its extolling of progressive political viewpoints and he credits the paper (along with some of its rivals) with promoting an engagement with politics in its readership:

> Obviously, Melody Maker, NME, Sounds were more interested in talking about adult political issues than Disc or Record Mirror, they were a bit more up the poppy end with Smash Hits but the inkies as we used to call 'em - because you got ink on your hands when you read 'em - the inkies were actively encouraging people to talk about politics (Bragg, 2018).

Mike Holdsworth, as a young music enthusiast of the post-punk era, supports this view of the NME playing a key role in connecting popular music culture to wider social issues and providing a point of opposition to the dominant political philosophy of the time:

> If you go and look at NMEs of the seventies you would have Paul Morley talking about situationism. They were cultural and political writers, not strictly music writers, and my generation, that was what we were educated on. I started buying NME for music and it introduced us to a whole different world of arts and culture and stuff like that and it was very anti-Thatcher (Holdsworth, 2016).

Central to the NME's promotion of progressive social and political values, as well as its opposition to the dominant political philosophy of the time, was its championing of the independent popular music recording sector, and the challenge this presented to the prevailing corporate paradigm of the major recording industry. The importance of the NME to the independent music sector which emerged in the punk and post-punk era, was huge, in both a cultural and commercial sense. Pat Long makes this point explicitly, while conveying some idea of the developments which allowed this challenge to emerge:

> From Sun Records through Northern Soul or the hundreds of 1960s garage imprints, the local independent label had long been a staple of the music business, feeding new bands through to the majors. But by the time that the trade paper Record Business introduced their indie chart in 1979, a new infrastructure had developed around the indies which allowed them to compete

> for sales chart positions properly for the first time. Independent distribution companies like Pinnacle, Spartan and the regional Cartel, which included Rough Trade, Backs and Red Rhino took on the records released by the smaller labels and got them into shops nationwide. NME was key to the survival and success of this new movement: the paper's influence meant that a positive review made the difference between selling a few hundred and thousands worldwide (Long, 2012, p. 132).

The ideology of independence, with its valorisation of autonomy and implicit critique of social power-relations, was as important to the journalists of the NME as it was to any of the emerging record labels; indeed, the credibility (and, therefore commercial potential) of the publication hinged upon it. As Charles Shaar Murray observes on frequent, and often bitter, antagonism with major labels such as EMI over negative reviews:

> We weren't about to be told what to do by PRs and record companies. We were fiercely independent. We weren't going to be told what to do by our publishers and we certainly weren't going to be told what to do by the music business[30] (Long, 2012, p. 72).

Murray deploys the adverb 'fiercely' here to modify the adjective 'independent', a collocation which occurs frequently in a wide variety of discourses, and which conveys a sense of remaining independent in the face of pressure to become something other than independent (whatever that other thing might be). This is an important narrative trope in that it depicts the protagonists (Murray and his fellow NME journalists).as being involved in a struggle against external forces to conform to an orthodox or mainstream position. Furthermore, these forces are necessarily powerful; in this case, IPC and 'the music business', and the resistance of the journalists can, thus, be seen as admirable or even, heroic. Regardless of how one views such resistance, it is evident that Murray saw the position purportedly taken by himself and his colleagues in moral terms; as being virtuous and courageous in the face of powerful opposition. The

[30] Long recounts how EMI pulled advertising from the NME after Nick Kent called Queen 'a bucket of urine' and Island reacted similarly to a negative review of a Robert Palmer album, however, such gestures proved inconsequential while NME's circulation figures remained high: 'NME was so popular that there were plenty of other people who'd take the advertising space if EMI or Island didn't want it' (Long, 2012, p. 72).

counter-culture credentials of NME, in Murray's framing, depended not only on a sense of resistance to the power of the major labels but on resistance to their own publisher: 'We were a crew who aimed to be as subversive as we could under the IPC banner. The idea was to hijack the NME and have a rock weekly being produced by a major corporation for a mass audience' (Long, 2012, p. 72).

This sense of autonomy was an important aspect of the creation and management of identity of the music weekly, particularly during a period when it espoused the cause of the emerging independent label sector, and was important in establishing affiliation with both music consumers and the new generation of labels and musicians themselves during a period when independence (whether actual or putative, organisational or rhetorical).was highly prized in popular music culture and was, thus, central to the economic decision-making of consumers. Murray suggests that the goal of NME writers was subversion, presumably of some established political and cultural paradigm and, in covert opposition to their publisher. Neil Spencer, however, suggests that the relative hands-off approach of IPC, at least in the late seventies and the early eighties, was down to the prosaic matter of the paper's commercial performance:

> The best thing we had going for us was success. We made a lot of money. A lot of money for them. And as long as we were delivering that then they weren't too bothered. The publishers I had to report to were sympathetic to the idea of having politics in the paper. But they were also wary. They didn't really, I suppose, looking back on it, I don't think they understood what was going on. Certainly, as far as the race issue was concerned. That would have been off their map (Spencer, 2018).

Furthermore, the extent and limitations of any kind of real independence from IPC would be demonstrated in a variety of ways throughout the 1980s and would culminate in a sense that such freedom was only ever illusory; permitted and tolerated only insofar as it served to generate profits. In an interview from June 1980 Mick Jagger, having been repeatedly subjected to accusations of 'selling out' (the paradigmatic unforgivable of the post-punk value system),[31] by an increasingly invidious Paul Morley,

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[31] Paul Morley admonished The Stones on the basis of perceived nest-feathering betrayal: 'They represented that part of rock which had become a matter of economics and manipulation, not a force that's fighting the

highlights what he regards as the NME's hypocrisy in positing itself as a champion of independence:

> England is totally controlled by the media. And NME is totally controlled by a large company. It's controlled by a very large conservative company, even though it's supposed to be allowed to do what it wants - I suspect it's not and the NME for all its bollocks, its writing on the wall, this adolescent posing - it is an old-fashioned out-of-date institution, which we don't even need. I think it's totally phony for the NME, which is part of a huge capitalist tool, to pose for these young children who don't know this ... Posing as this sort of mirror to this young movement - it's a load of old bollocks. It's just exploiting them. Same as the Daily Mirror does. Or the Sun page 3. It's the same fucking thing (NME, June 28 1980, p. 32).

The indignant Jagger proceeds to turn the tables on Morley, launching a stinging personal attack and indirectly challenging the suggestion made by Murray that NME journalists could ever attain the autonomy he aspired to: 'I don't have to sell my soul as much as you do working for a huge company like the NME. You're literally working for IPC, not any independent' (NME, June 28, p. 32). Neil Spencer acknowledges the delicate balancing act required to uphold the sense of independence of NME's contributors (and, of course, their concomitant counter-cultural credibility) while being cognisant of the fact that their publisher was a huge, corporate entity - a relationship exposed by the savvy Jagger. In fact, Spencer concedes that he regarded it as part of his job as editor to maintain a notional separateness between paper and publisher, perhaps to avoid the cognitive dissonance that proclaiming an anti-corporate message through a medium owned by a media conglomerate might entail:

> When I was editor, I tried to protect the staff from IPC. And to an extent I allowed them to pretend that they didn't work for IPC, that they worked for NME. I, on the other hand, knew that IPC was owned by Reed International. Among the other things that Reed International was doing in the early seventies was polluting North American streams. In particular, some that ran through the

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crap, blasting away restriction. The Rolling Stones changed sides; perhaps the only way to survive.' (NME, 28 June, 1980, p. 32).

> reservations of Native Americans tribes and as a result of the mercury they were putting into the water from their paper mills, maybe the same paper that NME was printed on, the native American women were giving birth to deformed kids. They were poisoned by the water. So ultimately, Jagger was right. Those were the kind of people who you worked for but of course it's a grey area (Spencer, 2018).

The ongoing tension between the NME writers' perception of themselves as champions of independence and the reality of the paper's ownership by IPC was a constant (although often unspoken) presence through the late seventies and the eighties. One area where this tension manifested itself most frequently was related to the question of which kind of adverts appeared in the NME's pages, a decision which was largely made by IPC's marketing executives and often served to undermine the politically progressive identity that the NME's writers and editors were trying to establish. The next section will look at these tensions, especially as they coincided with declining sales figures through the 80s, which was partly attributable to the emergence of rival publications, changing youth demographics, and which coincided with a general process of depoliticisation of the paper's content.

8.1. 'NME is not a cooperative': Disputes over advertising in the NME

> I don't think we would ever turn away advertising from record companies. The coffee adverts that often took centre-spread were a pain in the arse and I think not good for the paper. There was a move to advertise the army and the police in there, and I did draw the line at the army taking ads. I had a royal battle over that. But as for the casual sexism of the music industry at the time I don't think Ian Penman's in a position to point the finger at anybody in that respect. I think he had issues of his own. We were aware of sexism and the first thing I told Derek Johnstone the news editor the guy who compiled the gig guide – 'get those pictures of naked birds off the fucking page. What are they there for? We're not the Sun. Get the fuck out of here. Let's have a bit more order. Let's get some women writers, woman photographers', which we did. I mean, the culture wars were strong on the NME (Spencer, 2018).

One source of tension between those who wrote for NME and its publishers, which persisted throughout the eighties, was the advertising space which comprised a significant amount of the content of the paper (and, of course, its revenue), and which was handled by IPC advertising executives such as Andy McDuff, who outlined the attraction of the NME to a wide range of brands in terms of the demographic make-up of its readership:

> NME occupied a central position within British youth culture and suddenly we started to attract advertising not just from record companies but anyone keen to sell their products to 15-24-year-old men. Coffee companies, car companies, banks; they were all falling over themselves to give us money. We had adverts for Jaguar XJS and for Red Mountain coffee which were particularly unpopular with the writers (Long, 2012, p. 138).

As the seventies progressed, NME's sales volume and cultural influence increased, enticing a greater number of 'very uncool and corporate non-music brands' (Long, 2012, p. 138) to tap into its readership; a situation which often ran counter to Spencer's attempts to position the paper as politically aware and left-leaning. As Ian Penman noted, this led to some curious juxtapositions, which served to undermine the progressive didacticism found elsewhere in the paper:

> We couldn't believe the adverts that they were still accepting. It was old school. You'd have these articles on The Fire Engines or Kid Creole and then on the facing page there'd be an advert for David Coverdale with a photograph of a big dragon coming out of his crotch and two writhing women at his feet. It was bizarre (Long, 2012, p. 138).

By the middle of the eighties, however, sales of the NME were in decline as market segmentation and a dramatic increase in the number of specialist genre-specific music titles challenged the market dominance of the established 'inkies'. A Music Week article in early 1986 appraised the figures released by the Audit Bureau of Circulations relating to the sales of 'UK pop consumer titles' in the second half of 1985 in the interests of evaluating the effectiveness of advertising in music publications. The report, in noting a collective decline in sales of 100, 000 units compared to the same period in the previous year, concluded that the statistics supported the view held by many

marketing executives that TV had supplanted press advertising as the most effective means of promoting music product, especially with the recently launched Channel 4[32] offering cheap airtime (MW, Feb 15 1986, p. 1). Included in the figures were the sales of NME, Melody Maker and Sounds, all of which had suffered significant losses in percentage terms: 'Over the year … NME lost 17, 5000 to an end-of-year 105, 808 (14 per cent), Sounds fell by 12, 000 to 77, 193 (14 per cent).and Melody Maker dropped 7, 000 to 61, 433 (10 per cent)' (MW, Feb 15, 1986, p. 1).

Indeed, amidst the general despondency around the music press sector (the article speculated that one or more of the music titles may follow the recently defunct The Hit into liquidation), only a couple of publications bucked the negative trend: 'The success stories of the latest set of figures belong to Kerrang! which has risen by 17, 000 to 90, 767 and Smash Hits which has gone from 500, 734 to 515, 623' (MW, Feb 15 1986, p. 1). Smash Hits was the brainchild of former NME editor Nick Logan and first appeared in 1978, achieving almost immediate success (by June 1979 it regularly posted sales of 150, 000 per fortnight).by tapping into a market that, unlike the young Mike Holdsworth mentioned earlier, were less than enamoured of the socio-cultural musings of writers such as Morley and Penman:

> Dispensing with the sense for meaning and authenticity that was the staple of NME, Smash Hits celebrated pop music's surface culture without recourse to Roland Barthes, ably catering for both younger music fans and those readers who had grown disaffected with the way they were taking themselves too seriously (Long, 2012, p. 143).

Logan was also behind The Face, another publication which would come to rival the NME throughout the 1980s. First appearing in 1980 The Face was fashion-conscious and style-oriented and enlisted the services of several ex-NME staffers to provide content including Julie Burchill, Tony Parsons and Adrian Thrills. As Long notes, both publications, although aimed at different markets, started to erode NME's cultural pre-eminence and dominant market position: 'With Smash Hits undermining its commercial

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[32] Channel 4 was launched in 1982 and was supported by the government: 'The Conservatives had always been keen on commercial television: as an example of free enterprise and as a way of diminishing the BBC' (Beckett, 2015, p. 324).

potential and The Face undermining its position as the arbiter of cool, NME's sales began to flounder' (Long, 2012, p. 147).

Neil Spencer, although less convinced about the effect of Smash Hits on NME's readership, certainly viewed the Face as a rival which damaged the perception and therefore the sales figures of NME:

> I don't think Smash Hits had any influence on us at all. I mean we covered Bananarama, they covered Bananarama. We covered the Human League; they covered the Human League. The Human League, really, because they'd been a serious Northern industrial band before they went pop. We were never going to major on Kajagoogoo were we? I think that the Face is a different issue. I think the Face made the NME look a bit tarnished and inkie and I envied them the quality of the product. Attitude wise - the Face carried the swing, it was hip, it was style, style, style. But it was also pretty superficial. And when it did cover politics, it was always pretty ambiguous. I would never carry a column which ended God save Mrs Thatcher. That was Julie Burchill in the Face. So, you've got Burchill and, to a lesser extent, Tony Parsons, but others on their as well hyping up some pretty stupid right-wing shit (Spencer, 2018).

Another example of the pressure brought to bear on NME and its pop traditional weekly rivals was Kerrang! which was at the forefront of the increasing segmentation of the market around genre-specific titles. Kerrang! had been launched in 1981 as a spin-off of Sounds which was then edited by Alan Lewis. Originally intended as a special one-off heavy metal supplement, the magazine managed to tap into the popularity of both the New Wave of British heavy metal and the emerging west coast American glam metal scene and became in a relatively short period of time, a staple of the UK popular music press and a competitor to NME, both in terms of readership and the interconnected area of advertising. As illustrated by an advertisement taken out in Music Week in 1986 (under the parallelistic heading 'He can't hear what you're saying but he can buy what you're selling'), Kerrang! was offering would-be advertisers access to the same demographic which McDuff recognised as the core of NME's readership at the start of the decade:

> Kerrang! now sells an average of over 90, 000 copies a fortnight. It's mostly read by 15-24-year-old males. They're into heavy music and heavy spending. Spending on records, hi-fi, video, clothes, drink and Kerrang! Shouldn't you be buying into Kerrang!? It's got the lowest cost per thousand of any music magazine in the 15-24 years old male bracket. You might not like their music, but you'll love their business! (MW, Feb 15 1986, p. 32).

At the same time as the market segmentation of the pop music press occurred, a broad demographic shift through the 1980s served to diminish the target market of the music weeklies, as acknowledged by Iain Dawson who, as a specialist in media planning and buying with the London Media Company, offered a gloomy prognosis for the future of such publications in Music Week in 1988: 'It is all down to demographics. Over the past ten years, the number of 15–24-year-olds has fallen substantially, and that trend is set to increase dramatically over the next 10 years' (MW, March 12 1988, p. 32). Presenting a rather more sanguine view of affairs was the editorial director of EMAP, David Hepworth, who in pointing out the resilience of sales of Smash Hits, which were still sitting at around 500, 000 per week, suggested that the relative decline of general interest music publications was a result of their own inadequacies rather than any market-based determinism: 'It is all down to getting the product right. The decline of the old weeklies simply indicates that they no longer have it right' (MW, March 12 1988, p. 32). Whether the decline in sales of the NME was primarily due to changes in demographics, greater consumer choice in the area of popular music publications, or the shifting cultural perception of the newspaper it seems to have coincided with a period of depoliticisation, reaching a peak (or nadir), according to Neil Spencer, in the early 90s by which point the focus of the paper had become resolutely 'indie' in the sense of the word as a fashion-based, musical genre:

> So, there was sort of a dissolution of pop culture in any case. So, I think when NME really lost the politics was round about the time when Steve Sutherland was editor, and it all became about The Smiths and shoegazing bands. You know, I wasn't there then. You'd have to ask them (Spencer, 2018).

However, this redefining of independence began several years earlier, and NME played a central role in the process. Bob Stanley locates the beginning of the transformation of

the meaning of the word 'indie' from denoting an ideological and institutional challenge to the corporate structures and cultural stranglehold of the major labels, what Hesmondhalgh calls 'the post-punk vision of transforming the social relations of music production via the medium of the small record label' (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 57), to coming to signify a genre with strict aesthetic parameters, as around about the time when the NME released a compilation cassette called C86 (referring to 1986 the year of its release) which featured a fairly homogenous set of jangling guitar bands (Stanley, 2013, p. 586). This seemed to prefigure a move at the NME, which had been hugely influential in the emergence of the independent popular music recording sector around the time of punk and through the post-punk era, to consolidate its coverage of the late eighties musical landscape around guitar music even as Britain was experiencing the first wave of house music and what was to become rave culture, with several house acts achieving significant commercial success even as most 'indie' music failed to trouble the mainstream charts. Simultaneously, hip-hop music and culture was crossing the Atlantic but despite high-profile champions of these new musical forms such as Stuart Cosgrove and Paolo Hewitt, who were both NME journalists at the time, the newspaper which had seemed culturally radical in the early part of the decade exhibited a cultural conservatism, taking the safe option of appealing to the NME's dedicated readership's desire for guitar bands. Cosgrove in recalling the culture wars in the NME offices in the late 80s, shed some light on the mutable and elusive nature of the meaning of independence or 'indieness' as he called it:

> I was in love with the idea of indieness because actually Northern Soul was about indie culture. All those great soul singles were released on indie labels. What I should have done at the NME was turn around and say that, actually these wars between indie music and black music are meaningless because the real thing is that they all come from indie cultures. Def Jam was a small indie label. So was Creation. That idea of indieness was what NME should have owned. Instead we came into conflict with people who thought we should only be writing about white rock music (Long, 2012, pp. 163-164).

As with Spencer, Cosgrove uses The Smiths as a metonymic referent for white guitar-based indie rock generally[33], while also underlining the role of the IPC in promoting the cultural conservatism that came to dominate NME by the early 90s:

> The Face was the magazine of the decade and NME was caught in a vortex of change. The average NME reader was interested in pop culture: music, cinema, politics, things like the PMRC. But the publishers wanted it to be a paper that just reviewed music. And they missed so much: the rise of the superstar DJ, the rave scene and the replacement of the gig with the club as the main cultural event, they thought that things like house and hip-hop were a three-week fad and everything would soon go back to The Smiths (Long, 2012, pp. 173-174).

The NME under the influence of Spencer, with its support of left-wing movements such as Rock against Racism, the striking miners, Red Wedge, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was unusual at a time when the UK media was predominantly pro-Conservative. By the end of the decade under Alan Lewis' editorship, the NME had reimaged itself as 'a successful and very market-focused consumer magazine, far removed from its politicised earlier incarnation' (Long 2012 p. 188), a move which involved both a general decline in political coverage and a cultural conservatism with regards to musical content. This relative depoliticisation can be attributed to a variety of factors including the success of rival publications such as the teen-market oriented Smash Hits, the style-conscious The Face, and genre-specific magazines such as Kerrang!. However, the active role of IPC in this process can also be observed, despite the wishful thinking of journalists like Murray that they existed in a pure autonomous state free from corporate influence. Lewis, who drove the reorienting of the late 80s NME had assumed the role of editor after the sacking of Ian Pye, in response to a 1987 pre-general election cover featuring the Labour leader, Neil Kinnock which IPC regarded as unforgivable political partisanship, and, in the view of Andy McDuff, was a spectacular own goal, 'The Neil Kinnock [cover] was a totally misguided thing to do. Apart from anything else they backed a horse that didn't win. And a lot of the readers found it absurd' (Long, 2012, p. 171).

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[33] See Lakoff and Johnson (1980), p. 38, on the part for the whole metonym.

Later in the decade, anxious over events at Wapping in 1986 where a lengthy print workers strike followed Rupert Murdoch's News International Group move to a new production site, and mindful of the loss of sales attributable to industrial disputes earlier in the decade[34], IPC began a process of deunionisation, introducing private contracts with senior staff which effectively prevented them from membership of the NUJ. Technological developments had rendered several formerly specialised roles in the printing industry obsolete and had limited the efficacy of strikes. As outlined by Gopsill and Neale (2007), IPC officially derecognised the NUJ in 1993, a reflection of the more general decline in trade union influence in UK publishing (Gopsill and Neale, 2007, pp. 128-140).

A sense of the progressive political stance of NME journalists being undermined by its relationship with IPC is evident in an exchange which took place on the Letters page in 1988; one which echoed the charge of 'sell-out" levelled at Paul Morley at the start of the decade. An irate reader, in accusing the NME of hypocrisy in accepting adverts for artists who are on the Cultural Register for playing Sun City in South Africa, asks why the paper doesn't simply refuse to publicise them:

> In my eyes your paper sits on the fence. Why don't you get really unsafe and refuse to publicise these shite people, all those who have ever been on the list - apologies don't count! The whole thing stinks and so do you! You criticise people for dropping principles for cash - and then you do the same - you're just a bunch of hypocritical shite! (NME, June 25 1988, p. 62).

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[34] Spencer himself recalls the tensions inherent in the relationship between the NME and its publisher which came to the fore in a series of industrial disputes (firstly in 1980 and then again in 1984). between IPC and the National Union of Journalists, resulting in several weeks where no editions of the paper would be published: 'It really damaged us. It was bad for staff morale and after the first strike a couple of my best writers quit. And then the second strike also damaged morale. And also, while we were off the stands, people bought other publications. And then what was galling about it was the reasons for the strikes were so trivial. It was complete, what's the word? Microcosm of the standoff between dumb British middle management on one side and dumb Unionism on the other and I don't say that lightly. And the people who were instigating that particular strike were a bunch of Trotskyites who worked for Titbits! What fucking hypocrisy! You put out a rag like that, talking about sexism. You put out a rag like that, stir up trouble which means that we, who are the ultimate professionals, by the way, something people don't understand about NME. So, a bunch of very keen professionals is thwarted. Of course, it damaged us. It was awful.' (Spencer, 2018).

The response from letters editor Steven Wells was to the point and placed responsibility on the shoulders of IPC: ‘The NME is not a cooperative. The publishers have their politics and we have ours’ (NME June 25 1988 p. 62). A suggestion of a decline in the political content of the NME at the end of the 1980s is provided in another letter to the paper, this time decrying the sexism inherent in a Fuzzbox front cover headlined ‘Glamour Pussies’:

> Sometimes I remember the days of Sean O’Hagan writing pieces on why vegetarianism is an integral socialist ethic. Ok, a lot of it was pretentious ego massaging but at least we knew where we stood. Sorry for being so boring and right- on but it’s not all about taking ‘E’ and dancing with Shaun Ryder, you know (NME, Aug 19 1989, p. 54).

The key role NME played in championing the emerging independent record label movement in the wake of punk is apparent, both in terms of affiliating with the ideological goal of establishing an industrial paradigm to act as an alternative to that dominated by the major record labels, and in providing support which was crucial for the new labels’ commercial prospects. However, as Mick Jagger noted, there was an ambiguity in the NME’s positioning as the voice of the independents in that they were owned by a major, multinational publishing corporation, the IPC. This relationship remained largely unproblematic while the paper’s sales figures remained high; however, as sales started to decline through the 80s as a result of competition from rival publications and changing demographic patterns in society, IPC started to bring pressure to bear on NME’s editors to reduce the progressive, political content of the paper and, even, to promote more culturally conservative musical forms. The desire of the paper’s journalists to be regarded as autonomous stemmed from an awareness of the cultural value of being perceived as such (as per the ascription of social meaning outlined by Crotty and Creswell); that independence drove positive value-perception. This value-perception drove the economic decision-making of music fans and consumers.

I have used in this chapter a case study of the relative depoliticisation of the NME during the 1980s in order to examine the tensions and ambiguities involved in seeking to operate independently within a corporate framework. The rhetoric of independence and, indeed, the valourisation of the independent recording sector as a progressive challenge to the dominance of the major record label system, which was prominent in the pages of the NME throughout the decade (as examined in Chapter 7), was problematised by the paper's ownership by the international media conglomerate IPC and resulted in a number of confrontations throughout the decade in key areas such as advertising content, union membership of journalists, and IPC's role in appointing the NME's editor after the 1987 general election. This conflict provides insights into how independence was defined during this period and why it was considered of value.

Chapter 9: Record Industry Distribution

This chapter, which focusses on record industry distribution, is divided into two parts: the first on the history of distribution during the first century after Edison's invention of the phonograph; the second on the history of distribution in the UK during the punk and post-punk era. The first chapter will provide a definition of distribution and its relationship to the other steps in the supply chain of the record industry; production, manufacturing and retail. I will then look at a general history of distribution from the advent of the recording industry to circa 1950, when a variety of post-war changes in society brought about significant changes in the recording industry, before looking at distribution in the UK up until 1976, the year when punk rock first had a significant cultural impact in the UK.

The second chapter will focus on UK distribution from 1976 onwards, looking at the emergence of a number of independent distributors including Pinnacle, Spartan and the Cartel. The research in this chapter will be based upon interviews I have carried out with industry professionals who were active during this period and content analysis of contemporary music publications, in particular, the trade magazine Music Week. I will also consider the introduction of the independent charts and how this came to define 'independent' in terms of distribution.

9.1. The History of Record Industry Distribution from 1877-1976

9.1.1. What is record industry distribution?

Horner and Swiss provide useful working definitions of the difference between independent and major record labels. Independents are: 'Commercial firms that produce recorded music and remain, to varying degrees, independent from the production, distribution and manufacturing facilities of major record corporations' (Horner and Swiss, 2008), while Majors can be regarded as 'fully integrated companies which control the production, manufacture, distribution, marketing and promotion of the recordings of their own artists' (Horner and Swiss, 2008). The line between independents and majors historically has not always been clear (as illustrated here by the ambiguous phrase 'to varying degrees') either when used rhetorically in journalistic discourses on independence or by the industry to define key structural and institutional

differences. Thus, in the UK music press of the late 70s and early 1980s, labels such as Island and Virgin were regarded as majors despite not being fully absorbed into the major label system until 1989 (when Island was acquired by Polygram) and 1992 (when Virgin became part of Thorn EMI), respectively. Similar ambiguity arose when the newly formed Association for Independent Music (AIM), a trade organisation for independent distributors and record labels formed in 1998, set out its criteria for eligibility for membership as being that a company must be at least 50% independently owned, a condition generally regarded as being designed to permit long-standing British indie, Creation Records, who had sold half of the company to Sony, to become a member. Matters have become further confused by the transition of the term ‘indie’, used initially in the late 70s and early 80s to denote complete independence from the corporate framework of the major label system, into a term relating to fashion, or a style of music. As Bob Stanley ruefully notes:

> By the twenty-first century ‘indie’ had stretched out to become a meaningless catchall term that covered almost anything contemporary and guitar-based: Radiohead, the White Stripes, Manic Street Preachers, the Polyphonic Spree, Toploader - anything except metal. It had absolutely nothing to do with *the physical distribution of records (*Stanley, 2013, p. 590).

So, while definitions of major labels have been relatively constant, involving complete vertically integrated control of the three prongs of supply chain, production, manufacturing and distribution, definitions of independents have been mutable and seldom precise. The distinguishing characteristic of independent labels which recurs most frequently in such definitions, however, relates to distribution (as Stanley alludes to). It was because Island and Virgin were distributed by majors that they were not regarded as ‘proper’ independents in the post-punk era, and it was the use of a major distributor which precluded labels from entry into the UK indie chart, which began in 1980.

The primary purpose of record distributors is to provide record retailers with the products of the recording industry. The chain from production to consumption in the music industry (and in the entertainment industry generally) can be broken down into the four distinct stages of production, manufacturing, distribution and retail with each stage requiring several significant decisions each with the potential to contribute to the

success or failure of a release. The production process involves the creation of a recording, the copyright in which will be exploited by the copyright owner. Historically, the first owner of the copyright in sound recordings has generally been the record company or 'content company' (Harris, 2016). In legal terms, the copyright owner is the person or company which makes the arrangements necessary for the sound recording, in other words, the entity which finances the project. The exploitation of the copyright in sound recordings has been and remains the economic underpinning of the recording industry (changes wrought by the disruption of digital technology, notwithstanding). It is also the initial point where the record company establishes *control,* via contracts which provide them with exclusive rights to the recordings of an artist for a stated period (in some cases, life of copyright). Given the expense involved in the recording process (advances in digital technology once again, notwithstanding) most early-career artists traditionally rely on the financial power of the label to make the record in the first place. The superior financial power of the major labels has throughout the history of the recording industry given them a competitive advantage over independent labels in the signing of artists and the technical quality of recordings. The sound recording is then re-produced in one or a variety of formats in the manufacturing process. Again, decisions made at this stage are of crucial importance to the overall project, in particular, how many units of each record should be manufactured and in what format(s). The latter decision is particularly important in eras where emerging technology facilitates multiple formats and, therefore, wider choice in the market, for example in the late 1970s when cassette tapes challenged vinyl (which had been the industry format of choice since the late 1940s), or the mid-to-late 1980s when CDs provided an alternative to both vinyl and cassettes. Control of the means of manufacturing products, via ownership of the manufacturing plants, has historically been another key factor in the dominance of major labels. After the manufacturing stage, units are shipped from record companies to distributors who then make copies available to retailers. Keith Negus identifies the key role played by distribution in the struggle for market dominance in the recording industry, both in terms of competition between majors and between major labels and independents: 'The distribution divisions of the major record labels occupy a position of strategic importance within the music industry, playing a significant part in the struggle to maintain control of production and consumption (Negus, 1992, p. 55).

Peterson and Berger point to the existence of a monopoly situation in the US record industry during the period between 1948 and 1955, a 'corporate concentration' which the big four north American majors of the day (RCA Victor, Columbia, Decca and Capitol) managed to achieve through effective use of the strategy of 'vertical integration'. After discussing the majors' dubious (although not entirely illegal at this point) practice of offering influential disc jockeys a variety of inducements to play their releases, a practice which came to be known as 'payola', they proceed to observe the key importance of controlling the means of distribution in the majors' market dominance:

> Each of the majors maintained a system of wholesale dealerships, warehouses and record jobbers. While they did not own many retail record outlets, they could discourage individual retailers from handling the records of independent companies by threatening to delay shipments of their own fast-moving records (Peterson and Berger, 1975, p. 162).

Vertical integration is a business strategy which involves a company's expansion of its existing business structure and operations into different phases of the same supply chain, for example, when a manufacturer also owns its supplier and/or distributor. The rationale behind vertical integration from a corporate perspective is that it enables companies to increase efficiency and reduce expenses by decreasing overheads such as transportation costs, reducing turnaround time, and decreasing reliance on other companies, however the tendency of vertical integration is to diminish competition and lead to effective oligopolies: 'Policy interest in vertical integration has been concerned mainly with the possibility that integration can be used strategically to achieve anticompetitive effects' (Williamson, 1971, p. 112). In contrast to Peterson and Berger, Alexander argues that the record industry witnessed a substantial concentration of distribution *after* the 1950s, and that although during the fifties major labels had their own distribution channels, independent distribution networks provided a significant alternative. Citing Chapple, he suggests that:

> In the fifties the major companies - Columbia (CBS), RCA-Victor (BMG), Decca (MCA), and Capitol (EMI) - distributed through factory-owned branches. Independent distributors handled the majority of independent record labels. Each distributor carried a number of labels such as Atlantic, Dot, and Jubilee, and sometimes larger firms such as MGM and London (Alexander, 1994, p. 91).

Starting in the sixties and continuing into the seventies, major record companies began a process of acquiring successful independent labels and distributors in a process of horizontal integration. A significant consequence of this process was to concentrate distribution, as the distribution of the independent labels, formerly carried out by independent distributors, automatically switched to the distribution networks of the major who had made the acquisition. Negus details the crucial role played by the distribution team in the success of record releases and their crucial relationship with retail:

> Staff in the distribution division of the major labels work at the 'interface' between record company and retailer, and include market researchers, sales staff and business analysts. Their task is to monitor stock movements within the company's warehouses and among different retail outlets, and to ensure that the company is not pressing too many recordings (and wasting valuable storage space) or making too few recordings (and losing money by failing to respond to public demand) (Negus, 1992, p. 55).

The symbiotic relationship between distribution and retail is examined by Hesmondhalgh in his 1997 analysis of the punk and post-punk independent label boom in the UK, which draws the conclusion that not only was retail important in the emergence of a network of independent popular music recording, it was the most critical factor:

> An independent distribution network emerged which would run in parallel with, and in opposition to, the distribution facilities of major record companies. This network is central to an analysis of post-punk's long-term attempts to democratise the music business and it was based on the seemingly banal, but largely neglected, institution of the specialist record shop (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 257).

According to Hesmondhalgh, the number of specialist record shops in the UK increased from 1, 750 to 2, 370 in a three-year period from 1978 to 1981 (including several of the shops which would form the Cartel), a rise which he attributes to changes in the distribution sector of the UK record industry (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 257). Specialist record shops had been in decline in the late 60s and early 70s as high street retailers such as Boots and Woolworth, whose economies of scale allowed them a significant competitive advantage, entered the record retail market. Majors responded to these

changes by turning their distribution channels to face the new chain stores, cutting deliveries to the specialist shops and introducing additional charges on small orders. A gap in the market emerged which was filled by a range of independent wholesalers and distributors who had previously operated in niche sectors of the music industry such as the supply of jukeboxes. Their business model was relatively straightforward: ‘They worked by buying records from the majors at a bulk discount and then attracting retailers by supplying the records they needed without the small order surcharge imposed by the majors’ (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 258).

The unintended consequence of the majors’ orientation towards high street retailers was the emergence of a network of independent labels, distributors and retailers: ‘The majors’ centralisation of distribution and retailing, through the entrepreneurial activity of wholesalers, enabled a proliferation of small retail companies. They were able to enter the market because of the favourable terms provided by the ‘onestops’ (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 258). The ‘onestops’ included Spartan and Pinnacle two of the most significant distributors of the late 70s and the 80s and a network of seven of the most significant retailers would give rise to Rough Trade Distribution. Hesmondhalgh points to the decentralisation which resulted from the new network, and regionalisation was a defining feature of the relationship between the new labels, distributors and retailers. Control of the channels of distribution is, in historical terms, central to the major labels control of the production and consumption of popular music culture.

In this section, I have attempted to define what distribution is with regards to the record industry, to convey an impression of its significance, and to examine its relation to the other stages of the industry supply chain, production, manufacturing and retail. I have also discussed some key historical events in order to illustrate this relationship in context. I will now provide a more general history of distribution (particularly in the UK).

9.1.2. Record industry Distribution before 1950

The history of recorded sound, and therefore the recording industry, begins in the mid-to-late 19th century, with the efforts of a variety of inventors and entrepreneurs, operating on different continents, to develop the technology to enable sound recording and reproduction. In 1857, Edouard-Leon Scott de Martinville, a Parisian printer and bookseller, built the world's first machine for recording sound, the phono autograph, which succeeded in conveying visual representations of sound waves. Unfortunately, the new machine did not facilitate the reproduction of sound and so its uses were limited, and it fell to Thomas Edison 20 years later to become the first person to record *and* reproduce sound. As Wheeldon observes: 'Culture only exists as an 'industry' of notable size and concentrated power because of continual technological innovation in the creation, reproduction and dissemination of texts, sounds and images' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 1), and thus it was Edison's invention of the phonograph which provided the means for the music recording industry to emerge, in much the same way that Johannes Gutenberg's movable type printing press had enabled the music publishing industry some 400 years previously.

The commercial potential of the new technology was not immediately realised, and it would be over a decade before Edison's first record player would be made available to the public, the same year in which Emile Berliner unveiled his own 'talking machine'. Although Berliner's gramophone operated on the same general principle as the phonograph, the technology was quite different; the most significant difference being that Edison's machine used cylinders and Berliner's used flat discs. Thus, almost immediately a commercial struggle ensued between the different hardware manufacturers, indeed as Wheeldon puts it: 'the first 30 years of the recording industry were dominated by a format war between cylinders and discs' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 29). This established a pattern which would recur many times in the history of the recording industry where new advances in technology would give rise to formats which would compete with and often usurp the existing dominant format: from the post-war emergence of vinyl which came to replace shellac; to the arrival of CDs in the 1980s to challenge vinyl; and on to the present day where formats enabled by digital technology, such as streaming and downloading, compete with CDs and the remnants of the vinyl market. The format struggles would in turn establish another enduring feature of the

record industry, the dominance of major record labels. The struggle between cylinders and discs was, in the early stages of the industry, primarily a struggle over hardware sales with the sales of the recordings themselves being of secondary importance. As with today, the key areas where the format war would be won were convenience, cost and sound quality, and the constant improvement of both hardware and software required investment in research and development as well as marketing. Thus, the commercial development of Edison's cylinders would fall to the Columbia Phonograph Company founded by Alexander Graham Bell in 1888 and Berliner would collaborate with the Victor Talking Machine Company from 1991 (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 29). Initially, the phonograph dominated the industry with sales of Edison's invention increasing tenfold in the last decade of the 19th century (Milner, 2009, p. 37); however, the appearance of a new version of the gramophone would challenge this market dominance. As Milner notes:

> Inferior sound notwithstanding, there were plenty of reasons for the public to prefer discs. They were easier to mass-produce, and thus cheaper, and they were more durable, more user-friendly, and could hold four minutes of music, twice as much as an Edison cylinder (Milner, 2009, p. 37).

The consumer was faced with a choice based on the recurring principles of quality cost and convenience and as with debates surrounding streaming in the digital age, convenience and cost won the day.[35] By 1903, Columbia had recognised the superiority of the disc for reproducing recorded music and had begun to manufacture recordings in Berliner's format while still manufacturing cylinders and by 1912, Columbia followed Victor in manufacturing exclusively in the disc format (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 30). Victor had won the format war, due to a combination of the greater convenience to the consumer of their format and the clever marketing of their most popular artists. The second decade of the century saw considerable growth in the market for recorded sound predominantly lead by Victor: 'By 1919, the US market for the industry's products was worth $159 million. In that year there was

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[35]The gramophone's success could also be attributed to Victor's superior marketing, especially with regards to the Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, 'recorded music's first global superstar' (Milner, 2009, p. 37). Caruso recorded for the Victor-owned Red Label, and his huge popularity served as an endorsement of both the hardware of the gramophone and the software of the flat disc.

nearly 200 manufacturers producing more than two million machines, and in 1921 production of recordings exceeded 100 million units' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 30). It was also starting to become apparent, as the patents on record machine technology started to lapse, that the selling of records could be as economically important to the major companies as the selling of record players. In examining levels of concentration of major record labels, Alexander identifies a tendency towards high levels of oligopolistic control interrupted by brief periods of diversity generally as a result of technological innovations or other disruptions: 'The distribution of market share among major and independent firms in the domestic music recording industry has shown fluctuations approximating the shape of a (W), with two periods of low concentration, preceded and followed by several periods of high concentration' (Alexander, 1994, p. 86). The first phase of the industry's history saw the dominance of a few firms who manufactured and distributed both hardware (players of cylinders and discs) and software (cylinders and discs themselves). Rapid technological development from the start of the 20th century, particularly in manufacturing, led to easier access to the market for smaller companies and a dispersion of the market share of the majors. This was followed by a period of acquisition and merger in the industry, an approach which would frequently constitute the majors' response to challenges to their dominance:

> In the nine-year period between 1914 and 1923, the number of firms manufacturing phonographs and records grew at an annual rate of 20%. However, in the six-year period from 1923 to 1929, the number of firms producing record players and/ or records declined at an annual rate of 11%. Horizontal integration explains much of the renewed high levels of industry concentration (Alexander, 1994, p. 86).

The period from 1930 to 1945 is characterised, once again, by high levels of industry concentration, accelerated by a collapse in the market, which can be attributed to macro-economic factors (the great depression), and the advent of the radio industry: 'In 1927, sales of discs had been 104 million. By 1932 they had fallen to a mere six million. Sales of players fell from 987, 000 to 40, 000 over the same period' (Wheeldon, 2012, p. 34). Restrictions on the shellac required to produce records, and a cessation of the production of electrical consumer goods, inhibited record industry recovery during World War Two, however, the period post-war witnessed a revival, based on demand built up during the war years as well as German

technological progress in the use of magnetic tape in sound recording, which was discovered by the Allies as they advanced upon Berlin in 1944-45.[36] The new technology would have profound consequences for the music recording industry:

> Tape had several advantages over disc, not least that it enabled considerably longer continuous recording times. For all the improvements in sound quality, discs had revolved at 78 rpm since the early 1920s and needed to be changed every four minutes, a drawback which was scarcely tolerable for the enjoyment of classical recordings (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 34).

This innovation, which reduced costs substantially, led to a renewed period of market entry for independent labels. The market share of the majors which stood at 75% in 1948 would decrease to as little as 25 % by 1962. Alexander notes that the significant periods of market entry (the late 1910s/ early 1920s and the 1950s) were enabled by innovations in production and manufacturing technology which allowed access 'by lowering costs and the minimum efficient scale of production' (Alexander, 1994, p. 86). This in turn lowered levels of concentration in the industry. In both periods, horizontal integration accounts for the restoration of high levels of concentration; the majors simply bought the competition.

I will now examine distribution in the UK from 1950 to 1976, a period which begins at a time when technological advances in magnetic recording and the introduction of vinyl had a significant impact on the recording industry and culminates at the beginning of the punk era in the UK which was characterised by the emergence of a new breed of independent labels and distributors.

9.1.3. Distribution in the UK 1950-76

Tennent (2013), examines distribution in the UK record industry between 1950 and 1976, a period which saw the record industry change from being a branch of the electrical industry, specialising in the development of hardware, to an industry focusing on market development and the distribution of content. Of the four UK major labels that dominated the market in the

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[36] The potential of magnetic recording had been explored in both Britain and Germany pre-war, but the results had always been disappointing, and the process was regarded as being of little commercial value and not sufficient sound quality for radio broadcast. Walter Weber, the best man of H.J von Braunmuhl who was chief engineer at the Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft (RRG). radio network, would make the significant technological tweak; employing an alternating current (AC). rather than the previously utilised direct current (DC), a move which 'completely transformed the possibilities for making high-quality magnetic recordings' (Milner, 2009, p. 112)

1950s and 1960s, EMI and Decca had originally begun life as manufacturers of gramophones, with software (in the form of records) as means to encourage hardware sales. Pye records, which entered the market in 1954,[37] was the offspring of parent company Pye of Cambridge, also a manufacturer of hardware. The fourth major at this time was Philips, who had acquired the rights to exploit the US Columbia label outside of North America in order to break into the English-speaking markets (Tennent, 2013). In the annual reports of the majors during this period, the quality of the sound of their gramophones took precedence over success in the popular music market:

> The emphasis on technical quality followed through to the distribution level; wholesaling in many areas was done by specialist wholesalers known as electrical factors, who otherwise supplied electricians and electrical dealers with components and appliances. In retailing too, gramophone records were often carried by electrical shops, rather than specialists with the emphasis on music, although such specialists became increasingly important as the market grew through the 1950s and 1960s (Tennent, 2013, p. 331).

Nevertheless, Simon Napier-Bell observed that the business model of the majors was starting to change, especially given the economic possibilities engendered by the advent of vinyl:

> The big four record companies - Decca, EMI, Philips and Pye wanted quick profits. Their raw material was vinyl which was cheap. With a hit song pressed into it, vinyl could be sold at a mark-up of 20 times its original cost, but record sales had reached a ceiling. To sell larger quantities record companies needed new avenues of promotion (Napier-Bell, 2002, p. 9).

Tennent's analysis regards the UK popular music industry during this period as undergoing a period of 'rapid industrialisation' in contrast to a more general British industrial decline and he cites a dramatic increase in the UK market share achieved by UK artists during the 1960s as evidence of the competitiveness of the industry. Furthermore, despite a brief period in the late 1960s when US performers dominated the UK charts once again, the UK share of the UK market would remain resilient into the

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[37] After the purchase of two small independent labels, Polygon and Nixa.

1970s.[38] This period witnessed a dramatic transformation in the industry, characterised by its evolution from a cartel structure distributing only to specialists, into an industry which allowed upstream entry freely but increasingly emphasised large-scale distribution through mass retailers. Tennent argues that the major labels (led by EMI, the major player in UK distribution) operated an effective cartel in the 1950s: 'The existence of a cartel in distribution, whether formal or informal, is evidenced most visibly by the difficulties encountered by minor or new entrants, who lacked the resources to invest in distribution' (Tennent, 2013, p. 334).

9.1.4 Barriers to entry: Gala, Top Rank, Triumph

Tennent provides several examples of the difficulties experienced by aspiring record companies to enter the market, specifically, because of the majors' control of distribution; for example, Gala records which appeared in 1958, and was owned by Musical and Plastics Industry Ltd (MPI), a manufacturer of moulded plastics and musical instruments. The purchase of a record pressing system from the US, allowed Gala to manufacture several copies of a record simultaneously, in contrast to the pressing machines of the established labels, which could only press individual copies. Gala then decided its business model would be to compete on price; with 45 rpm singles being sold for as little as 4s in 1959, significantly lower than the industry standard price of 11s. The new company also invested in television advertising to support these releases which were mainly licensed from smaller independent labels in the US. Despite these favourable factors Gala 'could not gain access to the distribution channels of the established companies' (Tennent, 2013, p. 334). What this meant was that Gala records were 'restricted to marketing its records via non-specialist outlets such as chain stores, newsagents, and tobacconists, which the majors generally refused to supply' (Tennent, 2013, p. 334). Furthermore, an additional consequence of being frozen out from the established retailers was that Gala's records would not be sold in any shops which were used to measure the chart - which had been set up in 1952 and was a powerful means of promotion in the industry - and therefore their acts would not be able to capitalise on the publicity generated by ensuing TV and radio performances. Despite some minor success MPI would demerge Gala in 1961 and Gala's challenge to the 'big four' would dissipate shortly after.

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[38] Indeed, Gourvish and Tennent demonstrate that UK sales in the popular music industry increased substantially in real terms from 1950 through to the late 1970s - albeit that some of this increase can be attributed to international subsidiaries (Gourvish and Tennent, 2010).

Another significant attempt at market entry was by the Rank Organisation, who made a brief and ultimately unsuccessful bid to establish themselves as a major in the late 50s. Unlike Gala, Rank did not have the benefit of their own pressing plant and had to turn to the surplus capacity of their would-be rivals, Philips and EM, I which in turn incentivised both companies to provide distribution for Rank's records. Furthermore, Rank did not challenge the majors on price, instead adhering to the existing Resale Price Maintenance (RPM) structure. Rank's investment in its own distribution network helped it to attain a respectable 2.8 % market share in 1960, however, this was not enough for them to maintain interest and the label was absorbed into the EMI group in August 1960. Perhaps the most interesting challenge posed to the 'cartel' came from the maverick independent record producer, Joe Meek, who extended his DIY approach to record production (Meek tended to record in a home studio), to the setting up of his own label, Triumph, in February 1960. The story of the demise of Triumph was a familiar one; the major labels used their control of the channels of distribution to thwart a potential rival:

> Despite not, at least, openly challenging the established companies on pricing grounds, and like the majors, insisting that its records could only be sold through 'recognised record retailers', the major distribution networks did not carry Triumph's records (Tennent, 2013, p. 335).

Triumph managed a top ten hit with the Meek-produced 'Angela Jones' by Michael Cox but its reliance on smaller pressing plants and distributors meant that the label could not get enough of the product to market quickly enough and convinced Meek of the need to be part of the majors' networks. He went on to produce several commercially successful records over the next few years including in July 1961, Johnny Leyton's number one hit, 'Johnny Remember Me', ironically released on the now-EMI distributed Top Rank.

The struggle of Gala, Top Rank and Triumph to gain a toehold in the UK record industry in the late 50s and early 60s supports Tennent's assertion that the 'big four' acted as a de facto cartel and would, if required, co-operate to shut down or absorb potential rivals. The method of choice in achieving this was to cut off the vital connection between the company and retailers: 'Distribution was an important weapon for large-scale manufacturers to retain their influence over marketplaces and fight back against

the market entry encouraged by the growth of the consumer market in post-war Britain' (Tennent, 2013, p. 331).

Factors from outside the record industry would emerge to threaten this dominance, as had happened in the United States in the 50s with the arrival of television and the enacting of anti-trust laws. A 1955 Monopolies and Mergers Commission Report *Collective Discrimination - A Report on Exclusive Dealing, Aggregated Rebates and Other Discriminatory Trade Practices,* recommended outlawing the resale price maintenance to protect consumers from the collusion of distributors in a variety of emerging consumer markets. The Conservative government of the time had already brought in the Restrictive Trade Practices Act (1956) to tackle cartels and now moved to introduce the Resale Prices Bill 1964, an act which targeted price-fixing amongst major distributors. EMI and the other majors feared a loss of market dominance as large retailers would now be free to aggressively cut prices and, indeed, EMI (with the support of Decca and Philips) sought to gain an exemption for the record industry when it came up for Royal Assent in July 1964. Suffering under an enormous backlog of similar appeals, the Restrictive Practices Court announced that this hearing was unlikely to be heard in 1965 (indeed it was ultimately postponed to 1969), and the majors changed strategy in order to maintain their market power. A series of measures including the majors ceasing to carry each other's products, the introduction of rigid minimum order quotas and the tightening of percentages on sale or returns, were introduced. Most significantly, the majors moved towards the distribution of smaller labels:

> These new rules encouraged the majors, as manufacturers and wholesalers, to increase scale and scope in distribution by carrying a wider range of products – not just their own. From 1965 onwards the number of labels, and hence releases, began to increase rapidly, as new British-based independent labels entered the market, encouraged by the spare capacity in the distribution networks of the big four – the 10 or so labels charting in 1960 expanded to more than 50 by 1975 (Tennent, 2013, p. 338).

There would now also be only one wholesale channel for each release and as Tennent observes small, regional distributors such as Lugtons and Keith Prowse in London and

Martins in Birmingham were forced out of the market. Tennent views this in terms of a 'Chandlerian distribution narrative', an expansion in both scale and scope which saw major labels who possessed the capacity for manufacturing and distribution establish themselves as distributors for emerging independent record labels. The first of the labels organised around this paradigm was Andrew Loog Oldham's Immediate Records, which was announced to some fanfare (including a front page in Record Retailer, the forerunner of Music Week) in August 1965. According to Tennent, the launch of Immediate was ground breaking as it was the first time that a major label (in this instance Philips) had made a commitment to manufacture and distribute records for an independent label without demanding control over creative decision-making: 'Immediate was therefore able to concentrate resources on the parts of the record-making process supported by its capabilities, such as the 'A&R' process (the choosing of acts), recording and producing, and promoting the end product' (Tennent, 2013, p. 339). A model of reciprocity was established by which Philips could tap the cultural capital of Oldham, then the prominent manager of the Rolling Stones. Oldham's reputation as establishment *enfant terrible* could attract emerging talent and furnish Polydor with counter-cultural credentials, which were becoming increasingly bankable, and his production abilities would be an asset, having already produced a string of hits for The Stones. Philips could utilise its institutional and industrial might to manufacture records to the most exacting of technical standards, and organise and oversee UK-wide national distribution, using the well-established network it had in place for the distribution of its own catalogue. Philips would also use its trade connections to promote Immediate to trade magazines, radio, TV and retailers. The paradigm of reciprocity would recur many times in ensuing decades and the axis round which it revolved was always access to and control of the channels of distribution:

> The multi-divisional major companies do not attract the owners of small, independent labels by being knowledgeable about music, funky, cool, streetwise or artist-friendly. *The major corporation attracts the indie because it can distribute recordings* (emphasis added). Here the tensions between indie and major do not so much involve conflicts of art versus commerce or democracy versus oligopoly (as sometimes portrayed) as

> distribution struggles- battles to get recordings to the public. (Negus, 2002, p. 58).

The assertion of Simon Napier-Bell that 'from the word go, Immediate Records declared war on the four major record companies' (Napier-Bell 2002 p. 94) can be viewed as a rhetorical overstatement, and the relationship was always much more one of mutual benefit.[39] Of course, the scheme relied upon Polydor's ability to manufacture and distribute product efficiently and in sufficient numbers. In 1966, Immediate managed to achieve a 0.7 % share of the UK market and subsequent companies which followed the Immediate template would prove to be even more successful.[40] Some of the success of the emerging labels can be attributed to the availability of new promotional avenues, engendered by changes to the framework of the radio broadcasting industry, with the emergence of the music-based stations BBC Radio 1 and 2, as well as changes to the structure of Radio Luxembourg which promoted opportunities for the smaller labels. Furthermore, the arrival of independent local radio in the early 70s enabled record labels to target specific geographical areas. The emergence of these new labels did not, however, lead to a decentralisation of power in the record industry as the major labels succeeded in consolidating their power in the area of distribution, in the process eliminating competition from independent distributors: 'Independent wholesalers were edged out of the market by the 'big four' manufacturers, which could cut transaction costs by offering market-specific distribution capabilities' (Tennent, 2013, p. 342).

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[39] Immediate managed to achieve instant success, having secured the UK rights to 'Hang on Sloopy' by the American band The McCoys. The single went to number one, on the back of which Oldham signed two British artists in Cat Stevens and the Nice, to complement the Small Faces who were already part of the label's roster. Oldham would recount the surreptitious methods by which Immediate would ensure chart success, emulating the longstanding practices of the majors stretching back to 'payola' and beyond: There wasn't anything to stop you putting a load of girls in taxis, telling them which shops to go to, especially on Thursday or Friday. We'd send them back in on Saturday to re-order when there was no stock there, so that you got big reorders on the Monday morning (Napier-Bell, 2002, p. 95).

[40] Tennent points to the success of Mickie Most's Rak Records which was distributed through a licensing deal with EMI and featured successful chart artists such as Suzi Quatro, Mud and Hot Chocolate and Jonathan King's UK Records (distributed by Decca), claiming 2.7% and 1.5% respectively of a much more diverse market in 1974. This new approach also helped US independents gain access to the UK market and sign UK talent without having to make substantial investments in production and distribution themselves. Bell Records, distributed by EMI, claimed a 3% share of the charts in 1972, rising to 6% by 1975, having signed popular British artists including the Bay City Rollers, Gary Glitter, and Showaddywaddy.

9.2. Independent Distribution in the UK from 1976

This section will examine distribution in the UK during the punk and post-punk era, particularly independent distribution and the extent to which it posed significant challenges to the major labels system in both commercial and ideological terms. In presenting and analysing stakeholder voices from contemporary media sources as well as later retrospective accounts, I will interrogate further the fraught discursive terrain around independence: the extent to which it was considered desirable or, indeed necessary, for creative autonomy and artistic and ideological credibility; the mutability of definitions of 'true' independence; and the importance of independent distribution to such definitions. I will firstly look at the Cartel, a distribution network which emerged from Rough Trade Distribution. I will then consider its chief competitors in the independent distribution sectors, Pinnacle, Spartan and IDS. Finally, I will provide an account of the emergence of the independent chart and its importance to the independent recording industry.

9.2.1. 'Distribution is power': The Cartel

> Political economy has provided many insights into the various ways that corporate ownership impinges upon cultural practices, highlighting how production occurs within a series of unequal power relations, how commercial pressure can limit the circulation of unorthodox or oppositional ideas, and how the control of production by a few corporations can contribute to broader social divisions and inequalities of information, not only within nations but across the world (Negus, 1999, p. 15).

> I think it was probably a formalization of something that had been taking place. Anyway, I think it was really good because suddenly all the regions were connected and, you know, your record was kind of going through this Cartel and there was a good level of communication, so if a record was selling well in one place you knew that another distributor would become aware of this and take some. So, it was a really good idea. It created a sort of association or community of labels together who were able to take on major label distributors, you know? They did the same. They were much smaller but together became something significant (McRobbie, 2017).

The history of the recording industry has been characterised by long periods of the concentration of power in the hands of a few companies - an effective oligopoly - interrupted briefly by challenges to their power structure by smaller, independent companies. The means by which the majors have sought to re-establish dominance have typically been through the corporate practices of vertical and horizontal integration - controlling the steps in the supply chain from production to consumption - and merger and acquisition. As Keith Harris, who had extensive experience of working with major labels during the late 70s and throughout the 1980s, put it to me in interview, 'the majors have this underlying philosophy; when something blows up big, they buy it' (Harris, 2016).

Historically, the conditions which have facilitated any kind of challenge by independent labels have been technological, for example when recording technology has improved to enable cheaper recording thus reducing the costs of entry to the market (as happened in the late 1970s) or have come from legislative changes such as antitrust laws which have limited the capacity for the corporations to employ anti-competitive practices. Developments in the operation of promotional channels such as the advent of TV or changes in the radio industry have also, historically, allowed for periods of independent success. The struggle between the corporate power of the major labels and the entrepreneurial endeavours of the independents has always been *implicitly* ideological, asking questions of the nature of capitalism and the way in which 'industry produces culture' (Negus, 1999, p. 14). Negus considers the implications of the institutional structure of the companies which produce, re-produce, and disseminate culture:

> How do owners exercise and maintain control within corporations and what are the consequences of this for workers and public life in general? With regard to the music business, this raises questions about the impact of capitalist ownership on the creative work of artists and the options available to consumers (Negus, 1999, p. 14).

This question goes to the heart of what is at stake when culture exists as an industry, and who it matters to. Wheeldon invokes Plato to demonstrate the importance of culture to the social fabric: 'let me make the songs of the nation, and I care not who makes its laws' (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 1), but the 'making' of songs is only one part of the

struggle to produce and control culture. Of equal importance is the means by which songs (or texts of any kind) reach an audience or, in a capitalist economic system, the consumer. In the music recording industry (as in the entertainment industries generally) this vital step is distribution. Control of the distribution of cultural products as Geoff Travis recognises, is intrinsically political:

> DIY was the ruling philosophy. We became a distributor when we realised there was no other way to get our sort of music to people. We realised that distribution is power and that to have control over that particular means of production was absolutely crucial (The Guardian, Feb 28, 1987).

Much of the discourse around independence in the punk and post-punk era in the UK was underpinned by the ideological goal of establishing a network of independent recording which could operate outside of the corporate framework of the major labels. This alternative sphere would comprise labels, distributors and retailers but also a variety of other types of cultural production including local music promotion and the publication of numerous music-related fanzines. Most significantly, this attempt would lead to the formation of the (ironically named) Cartel, a nationwide network for distribution which would connect the emerging independent labels with the growing number of specialist retailers. Along with Rough Trade, the Cartel originally comprised six other distributors: Red Rhino in York, Probe in Liverpool, Fast Forward in Edinburgh, Nine Mile in Leamington Spa, Backs in Norwich and Revolver in Bristol. The Cartel would be run as a collective based on ‘mutual, co-operative control’ (King, 2012, p. 127) and was a radical departure from prevailing industry models which had generally required independents to turn to major labels at the crucial stage of distribution. Owning the means of production and distribution meant political autonomy and the ability to produce cultural products free from corporate logic. The goal at its most ambitious was to alter that way people saw the relationship between culture and the marketplace. Mike Holdsworth, who worked at Rough Trade Distribution from 1985 until its demise in 1991, confirms the avowedly political nature of the organisation:

> Oh yeah, Rough Trade was run as a collective and that in itself was a political issue at the time, which was quite counter to the Thatcherite economics of it. And then the structure of the Cartel, which was this thing that evolved out of Rough Trade Distribution, taking other regional distribution companies and weaving together,

> like, an alternative structure which effectively … was anti-establishment because it was anti the major corporate structure (Holdsworth, 2016).

Sandy McLean who worked for the Edinburgh-based arm of The Cartel, Fast Product, provides an impression of the distribution network's provenance and the extensive geographical reach it managed to achieve:

> The Cartel was basically Rough Trade realising they were so busy they couldn't handle all of this explosion of new Indie labels coming up, so they were shipping out records to places like The Red Rhino shop in York the Backs shop in Norwich, Revolver shop in Bristol and these guys were doing it, putting it in their back shop and selling it in their area and around their shops … Fast Product was the only label that they approached and said, 'will you take a roomful of stock? Phone up your record shops in Scotland, like from Oban to Wick and Thurso and Shetland and all these places - so all through Edinburgh, all through Glasgow?' So we basically, for the first couple of years, we just had to get the phone book out, phone up Douglas's in Oban, whatever they're called … Music Matters in Buckie, Sound and Vision in Prestwick … and just say 'are you interested in taking some of this new music?', and some of them weren't, some of them were. Tom Russell for example, Tom Russell had half a dozen shops in Glasgow back in the early eighties, so I had to chat him up (McLean, 2016).

Stephen McRobbie, from the perspective of a young music fan and musician, witnessed the transformative effect of the regionalisation the Cartel promoted, a process which saw longstanding regional hierarchies dissolve, and a new more egalitarian value system emerge:

> There was definitely a sense that things were changing and probably regionalisation in cities like Manchester and Edinburgh became important - and Glasgow. I think there was … with the sea change people seemed on an equal footing to each other in a way, so in a way, coming from London or being based in London lost some of its - maybe value is too strong - but the value of doing something based in somewhere like Wales rather than in London, in this new DIY scene it just did not matter. In fact, in a way you would think 'God, that's

> wild. These guys stay there, and they are doing this mental music', so it was this slight kind of transformation (McRobbie, 2017).

Hesmondhalgh (1997) employs the term *democratisation* as a 'useful normative concept for assessing post-punk's institutional effectiveness', and intrinsic to this concept are notions of *participation* and *access.* Hesmondhalgh also points to the importance of *decentralisation* (a shift away from the traditional industry centre of London to the regions of the UK), *collectivism*, *collaboration* and *co-operation*. Boon's account of the rationale behind the Cartel, with its description of a 'community of interest' implies the collectivist and cooperative nature of the organisation. As King suggests:

> Though London would be its nexus, the idea was that no cog in the Cartel's chain would be more powerful than any other. Each distributor would provide a point of access and egress for any band, label or fanzine writer that wanted to lock into Rough Trade distribution's perpetually turning wheel, thus ensuring nationwide distribution without the need to supply and co-ordinate the releases via the hothouse of London (King, 2012, p. 126).

The significance of an independent distribution network is highlighted by Digby Pearson, who set up the Earache Records in 1986 in order to release the records of bands emerging from the UK death metal scene such as Napalm Death and Extreme Noise Terror: 'Living in the UK was quite important because of the strong independent music scene here and, even better, the strong independent distribution sector' (Mudrian, 2004, p. 123).

Pearson, who would eventually sell a substantial share of Earache to Sony in 1992 when the death metal genre had gone over ground, credits the eclecticism of the Cartel with their agreement to distribute records which would have had, at that point, only limited appeal:

> A company called Rough Trade came out of a record shop in West London and was very important in the whole scheme of things. Basically, they started Rough Trade Distribution, which was an independent distribution company, and for the first time ever it was like you didn't need to have major distribution in the UK to survive … I went to a company called Revolver. They were part of the Rough

> Trade family and not afraid of left-field music. That was such an important moment, because they accepted my label. I had no track record or anything, and they were like, 'Yeah, sure, we'll distribute your records.' So, I was like, 'wow, I've got distribution. Great!' (Mudrian, 2004, p. 122).

Pearson states that if it wasn't for the existence of Rough Trade distribution it might have been impossible for him to launch Earache at all, providing an example of the importance of distribution generally and of Rough Trade Distribution in particular. This point of view was supported by Ivo Watts-Russell, whose label 4AD had an unexpected number one hit with 'Pump up the Volume' by M/A/R/R/S, the first number one The Cartel achieved:

> It was … a concrete way of saying thank you to (Rough Trade's) Richard Scott and Geoff Travis for the unbelievable support they had given 4AD, especially early on. Without them, many labels would never have had the opportunity to start or to have the ability to continue (Aston, 2013, p. 245).

Nevertheless, although regionalisation and decentralisation had been founding principles of the Cartel, a marked departure from these principles took place around the middle of the decade, as reported in a Music Week article bearing the headline 'Cartel centres despatch' (MW, March 8 1986, p. 1). Under the guidance of Richard Scott, the organisation decided to centralise its existing structure of regional despatch in London, a move away from the traditional regionalisation that characterised the early years. This streamlining process - ostensibly to allow each regional member to sell product more 'aggressively'- would take place in two stages, with firstly Revolver and Nine Mile being handled directly from Rough Trade's warehouse in Kings Cross before Red Rhino, Fast Forward and Backs moved over to the new system. The rationale behind the move was presented by Scott in terms of challenging the majors:

> The Cartel's role historically has been one of discovering and developing new talent and record labels through independent distribution with a high percentage of these achieving success. Now we feel we are structured to be competitive with the majors as a parallel - not 'alternative'- sales force (MW, March 8 1986, p. 1).

The rhetoric of Spartan and Pinnacle had long drawn on themes of reaching parity with the major labels, both commercially and in terms of status in the industry, and this was now the avowed aim of The Cartel. A Music Week feature on distribution the following year, reflected positively on the changes in the Cartel's distribution set-up, although thought it important to stress that the regional members still retained considerable autonomy, 'On the indie front, Cartel members now enjoy the benefit of a central London wholesale base and whilst they retain ultimate responsibility for their individual regions, this makes for greater efficiency all round' (MW, May 31 1986, p. 1).

Hesmondhalgh (1997) observes that by 1988, the Cartel was buoyant and had managed to capture a relatively small but, nevertheless, significant share of the UK distribution market. The arrival of high street retailers such as Our Price and HMV had had an adverse effect on many of the specialist, independent record shops that had been the Cartel's base in the early years, but the Cartel (along with Spartan and Pinnacle).had successfully integrated into the new retail landscape and, at least in terms of sales, was doing as well as it ever had. In 1986, Richard Scott was confident enough to predict significant imminent growth for the Cartel and to suggest it was more than a match for potential competitors, including majors:

> We account for about two per cent of the market at the moment, but I see no reason why we can't double that over the next 18 months and double it again in the 18 months after that. The Cartel currently has more than enough product to compete with any other company vying for a place in the marketplace (MW, April 19 1986, p. 4).

In fact, in 1988, after independent distributors achieved their first simultaneous number 1 and number 2 records in the UK singles charts with only Kylie Minogue's 'I should be so lucky' (which was released on PWL and distributed by Pinnacle).keeping the Rough Trade-distributed 'Beat Dis' by Bomb the Bass on the Rhythm King label, off the top spot, Rough Trade marketing director Simon Edwards was emboldened enough to urge labels to consider abandoning major distribution for the independents: 'This means that labels will begin to think carefully about their distribution and will consider independents, perhaps for the first time. The indies have been able to respond quickly and efficiently to the sudden demand for dance records' (MW, March 5 1988, p.1). Why then, Hesmondhalgh asks, 'was the Rough Trade organisation bankrupt within three

years?' (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 269). Two reports from the NME provide an indication of the problems besetting the Cartel even as it appeared to be in its rudest health - the first from December 1988:

> Indie distributor RED RHINO (sic) has gone into voluntary receivership. Speculation about the company's financial problems has been rife for weeks and a Cartel spokesman confirmed on Friday that despite attempts at refinancing Rhino - the York-based arm of the Cartel - the firm had been put in the hands of a receiver. Red Rhino are believed to have debts in the region of £350,000. Prior to Friday's announcement various stories about Rhino's position had filtered around the country: among them rumours of debts up to half a million pounds, take-over bids by Virgin and the suspension of Rhino's off-shoot Ediest label (NME, Dec 17 1988, p. 2).

This was followed in December the next year with news of financial difficulties afflicting Fast Forward, another founding member of the distribution network:

> Fast Forward, the Scottish arm of the Cartel independent distribution network, has ceased trading and is currently in discussion with its creditors. The news comes virtually a year after former part of the Cartel, the York-based Red Rhino, went into voluntary liquidation. All Fast Forward product has been withdrawn from sale, with labels affected including 53 & 3rd, who were responsible for launching the likes of C86 popsters, the Shop Assistants. A Cartel spokesman put a brave face on the situation, despite this latest blow to the distribution set-up. He told NME: 'It's obviously sad that fast forward (sic) should find themselves in this position, however the Cartel remains intact and there are ambitious plans for 1990 which will reinforce our strength in the independent sector' (NME, Dec 16 1989, p. 5).

The unnamed spokesman here uses the rhetoric of venture legitimacy, familiar from Garud et al, in a bid to reassure potential stakeholders and investors that they can expect the Cartel to overcome the difficulties besetting it and return to its central role in independent distribution. By 1991, however, the Rough Trade organisation had collapsed, and the Cartel was no more. Hesmondhalgh (1997) cites various contributory factors to its downfall such as the purchase of a hugely expensive computer system

which turned out to be not-fit-for-purpose, the move to a new warehouse in north-west London before the existing warehouse had been rented out (meaning that Rough Trade was effectively paying rent on two properties), and the investing of 5 million pounds into the American wing of the company, Rough Trade Inc. However, he also suggests the collective nature of the Cartel was, at least partly, responsible for the organisation's demise. A 1991 Music Week article (which as the mouthpiece of the major labels may not have been too disappointed by the Cartel's struggles), entitled 'Death by Committee' made similar claims echoing 'common criticisms about the unwieldiness of democratic procedures in co-operative organisations' (Hesmondhalgh, 1997, p. 269).

Sandy Mclean gives a sense of the rapidity with which the mini empire dissolved:

> It was dominoes a wee bit. Because Red Rhino had spent so much money pressing stuff up and being a label and distro, they owed this pressing plant, Mayking, they owed them a crazy amount of money. So, obviously Mr. Mayking decided to chase up all their debts, and we used to have about three months' credit, so he just phoned up one day and said 'you owe me 28 grand like, I want it now. You owe it to me now'. And I said 'well, I can't give it to you now'. And he said, 'that means you're insolvent so I can shut your company down tomorrow.' So, I said, 'gonna no dae that' kind of thing and he said, 'well you know I don't want to do that, so I'll give you six months to pay it off', and he did, but it meant that we basically just had to move and downsize (McLean, 2016).

In December 1990, Revolver, another Cartel founding member, decided to jump ship, just as the ailing Rough Trade was coping with a wave of resignations and redundancies, as reported in Music Week under the headline 'Revolver deserts Rough Trade':

> Revolver is linking up with Pinnacle in a move which represents a reduction in business of about 10 per cent. The news comes less than a week after Rough Trade laid off up to 40 staff. Bristol-based Revolver and Pinnacle- the UK's largest independent distributor-are establishing a sales and marketing team to provide distribution services for specialist labels. Revolver is taking with it all but one of its record labels, only Beechwood Records is staying with Rough Trade (MW, Dec 15 1990, p. 1).

Revolver would be taking a clutch of successful labels with them including Heavenly, Lazy, Earache and Shimmydisc, and the move meant that, by this stage, other than Rough Trade, only Backs remained of the original Cartel members, with Fast Forward and Red Rhino having gone out of business and Nine Mile having been absorbed into Rough Trade itself. Mike Chadwick, Managing Director of Revolver, refuted claims that the decision was prompted by ongoing negative press around Rough Trade distribution, insisting 'We have been talking about this since last December. It is a response to market trends. We felt it was time to make the move' (MW, Dec 15 1990, p. 1).

However, other voices in the media around this time were less diplomatic. Former Red Rhino Boss Tony K launched a broadside against Rough Trade after setting up a new wholesale and distribution company called APT Distribution under the ownership of the Belgian record label Play it Again Sam! K, describing himself as positive about the future and looking forward to his new venture, free from Cartel interference: 'Now we have got rid of the shackles of the Cartel. After constantly having them round our necks we can now get on with some good business direct to the shops' (MW, Mar 3 1989, p. 4). The US label Sleeping Bag records also left Rough Trade Distribution around this time - moving to Spartan - after what they called a 'torrid and disappointing 18 months with Rough Trade' (NME, Aug 4 1990, p. 3). Label manager Mervyn Anthony Lynn released a press statement, criticising the commitment of RTD, 'In the last 18 months we came close to breaking the label a few times but when that extra push is needed one shouldn't have to look over one's shoulder to make sure you're getting the support and attention necessary' (NME, Aug 4 1990, p. 4). The effects of Rough Trade's various problems were, perhaps, most keenly felt by Cooking Vinyl which was forced to make most of its staff redundant in October 1990, a move which the label's managing director Pete Lawrence portrayed as a direct consequence of Rough Trade's inability to get product into the shops on time. Cooking Vinyl had generally been sustained by healthy sales in their back catalogue but were affected in 1990 by a disastrous sales decrease, that they laid squarely at the door of their distributor:

> Our actions have been forced on us by the massive delays caused by Rough Trade moving warehouse and installing a new computer system. It hit our turnover massively during the summer. We lost at least a third of our projected

> income because the records weren't in the shops. Labels like 4AD and Mute are big enough to ride it out, but the smaller people who rely on Rough Trade will be hit, especially if they haven't got a massive priority chart act to help them get back on course (NME, Oct 27 1990, p. 3).

Mike Holdsworth, speaking in the music press at the time, attempted to respond to Lawrence's claims but was not entirely convincing in stating:

> Although Rough Trade Distribution sympathises with Cooking Vinyl's current problems, it cannot accept the claims made by their managing director Pete Lawrence in NME, particularly as we have been, and will continue to be, committed to independent labels of all sizes (NME, Nov 3 1990, p. 3).

Any sense of collectivism or solidarity amongst the erstwhile allies that comprised the Cartel, was thin on the ground, as labels and other distributors lambasted the incompetence of Rough Trade Distribution. Retailers too, joined in the onslaught of criticism as claims mounted of inefficiency: current records being out of stock; orders being substantially late; and even deliveries being sent out to the wrong record shops, all issues attributed by Rough Trade itself to problems experienced after moving into the new warehouse and the installation of the new computer system. Probe records in Liverpool provided a sense of how Rough Trade's problems were having a knock-on effect for retailers:

> Rough Trade's been shit recently. Deliveries have been late, they've been getting better, but they're still late and there's a load of stuff out of stock. We tried to get the Ned's Atomic Dustbin single last week, but we were told that was out of stock. We lost about five days' sales on that- and we only got copies in the end because a sales rep came round (NME, Nov 3 1990, p. 3).

To compound a miserable year, Rough Trade announced in 1990 that they would be laying off around 70 staff, many of whom worked in the new warehouse, as well as others who had been brought in to oversee the setting-up of the new computer system. The lay-offs were portrayed by a spokesperson as a streamlining exercise designed to make Rough Trade more efficient:

> As far as the warehouse goes, there's going to be slimming down of staff to make it run better. Obviously, it's a shock to the system, but once people know what's happening, they'll be able to see that we just couldn't afford to carry on employing these consultants who were getting paid by the hour. And the warehouse has been overstaffed. A lot of these people were on short-term contracts knowing that at some stage they'd be told their services would no longer be needed (NME, Dec 6 1990, p. 3).

The sense of turmoil around Rough Trade was heightened the following week with reports of the company being forced to hire extra security guards at the warehouse amidst a wave of vandalism and 'sabotage', carried out by disgruntled staff and ex-staff, 'Bricks have been thrown through windows, toilets have been flooded, and NME understands that the man responsible for the redundancies, managing director George Kempton-Howe (sic), was sent a parcel of excrement in the post' (NME, Dec 15 1990, p. 3). The response from a Rough Trade spokesman placed the blame on a small number of miscreants, using pointed contemporary political language to chastise the culprits 'There is a minority of people, and I must stress that it's a minority, who have used the situation to practice their own militant tendencies' (NME, Dec 15 1990, p. 3).

Kimpton-Howe had been brought in to steady the ship after the departures of key figures such as Dave Whitehead and Simon Edwards in 1989, but his appointment was met with general disapproval and, indeed, recalcitrance from long-term Rough Trade staff. As Sandy McLean notes retrospectively, Kimpton-Howe was an incongruous appointment for the company, a recognisable corporate archetype:

> We realised we needed a more professional manager, so they went and got this guy from Pinnacle, George Kimpton-Howe, who turned out to be a fucking idiot, a kind of old school businessman, it's like hiring Arthur Daley or someone like that to run a whole food shop or something (McLean, 2016).

An unnamed former member of staff gave an impression of the bleak situation facing Rough Trade at the end of 1990, using rhetoric which was a familiar feature of the indie culture wars:

> At the moment they are 800 orders behind. That means 800 shops, a lot of them chart return shops, just can't get the records as quickly as they need them.

> They've got a computer system worth a quarter of a million pounds, and it just isn't working and that was before they sacked 70 people. They think they'll be able to get through the bad patch and carry on as normal next year. They must be joking. A lot of people who have worked for Rough Trade for a long time are very bitter, they feel like they've been betrayed. The company is turning into a corporate monster, but they're just a bunch of amateurs trying to play with the big boys (NME, Dec 5 1990, p. 2).

There is a clear sense here of a storytelling contest, of dichotomous accounts of the situation facing Rough Trade, competing for priority in the discursive media marketplace. Holdsworth appeals to the historical reputation of Rough Trade as the long-standing defender and nurturer of independent labels, claiming the company 'have been, and will continue to be, committed to independent labels of all sizes' (NME, Dec 5 1990, p. 2). His theme is one of 'we are the same company we have always been with the same value system' and is designed to elicit sympathy, and more practically given the situation, trust. The unnamed ex-employee of the company, however, utilises a number of negative tropes when focusing the narrative, including those of 'corporate monsters' and 'big boys', which were, and still are, commonly used negatively to denote major record labels. The underlying moral of the narrative, as outlined by the anonymous storyteller, is one of betrayal and, indeed, hubris. The motive attributed to Rough Trade is one of greed and aspiration, of trying to become everything they were originally opposed to, and, in the process, betraying those people who had worked at the company and helped to build its cultural and institutional status.

9.2.2. 'Separatist ethic': the downfall of Rough Trade Distribution

McLean's first-hand experience of the Cartel supports this depiction of Rough Trade's overextension, and conveys an impression of the organisation's swift decline from M/A/R/R/S' conquest of the singles charts:

> You'd not just have the Smiths, you'd have Depeche Mode, you'd have Yazoo, you'd have Nick Cave, the Pixies, and Pump up the Volume, once you'd had chart records it just became easier and easier, and it just kept getting better and better and better and then some bright spark had the idea to get another warehouse and to get a new computer system. So, they basically spent all their

> money on a new computer system and a warehouse, and that's what caused the end of it (McLean, 2016).

As the ramifications of RTD's dramatic collapse were pored over, a comment piece in Music Week suggested that the company's 'separatist ethic' was anachronistic going into the 90s and, indeed, that the conception of independence that it had come to embody was no longer relevant:

> Rough Trade's effective dismemberment calls into question whether the very notion of independence really has any meaning anymore. Those original independents which struggled through the early Eighties to establish themselves inevitably have a strong sense of mission. But from a 1991 perspective, in which 57 varieties of deal are the norm, it seems more likely that the Rough Trade-style separatist ethic was merely a historical phase the record industry had to go through in order to develop (MW, May 18 1991, p. 4).

From this perspective. the demise of RTD marked the end of a period which started around the time of the emergence of the first independents of the punk era in the mid-70s, a period characterised by a distinct industrial and organisational paradigm and imbued with an ideological sense of purpose, as characterised by a somewhat sombre feature in Music Week in June 1991:

> As the first dedicated indie distributor, Rough Trade was the founder of an ideal which set the independent music scene apart from the rest of the industry. The question is whether its stubborn adherence to its unique philosophy eventually caused its downfall (MW, June 1 1991, p. 8).

As reported in May 1991, the majority of the labels associated with RTD would move over to their 'arch-rival' Pinnacle (MW, May 18 1991, p. 1). In fact, of the bigger labels involved only Big Life owned by Jazz Summers would take a different path as he announced in a manner which demonstrated again the provisional and contextual nature of definitions of independence:

> There were five major record labels at Rough Trade and four of them have gone to Pinnacle. I've gone my own way with Polygram: you tell me who's the

> independent one? Independence is an attitude, and I am still in control of my destiny (MW, May 18 1991, p. 3).

Summers rhetorical question here borders on the absurd in suggesting that he, in opting for major label distribution, is more independent than those labels who chose independent distribution through Pinnacle. However, the logical gymnastics at work here show that the perception of independence is so prized that stakeholders are willing to stretch credulity to frame themselves as independent. Typically, Summers reinforces this sense of independence in terms of 'control'. In the same issue of Music Week, Summers targets his ire at Geoff Travis personally, although in doing so he backhandedly credits Rough Trade Distribution for its crucial role in the development of the independent sector. 'I am angry with Geoff Travis. He is Mr Rough Trade, and although they enabled a lot of us to start up, they strangled us with complete inefficiency and gross incompetence' (MW, May 18 1991, p. 1). Summers' attack drew a response from the oft-maligned Steve Mason who showed his support for Travis in Music Week's letters pages, while emphasising how far back their relationship extended:

> What I found extremely offensive was the reference in your diary column to Geoff Travis and the intimation that while people were suffering, he was sunning himself on some beach. One bitter quote should not be taken that Geoff is unpopular. The support he has had from his friends and labels over the last three months has been admirable. I have personally known Geoff for 15 years and during that period he has built up one of the country's most respected distribution networks. He would always put the wellbeing of the independent industry first (MW, May 25 1991, p. 8).

In fact, the relationship between The Cartel and Pinnacle, often portrayed as adversarial in contemporary sources, retrospective journalistic accounts, and, indeed, in interviews conducted for this project is shown to be more nuanced when considering the inception of the relationship between Mason and Travis:

> When Geoff Travis set up Rough Trade's first fully-fledged distribution service in the late Seventies, a benevolent Steve Mason lent him £15, 000 to open his first warehouse. In 1991 Mason is helping out again but this time the company is

> being dismantled. Steve Mason's Pinnacle is paying a 1m advance to the main labels which operated under the now-beleaguered Rough Trade Distribution (MW, June 1 1991, p. 8).

The next section will move on to examine some of The Cartel's counterparts and competitors in independent distribution, Pinnacle, Spartan and IDS. In doing so, it will examine areas of conflict and complementarity between the different organisations, the extent to which they represented a unified independent distribution sector in opposition to major label distribution, and ways in which they were viewed as ideologically distinct from one another. The importance of the concept of independence in the ascription and perception of value and, therefore, its contested status in popular music discourses, will be analysed in the light of these relationships.

9.2.3. 'Big guys in suits': Pinnacle, Spartan and IDS

> Spartan was the big one actually - they went bust - Pinnacle kind of came along as well. Spartan were a big one, they were the kind of big guys in suits and a lot of the indies like Factory and Mute - Tony and Daniel were quite smart guys - they put their stuff into two distributors. They put all of the albums into Spartan and all of the albums into the Cartel. So, when I got wind, when I got a call from someone saying there's a new New Order album out in two months - brilliant! So, I would pick up the phone and dial. The first call would be to the manager of HMV in Union Street and then the HMV in Princes Street and then the next would be the manager for Virgin. I'd say 'Hi Dougie, I've got a brand-new New Order album, it's called such-and-such, it's LP and cassette, we're doing a 1-in-10 deal, it's this, this, how many do you want? 50? Ok, fine.' And then I'd phone up the next megastore and get an offer and before you know it, an hour later, I'd have orders for about, I don't know 1200 something like that, 1500, and then Spartan would get the same information at the same time as me and they would send a letter to their rep. By the time he went around the shops two weeks later, I had taken all the orders, so we were competing with each other, with the same stuff (McLean, 2016).

> The weaving together of those independent distributors was an act of necessity, of survival, but also it was an act of political will because it was to challenge the dominance of major label distribution and of Pinnacle … Pinnacle was a straightforward financial distributor, who did PWL and loads of other stuff, but

> they never had the thing with Rough Trade and the other Cartel distributors which we thought was good, cool music that had some cultural value and political value (Holdsworth, 2016).

The emergence of independent distributors such as Pinnacle and Spartan had, as previously observed, occurred in the 1970s as a consequence of major label distributors changing their approach to specialist retailers and orienting towards the emerging high street retailers, creating a niche which the new 'onestops' moved in to fill. As Holdsworth suggests, discourses during this period involved hierarchies of independence; in other words, some 'independent' companies were more independent than others. The notion of independence here carries an implicit moral value, a sense of the willing sacrifice of something (in this case financial gain).to a higher good (the creation of something of cultural value). This paradigm was often used to frame the relationship between independent and major *record labels*; the 'guys in suits' imagery conveying a sense of faceless bureaucracy and cold, corporate power as opposed to the humanity and vulnerability of the independents; however as demonstrated here, it could also usefully be deployed as a construct to distinguish different types of independent distributor. The grand narrative of independent popular music recording from the late 70s and through the 1980s and indeed, in virtually every subsequent popular account of the period, portrays Rough Trade as a moral and ideological enterprise with Geoff Travis (and, to some extent, others such as Richard Scott) placed at the heart of the narrative. Of course, this framing pushes other important figures of the period (for example, those involved with Pinnacle, Spartan and IDS) to the periphery, diminishing their historical significance. Indeed, retrospective accounts of independent popular music recording in the UK in the 1980s tend only to mention the other significant independent distributors of the day in terms of being the anti-Cartel, the antagonists to the Cartel's protagonist (King 2012, Cavanagh 2000). Cavanagh provides a sense of the moral and political dilemma facing Rough Trade when they were on occasion forced to hold their noses and use the distribution channels of an independent rival, citing the example of when, to achieve the chart success that might retain the services of Aztec Camera, who were already turning the heads of major labels, the company outsourced the bulk of distribution responsibility for the band's 1983 single 'Oblivious' to:

> … the go-getting sales force of its competitor IDS (Independent Distribution Services). On an ideological level, IDS represented everything Rough Trade despised. 'Rough Trade was like this barmy, English middle-class idea of socialism,' says Ed Ball. 'They would have brown rice there when you went in. You could help yourself to it while you waited.' The slick, mobile reps of IDS on the other hand dined on meat - meat! - and had blithe conversations with HMV and Virgin buyers in the provinces, discussing every subject but music for all Rough Trade knew (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 68).

This contrasts with the extent of the coverage of the various companies in Music Week during the 1980s, where Pinnacle particularly, receives a substantial amount of attention, largely due to its impressive success in the marketplace, most notably in the late 80s as a result of its partnership with PWL, the biggest selling UK independent of the decade. This contemporary neglect can be attributed to the far more musically diverse roster of Pinnacle and Spartan with, for example, Spartan's relationship with Ritz Records and its hugely successful roster of Irish MOR artists (which included The Fureys, Rose Marie and Daniel O'Donnell) or Pinnacle with metal label, MFN. As Spartan managing director, Tom McDonnel, said in relation to his company's roster:

> Irish MOR music is an important part of Spartan and certainly accounts for a sizeable amount of our business - pushing hit records is one thing and pushing catalogue is another thing all together, and you certainly can't neglect the latter (MW, April 30 1988).

Much of this music was hugely popular at the time, however, nowadays it rarely commands any notable popular or academic attention for various reasons, including: the general absence of audiences of this type of music from contemporary academic or media circles; the music's low position on the hierarchy of 'cultural value'; the massively outsized access to media channels of post-punk talking heads; and the lack of an ideological and moral underpinning to support a narrative. Pinnacle and its chairman Steve Mason played a significant role in the events surrounding the demise of Rough Trade distribution in 1991, events which serve to underline the ambiguous relationship between independent distributors - sometimes harmonious, sometimes adversarial. However, Mason's approach to business and subsequent reputation were very different from his counterparts at the Cartel.

9.2.4 'Eggs in one basket': Dual and multiple distribution

Martin Mills contributed his view on the takeover of Pinnacle by Mason in the month after it was completed; upon discussing the labels Beggars Banquet and 4AD, Mills emphasised the distinctive nature of the Cartel as opposed to other independent distributors:

> Both labels used to distribute through the Cartel and Pinnacle. When Pinnacle went out of business, we pulled out immediately. To be honest, with a few personal exceptions, we never had much time for the old Pinnacle regime, and we transferred ourselves totally to the Cartel. To my mind, they are the only independent distributor. I think Pinnacle will work under its new ownership, but I still see Pinnacle and Spartan as being 'smaller major' distributors. The Cartel is the only indie distributor that has a different idea about how to do it - they sell records by name, not by numbers. We are very supportive of the Cartel and think it's a great way to distribute our acts (MW, Feb 2 1985, p.2).

It is apparent that the definitional framework Mills utilises here is not based purely on institutional or business structures but on somewhat nebulous perceived ideological factors. The casting of Pinnacle and Spartan as 'smaller majors' implies a criticism of their aspirational practices and in describing the Cartel as 'the only independent distributor', the adjective 'independent' can only logically describe a kind of attitude or approach of the company, which would be a highly dubious use of this essential word. Certainly, in organisational terms and with regards to a relationship to the major record companies and distributors, there was nothing less independent about Spartan and Pinnacle. In any case, Mills goes on to suggest that his regard for Rough Trade remains conditional and that given the right circumstances he'd have no compunction in using another distributor: 'Having said that, we're being approached by the new Pinnacle to go back on a non-exclusive basis and we're considering that at the moment' (MW, Feb 2 1985, p.2).

Mills comment here backs up the point made by McLean that independent distributors were often in direct competition with each other with regards to selling the same product to retailers, particularly during a period in the 1980s when it was commonplace for independent labels to go through multiple distributors. This was to change at a point roughly midway through the decade:

> There was a big shift in about 85/86 where companies went from dual distribution to sole distribution, so you had to make a choice between Rough Trade and Pinnacle. At one point, Pinnacle was actually selling Factory and Rough Trade was selling Factory. And Spartan was certainly selling Mute as was Pinnacle and Rough Trade - they were selling to all the distributors - but then there was a commercial shift where you had to go with one sole distributor. That was just to make the economics work really. And people would be all 'we've lost a label to Pinnacle' and you would try to sign a label from Pinnacle to the Rough Trade structure and labels would also make a choice. There was a moment towards the end of Rough Trade where Creation moved from Rough Trade to Pinnacle (Holdsworth, 2016).

The nature of the competition between independent distributors changed at this point from competing with the same product on price to retailers to competing with each other over record labels. The previous arrangement had been beneficial for labels and shops but less so for the distributors themselves, with retailers able to play one distributor off against another, as pointed out by Ivo-Watts Russell in discussions prior to the move to sole distributorship in 1985:

> There are problems to joint distribution. Ridiculous games go on among the retailers, with them winding up the distributors by saying they've been given a deal on a record in order to get a better one from the other distributor. So, you get them undercutting each other when it was the shops which started the deal which is ridiculous (MW, Jan 26 1985, p.46).

Watts-Russell expands on his theme by articulating the obvious advantages of dual distribution in terms of spreading risk but also suggests a notional hierarchy in relation to the *ideological* status of independent distributors with the Cartel presented as the originator of the indie value system:

> Any label that has dual distribution whether its Mute using Spartan and the Cartel, or Factory with Pinnacle and the cartel will not deny that there are financial benefits in not putting all your eggs in one basket. We found that if Pinnacle were having bad time (sic) then usually the Cartel were doing ok and vice versa so one way or another there was always a guarantee of some money from somewhere. But, a lot of people, myself included, would like to see the Cartel as the strongest independent distributor as that is where the ideals come from originally (MW, Jan 26 1985, p. 46).

Over a year later Richard Scott was reported as insisting that 'Indie in-fighting' over multiple distribution must stop and that, indeed, competition between independent distributors was the only thing preventing them from challenging the major distributors for high street sales. Specifically referring to Mute, Factory and 4AD Scott noted that the use of dual or, sometimes, three-way distribution had led to a situation where independent distributors were forced to savagely undercut their rivals' discounts, a practice that went against the Cartel's long-standing policy of giving retailers as little discount as possible, and one which Scott insisted was completely unnecessary:

> In a shrinking market there is a lot of pressure on people to give more deals, and it's very easy for chains to play one off against the other. There is plenty of room for Spartan, Pinnacle and ourselves but it is not being properly occupied while we're being obliged by various labels to compete with each other-and sadly several major indies lack the foresight to see that (MW, April 19 1986, p. 4).

Scott's use of the word 'major' here is, apparently, as an adjective meaning 'big' or 'successful' and its use is not related to the institutional or organisational features of the companies being discussed, however, there is still a somewhat incongruous sense to the adjective-noun combination, almost as if Scott is expressing (wilfully or otherwise).something paradoxical or oxymoronic. Aside from highlighting the

competition amongst independent distributors, as well as the exploitation of favourable bargaining power by retailers, Scott also refers to the competition between independent distributors and independent record labels, accusing Mute, Factory and 4AD of lacking the vision to see that it is against their interests to undermine independent distributors. The approach of the labels mentioned here works against any sense of collective responsibility in the field of independent popular music recording, as their motivation for utilising dual or multiple distribution can only be regarded as an attempt to minimise their own financial risk to the detriment of distributors. The practice of dual distributorship, Scott suggested, had not been without merit in the nascence of independent distribution, as it served to alleviate risk (in the manner noted by Watts-Russell), however, now he claimed that it was counter-productive in an era when independent distribution had become considerably more professionalised:

> There was a strong feeling in the early days that dual distribution split the financial risk so that if one distributor went under you could always get some money back from the other. And there was also some feeling that it gave you saturation distribution. That might have been true in the late 70s, but now independent sales structures are sufficiently sophisticated to get into all outlets, and by using two you are in fact putting both at risk (MW, April 19 1986, p. 4).

In urging the independent record industry to give up dual distribution Scott was envisaging a situation where independent labels would be split fairly evenly between their counterparts in distribution, and independent distributors could cooperate on promotional campaigns motivated by ‘a healthy hatred of the majors’ (MW, April 19 1986, p. 4). He also suggested that the recent centralising of the Cartel’s operations in their London office would leave them ‘in a position to seriously attack the majors’ (MW, April 19 1986, p. 4). The antipathy, notable from 1984 onwards, of those at Rough Trade towards Pinnacle and its chairman, Steve Mason, was played out when Creation records chose Pinnacle over Rough Trade for distribution. This situation had, somewhat ironically, arisen after Rough Trade Distribution had put pressure on labels to end the practice of using more than one distributor, a move which had mixed results, as Mclean notes: ‘Richard Scott basically told them you do one or the other and Factory went to Pinnacle and Mute went with Rough Trade’ (McLean, 2016).

Mason recalls the circumstances around the ending of dual and multiple distribution somewhat differently from the labels associated with the Cartel, laying out his version of events in a 2012 interview:

> I think the big turning point with all that was, there was joint distribution - 4AD were Spartan and Rough Trade, Factory were Rough Trade and me and Mute were Spartan and Rough Trade. So, the 3 biggest labels actually had joint distribution and I put my foot down and said 'this doesn't work because we're getting a new New Order record, all the Rough Trade guys are on the phone, we're all on the phone… *thenewNewOrderrecordhowmanydoyouwant?' (gestures slamming down phone)*, and I went to Tony and said 'this is a nonsense! You spend months designing a sleeve and everything and it's sold on a Monday morning in an hour and a bit.' So, I said, 'look, we're going to be exclusive', so, Tony being Tony, said, 'nobody tells me what to do' and put the gauntlet down … So, I went up to see him in Manchester and, I always remember his comment, he opened the door and said 'Fuck me, you 'aint got horns', because obviously he'd been sold this bill of goods from Rough Trade that I was the Devil Incarnate (UK Rock History, 2012).

Impressed by Mason's audacity, at least according to Mason's account, Wilson decided to opt for exclusive distribution through Pinnacle. Another label boss who was considering his distribution options was Alan McGee of Creation Records. McGee had expressed some dissatisfaction with Rough Trade Distribution in an interview with the Radio 1 DJ Janice Long in June 1985, lamenting its inability to get Creation's records into the charts and predicting that an imminent change in distributor was likely:

> Well, the options are that the Cartel possibly employ a strike force, like the major record companies, i.e. people that go into record shops and say: 'Do you want to buy such-and-such a record?' every single day. If that happens and we (sell) more records, sure, I'd love to stay independent… but in reality, I'm afraid (Creation).is probably going to have to go through a major sometime this year (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 134).

McGee here alludes to the superior power of major distributors to influence the chart placing of their releases. Keith Harris also refers to this in describing the manner in which the majors could obtain an advantage in the market by utilising long-standing practices both fair and foul:

> When it comes to distribution and the main streams of marketing, like chart positions and stuff like that, there was no way the indies could compete with the tricks/ incentives the majors could use. I guess by the late 80s we were already into 'if you buy one copy of the record, we'll give you one for free' so, if the shop sells that second one, then all the profit is theirs, which obviously influences the charts very heavily, and the majors had various strategies to influence the way the charts operated and indies couldn't afford to do that. At one point … a lot of the majors used to have teams going out and buying their own records (Harris, 2016).

McGee would eventually take his label to Pinnacle, a move which Mike Holdsworth credits to the departure of Dave Whitehead from Rough Trade and a subsequent lack of personal relationships, but Sandy McLean also attributes the defection to Mason's offer of financial incentives: 'Creation were lured away by money to Pinnacle. Steve Mason offered him 20 grand, 30 grand or something like that, in a oner to come to Pinnacle' (McLean, 2016).

Rough Trade had maintained a consistent line in its depiction of Pinnacle as a company who not only possessed the ethical values of the majors, but epitomised their version of the independent sector's ideological adversary, the *Recognized Evil*:

> The mantra about Pinnacle that Rough Trade repeated to its labels again and again went something like this. Pinnacle is a bastion of Thatcherism. The values of its chairman Steve Mason contravene every rule in the Indie book. Art over wealth. Fun over survival. Good vibes over bad vibes. Music over everything (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 182).

For McGee, however, who had always harboured reservations about the 'right-on' credentials of Rough Trade, Pinnacle had two things going for it: firstly, that Mason was a straight talker; secondly, that he had a reputation for always paying on time. Dave Whitehead, general manager at Pinnacle outlines Mason's qualities, in doing so characterising him in terms that

further distanced him from the central tenets of indie orthodoxy: 'He was a great businessman, very singular, very self-driven…had a good financial head. I don't think he proclaimed to know anything about music as such' (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 183).

McGee had never enjoyed a personal affinity with people like Geoff Travis or Richard Scott suspecting that they looked down upon him. However, he regarded Mason in a more positive light:

> Rough Trade painted Steve Mason and Pinnacle as capitalists … the absolute evil. They said they were as bad as a major record company … He was a good guy. He made money out of music - that's what Pinnacle was all about. He wasn't as into music as the Rough Trade people, or as idealistic. But he wasn't the devil (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 183).

Pinnacle's ambitious approach pre-dated Mason and was outlined in an interview in Music Week from December 1980 with Terry Scully, then managing director of Pinnacle's parent company, Craelec. Scully insisted that despite the unfavourable macro-economic conditions that had badly affected the financial outlook of the major labels, the 'joint rise of indie distributors and labels will continue' (MW, Dec 25, 1980. The company's immediate aim was to increase their market share to 2% (5 million) of the UK market by the end of the year and the theme of growth and expansion was re-iterated in the same article by Tony Berry, Pinnacle's general manager: 'it is in this climate of recession that we are building a label division… and getting results with an increasing number of experienced professionals coming to us from the majors' (MW, Dec 25 1980).

Berry goes on to expand: 'We are in with a chance of becoming a major company in the music industry within the next two year' (MW, Dec 25, 1980). Pinnacle feature heavily in Music Week around this time, a testament to the impact independent distribution had on the industry, with Scully continuing to outline not only the aspirations of Pinnacle as a company but the role of independent distribution more generally:

> National independent distribution will now be the norm and play a vital part in our industry, to serve the very many independent labels now seeking access to the market. It is Pinnacle's policy to be in the mainstream of the music and record industry and to this end we are re-launching the Pinnacle record label. This move, together with continued signing of quality distribution deals, will spearhead our next stage, which is four or five per cent level of market penetration (MW, Dec 25 1980).

Ian McNay, founder of Cherry Red records also expounds on the changes in the industry during this period in an interview in Music Week in January 1981, going so far as to state that the only purpose major record labels have left is to serve as distributors:

> The record industry is changing faster than people realise. The big corporations have become virtually bankrupt creatively. Major companies should learn to stick to being efficient distributors; that is where their future lies. The days of conventional line-ups and 30, 000 debut albums are over. Recording costs are the band's money as record companies always recoup recording costs. Bands should be encouraged to record economically. Their egos should be directed into working hard to promote their product, not directing their energies into seeing how much of other people's money they can spend. Record companies are not banks (MW, Jan 10 1981, p. 4).

McNay explains in the same article the reasons behind the label's move from Spartan for distribution to its rival Pinnacle:

> We've come a long way with Spartan, and I have a lot of respect for them. However, three years is a long time with one distributor. The strength of a company is the ability…to change when things are going well, as well as badly (MW, Jan 10 1981, p.4).

This provides a further indication of the way in which independent distributors competed with each other as much as the majors. McNay's decision would be vindicated later in the same year when the Dead Kennedys 'Too Drunk to Fuck' became a surprise and unlikely hit. McNay would apportion at least some of the credit to his new distributors: 'It was the first record of ours to go through Pinnacle, which has been working extra hard on it' (MW, June 20 1981, p. 4).

A Music Week advertising feature from 1988 provides a useful account of the history of Spartan and demonstrates its significant role in record distribution in the UK in the 1980s with Spartan being described as 'the first truly independent UK distributor' (MW, April 30 1988). At this point the company was celebrating its 10th anniversary, having set up in business at a time when the major labels were firing many members of staff and in the middle of recession, and as managing director Tom McDonnell makes clear, there was a significant amount of negativity and scepticism towards the new enterprise:

> There are always those people who think that if something is new then it can't possibly work, but what encouraged us was the very positive reaction Spartan had from the retail trade - and that mattered much more than what the pessimists were predicting (MW, April 30 1988).

McDonnell and Spartan's marketing director Dave Thomas - unlike the majority of the label owners who would go on to set up the Cartel - were relative industry veterans having been involved in the music industry for over a decade before establishing Spartan, with both working at Record Merchandisers Inc., which had been set up by EMI in 1966 to distribute records to non-specialist record shops. The high street retailer Woolworths was Record Merchandisers biggest client, and it was most likely this background which accounted for the notably eclectic nature of Spartan's catalogue many of whose releases would not pass the test of being 'good cool music' with political and cultural value as outlined by Holdsworth in relation to the Cartel. The first record distributed by Spartan was Bad Hearts by The Tights (the first single released on McNay's Cherry Red Records) which sold around 3, 000 copies but soon the distributor would have significant chart success with the Fiddler's Dram single 'Daytrip to Bangor' which would go on to sell 600, 000 copies and according to Thomas was selling 30, 000 copies a day at its commercial peak (MW, April 30 1988). Thomas described the further chart success that would follow with artists such as Toyah (on Safari), Adam and the

Ants (Do it Records), and UB40 (Graduate) all of whom could reasonably be placed at the commercial end of the post-punk spectrum, but around the same time Spartan formed a relationship with MOR Irish label Ritz which would prove to be mutually prosperous and would last through the rest of the decade. Initially releasing Joe Dolan's 'It's you, it's you, it's you' in October 1981, the label would go on to have further success with a number of acts including Dana, Daniel O'Donnell, the Fureys and Davey Arthur whose 'When you were sweet sixteen' reached number 14 in the UK pop charts.

> I think Spartan came along at the right time. There wasn't really an independent sales and distribution service available at that time. Either you went through a major record company's distribution network, or you used one of the wholesale or one stop operations. There was no central body working independently that could say to someone wanting to release a record and do the job for you, you don't have to go touting it around, we'll provide the service, including pressing the record and distributing it to the retail shops (MW, April 30 1988).

The Irish MOR which comprised a significant part of Spartan's success was, of course, outside of the 'world' that Geoff Travis spoke of with regard to the independent record sector, and never made an appearance on the independent charts. PWL, on the other hand, presented a different challenge to the culture that surrounded the Cartel and seemed to actively embrace an adversarial role, as will be discussed in the next section.

9.2.5 'The acceptable face of Thatcherism': Pinnacle and PWL

In July 1989 PWL renewed their two-year distribution deal with Pinnacle, in the process eschewing the possibility of either establishing their own distribution wing or being distributed through a major. PWL managing director, David Howells, explained the logic behind the decision in terms of loyalty and mutual benefit:

> Since we started two years ago, we have had enormous success and our growth has been extraordinary. But Pinnacle has grown with us and delivered the goods every time. Rarely will you hear anybody saying good things about a distributor, but we have only praise for the job Pinnacle has done for us (MW, July 8 1989, p. 4)

Later in the same year, Music week reported on Pinnacle achieving their best ever performance in terms of market share in their market survey distributor category, attributing this success primarily to PWL, who increased their market share in both the singles and albums markets and, in doing so, challenged the market dominance of the majors:

> The rise of Pinnacle is the most notable feature of the distributors' shares. With the help of the success of PWL, Pinnacle increased its singles share from 5.5 per cent to 12.7 per cent year on year, beating CBS and BMG into fourth place. In the albums share it rose from two per cent to six per cent (MW, Aug 5 1989, p. 32).

PWL was set up in 1987 by the highly successful writing and production team of Stock, Aitken, Waterman (SAW) and would become the most successful UK independent label of the decade by market share, however, the achievements of PWL were often met with resentment rather than approval from within the independent sector in a manner which, once again, provides insights into the ambiguous and contested nature of independence, as socially ascribed. In a vitriolic outburst in a 1987 interview, NME journalist, David Quantick dubbed Stock, Aitken and Waterman, 'the acceptable face of Thatcherism' adding that 'EVERY INDIE BAND (sic) in the world loathes and despises them' (NME, July

18 1987), and later in the same year Cathal Coughlan of the impeccably 'indie'[41] Irish band Microdisney described them as 'the Leni Riefenstahls of Britain's era of enterprise' (NME, Oct 3 1987, p. 12), using what van Dijk refers to as the rhetorical ploy' of *comparison to Recognized Evil.* As previously discussed, the enterprise culture that Thatcherism espoused and, indeed, actively promoted through government policies such as the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, was exemplified by the growth of the independent popular music recording sector and it is possible to observe some areas of complimentary between the two. Yet for Coughlan and Quantick and many other commentators in the music press of the time, Margaret Thatcher represented anathema, her political philosophy of individualism and self-reliance running in perceived ideological opposition to the collectivism which characterised the field of independent popular music recording. Quantick identified in PWL (specifically, Mel n' Kim's 1987 hit, F.L.M.) an embodiment of a shallow and self-interested culture, a culture based more on self-gratification than collective provision, which had been engendered by years of Thatcherism:

> What they do works, because it sells (and that's all they planned to do) - and smart theorists could tie it up neatly with the cynical, anti-idealist nature of Thatcher's Enterprise Britain. What do the kids want? Hospitals? Housing? Full employment? No: they want Fun, Love and Money (NME, July 18 1987).

The record label, according to this perspective, was guilty of the indie unforgivable of conspicuously placing commerce above art and, indeed, Quantick issues an implicit condemnation of the audience ('the kids'), who are chided for being insufficiently ideologically motivated in their choice of pop record. Similarly, The Housemartins, who had been involved with Red Wedge, attributed a political dimension to the seemingly benign Mel n' Kim hit, in a 1987 NME interview, in doing so highlighting the general antipathy of many typical NME bands to the slick and commercial pop of SAW, as well as demonstrating a general tendency to label people that they disapproved of in negative ideological terms:

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[41] MIcrodisney had recently been signed to Virgin Records.

> Fun, Love and Money' is a right wing political statement. It's probably right to talk about them 'just doing their job' but to do a job like lyric writing and continually to turn a blind eye is a right wing position. A blind eye is a right wing eye and an open eye is a left wing eye (NME, Sep 12 1987, p. 16).

The same year, however, Waterman responded to similar accusations being made by NME journalist Sean O'Hagan by emphasising the label's independence, invoking the bureaucratic apparatus referred to by Rob Dickins a couple of years earlier to portray the major labels as the negative other, as well as the unimpeachably positive figure of 'the artist', to support his claim:

> I tell you something, we are truly independent, more so than a lot of so-called indie groups. We don't allow anyone from a record company through this door except the artist. The accountants and the book balancers have a death grip on '80s pop and we're not a part of that (NME, Dec 19 1987).

Waterman's casting as a Thatcherite villain of the piece in the pages of the NME, and the defence of his label's indie credentials offered in response, shines a light once more on the contested and often ill-defined nature of independence. From a purely organisational and industrial perspective PWL could only be regarded as a textbook indie, and not only that, one which had the rare capacity to challenge the major labels in the tangible and measurable terms of market share. However, as outlined by Quantick, Coughlan and others, the pursuit of commercial success, the unselfconscious desire to have hit records, and even, arguably, the type of consumer they appealed to, set them outside some paradigms of independence; instead, they were regarded as striving and aspirational and, therefore, according to the simplistic narratives of the day, Thatcherite. Waterman, for his part, saw in the putatively progressive and democratising indie sector an elitism which sought to exclude people on the grounds of class and gender:

> If we'd been elitist musical snobs, we'd have got awards and not arrows and guns. But we were populists. And although we made the kind of records people wanted to buy, they weren't the sort of people the music industry and the media like to attract. They want intellectuals and university graduates, not

> ordinary working-class people. And especially not women. That's a huge section of the British public who the industry simply don't cater for any more. But we did. And they hated us for it' (Vox, Oct 1992).

Speaking in the NME in 1999, Waterman, depicted on this occasion as 'The Saddam Hussein of pop' was asked by Stephen Dalton where he saw his record label in the independent hierarchy; 'Do you class PWL as a true indie label in the same sense as Mute or Beggars Banquet?' Waterman's response, perhaps surprisingly, framed the discussion in ideological, anti-establishment terms:

> Totally! I sit next to all these guys on the BPI independents committee. My music philosophy couldn't be further away from (Mute boss) Daniel Miller's, but the mentality is exactly the same. We all do what we want and we don't want to compromise. It's the same ideology – do what you want and fuck the system (NME, Jan 9 1999).

The implication in Dalton's question is, of course, that these labels (Mute and Beggars Banquet) possess something that PWL don't, most likely, something along the lines of Mike Holdsworth's 'political and cultural value'. However, the importance of the success of PWL to the independent sector generally, and (due to its relationship with Pinnacle), the independent distribution sector specifically, was acknowledged, somewhat grudgingly, by Chas de Whalley in Vox in 1992:

> But what upsets Waterman the most is the fact that his record label, PWL, has never been afforded the respect it deserves, for being the first independent operator to take on the big boys at the pop game and beat them hollow. It's an uncomfortable fact, but without Waterman and his succession of million-selling Kylie and Jason singles to show them the way, independent distributors like Pinnacle would enjoy little of the strength and self-confidence they do today (Vox, Oct 1992).

Both Pete Waterman, as the figurehead of PWL, and Steve Mason, who was the most prominent figure at Pinnacle were routinely vilified throughout the eighties as 'Thatcherite' by business rivals and musicians associated with the independent recording industry sector. The rationale behind these charges appears to be that in pursuing profits,

and thus being conspicuous capitalists, they were subscribing to and promoting the aspirational, materialistic ethos of Thatcherism. Not only does this depiction instrumentalise sometimes simplistic art vs commerce, or culture vs. enterprise dichotomies, it seems to be underpinned by a discomfiting social and cultural elitism; a hierarchy of independence, the kind of indie righteousness proclaimed by the likes of The Housemartins and Microdisney.

9.2.6. 'Independent in the true spirit of the word': The independent charts

A sense of the independent sector operating outside of the corporate framework of the major label system was encouraged by the establishment of an independent chart in January 1980. The chart was the brainchild of the ubiquitous Iain McNay and was designed to give 'prestige and validity' (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 46) to the numerous new labels which had emerged in recent years. The initial criteria for inclusion in the chart established certain definitional parameters for the word 'indie'. To qualify for the charts a record had to be released on a label which was 'independently distributed: produced, manufactured, and put into record shops without the involvement of a major' (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 46). As Mike Holdsworth explained, the key determining factor was distribution:

> When the formed the first independent chart - it was distribution. That was the only way you could qualify to be on the independent charts, to go through an independent distributor whether that was Rough Trade, Pinnacle, Spartan, there were a bunch of other smaller distributors (Holdsworth, 2016).

This led, inevitably, to the exclusion of a variety of labels which could have, under other circumstances, been deemed independent: 'Many famous independent labels of the 70s including Virgin, A & M, Chrysalis and Island - were distributed by majors in 1980 and were therefore ineligible' (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 46). The decision here can be seen to reflect the increasing recognition of the importance of distribution, as well as ongoing attempts to set up an alternative organisational structure to that historically dominated and controlled by the majors.

The distributors listed on the first chart were Rough Trade and Fresh (London), Pinnacle (Orpington), Red Rhino (York), Graduate (Dudley), and Bullet (Stafford). The chart would be based on sales information gathered from independent record shops from around

the country by the market research company MRIB who would compile a top-30 of Britain's best-selling independent singles and the 15 highest selling albums. The first chart was printed in the trade magazine Record Business in January 1980 and according to McNay provided a number of vital services to the independent sector in that it 'helped shops order records, provided information for radio stations on what was really selling, and showed record companies abroad which companies were worth talking to regarding licensing releases for their territories. For ten years, the chart served a clear purpose and for many labels was *the* chart' (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 47).

Thus, the chart simultaneously served commercial and ideological purposes, underlining the distinctiveness of the independent sector in terms of the production and dissemination of culture, and providing a useful marketing platform for smaller labels. Geoff Travis confirms the notion that the independent chart was a significant factor in defining the identity of the independent sector as something separate from the mainstream world of the majors:

> The first independent charts were very important. It was significant if the Fall's LP was number one, it gave you a sense of achievement. We were happy in our own world there was a logic and beauty to it. And the real world's taste was so terrible (Stanley, 2013, p. 579).

However, in 1985, Music Week announced that in the process of its own research department assuming the role of compiling the independent charts from MRIB, the criteria for eligibility would be changed to allow the inclusion of more labels. From its inception the charts had been based on labels having independent distribution but now labels distributed by majors would qualify so long as they met a specific set of conditions. Music Week research manager, Tony Adler, set out the rationale behind this decision in these terms:

> We have made this change because of the changing nature of the indie label industry. We believe an indie label can remain independent in the true spirit of the word while using any form of distribution - be it independent or provided by a major record company. And we have felt for some time that the indie chart was too restrictive in disallowing labels distributed by, say, PRT. Now more labels are

> using distribution through other record companies and the time is right to allow them access to the indie chart' (MW, Mar 16 1985, p. 1).

The new criteria for inclusion in the independent labels chart would define an independent label as one which: did not have access to its own manufacturing plant; did not have a licensing arrangement in place with a major; and did not engage, or have access to, the services of its own salesforce. The article did not report, however, that they would continue to restrict entry from specific musical genres, such as heavy metal and disco/ dance music which were separately catered for by their own specialist charts. This stratification of the independent sector did not meet with universal approval and certainly opened up the compilers of the charts to charges of elitism in overlooking some areas of independent popular music (for example, Foster and Allen or Black Lace were never deemed worthy of inclusion). The means by which the compilers could manipulate the chart was through prioritising certain record shops ensuring that only the purchases of particular demographic groups would be eligible, as pointed out by a disgruntled Music Week reader:

> You repeat the myth that independent labels 'started primarily as a punk/ new wave movement in the late Seventies. This stereotyping of the 'independent' music label is re-enforced every week by your indie charts which are obviously drawn from a particular kind of retailer (MW, Feb 18 1984, p. 24).

Barry Lazell, writing in Music Week in 1987, looked at the anomaly of the independent Man to Man single Male Stripper suddenly breaking into the Gallup top 30 whilst not appearing on any of the specialist charts. The single had run its course in the specialist dance music shops, and, therefore, had left the dance music charts, after having had relative success in a few niche centres, namely H-NRG-orientated specialist retailers such as London's Record Shack, and in parts of northern England and Scotland where 'high tempos are always likely to have the advantage' (MW, Feb 14 1987, p. 22):

> The burst of popularity on the pop chart is due to sales almost entirely from mainstream shops, with the actual impetus being helped not a little by the now familiar practice of bringing the record back into availability again suddenly after allowing demand to build during repressing. So, we now have the very odd situation where an indie-distributed dance record is doing

> nothing to speak of on the indie chart, has experienced only a comparatively mild revival on the dance chart, but leaped among last week's mainstream sellers at 25! The very weight of that entry is likely now to knock-on back into the specialist areas, but last week Male Stripper set what will surely be a unique record (MW, Feb 14 1987, p. 22).

There were also ongoing debates around the definitions of 'Indie' as it related to eligibility for the charts and most particularly the ways in which major labels would try to circumvent the criteria in order to enable their acts to have access to the cultural capital that an appearance on the indie charts would bring, as Tony Wilson observed:

> The definition causes a lot of problems, there's been a lot of rowing about it during the last couple of years - the dear old indie chart, who gets into it or not, and we do hear a lot of alternative definitions. 'We bring out indie-type records' or 'we are not owned by separate companies'- I think many of you know and have heard rehearsed these variable definitions, and unfortunately none of them hold water. Is Virgin an independent? Is 10 Records? If you use any non-technical definition then everybody gets confused, and anybody can be on the indie chart. It's very nice for those major labels to have little off-shoots with different names so that they can get a little bit of coverage in the indie chart, and perhaps we should have a panel who sit ever week and decide which of EMI Records 18 releases this week are indie-type records (MW, Nov 15 1986, pp. 4-6).

For the chart's founder, McNay, this would ultimately prove to be the downfall of the Indie chart as any of its cultural relevance was diminished by major label encroachment:

> The multinationals started boutique labels with independent distribution, meaning they hogged the indie chart. It was all hunky-dory for 10 years, the only chart that mattered for many people, and then the majors hijacked it. That's where it went off the rails for me (Stanley, July 31, 2009).

Several factors are of interest in relation to the independent charts through the 1980s. Firstly, the object of it was to formalise something that was happening anyway; a network of independent retailers and distributors had established itself and sought the kind of recognition that the official Gallup charts bestowed on mainstream artists and

record labels. This act of validation was not only for the *producers* of popular music cultural products but for the *consumers*. The independent charts conferred legitimacy on the choices made by fans of the independent record labels associated with the chart. Secondly, there was also a functional aspect to the chart in that it aided the decision-making processes of distributors and retailers and alerted specialist DJs and radio stations to records which were popular as well as providing a certain A & R service to the international record industry who were increasingly licensing UK independent labels. Thirdly, the chart was exclusionary. Compiling chart returns from specific retailers ensured this, acting to keep out artists such as Renée and Renato, and preserving a mutable but distinctive core identity. To some extent, this was understandable in that the specific purpose of the chart, to give formal recognition to records associated with a specific network of labels, distributors, and retailers, would have been greatly undermined if the eligibility criteria was too broad. However, it is not difficult to understand the way in which the perceptions of elitism and musical snobbery that dogged the independent recording sector, particularly those organisations associated with the Cartel, were exacerbated by the cultural separatism of the eligibility criteria. Fourthly, and related to this last point, the effective debasement of the original ideals of the chart came about as a result of the entryism of the majors, setting up putative independent labels who were largely financed by corporations. This was an indication of the positive value-perception that a presence in the indie chart bestowed and testament to the chart's desirability. In a curious way, there is a legitimacy paradox (as outlined by Garud et al) at the heart of the story of the independent chart; in attempting to enhance the status and thus the legitimacy of an emerging sector of the recording industry, they were successful to such a degree that the apparatus they established to measure and produce this legitimacy was co-opted by more powerful and resource-laden competitors. This process resulted in the decline of accumulated legitimacy as lamented by McNay and rendered the chart's initial purpose futile. This also coincided with and contributed to the redefining of 'indie' as a style-based music genre rather than an alternative organisational and industrial paradigm. The desire for a specialist indie chart, nevertheless, conveys the sense of the independent sector's growing awareness of its distinctive nature in relation to the majors. This awareness also manifested itself in attempts to establish an independent trade organisation to rival the BPI.

9.2.7. 'A pressure group for the Indies': Attempts to form an independent record label trade organisation

The perception that the BPI, although ostensibly a trade organisation for record labels of all sizes, unduly prioritised the majors and peripheralised independents was pervasive in discourses in Music Week in the 1980s. Martin Mills, in lobbying for a permanent independent voice on the BPI council made this point succinctly, 'The BPI council is very much the territory of the four majors' (MW, June 21 1986, p. 1), and even as the independents pushed for greater representation in the BPI, debates around forming a separate independent trade body were ongoing. One early attempt at establishing a collective independent voice was the Independent Labels Association (ILA) which set itself up as a central information service for independent labels but was limited in its scope and was liquidated in February 1985, with director Trisha O'Keefe insisting on the need for a prompt successor:

> It has become alarmingly clear that a new representative body needs to be set up on behalf of all independent labels to tackle at grass roots level the more deeply damaging problems which exist overall and which without dramatic reformation mean that fair play will never exist in the record industry' (MW, Feb 16 1985, p. 1).

Almost immediately, the Independent Phonographic Industry (IPI) emerged, promising a different approach to its predecessor with O'Keefe describing the new organisation as 'a pressure group for the indies' (MW, March 30 1985, p. 4). Ian McNay noted the shortcomings of the ILA in engaging the more prominent labels in the independent sector while outlining the expectations of the new organisation:

> The ILA had its heart in the right place, but it never made involvement with it attractive to the larger indie organisations. It couldn't provide anything for the larger indies because most of us already have our own basic services and they were never interested in becoming a lobbying organisation. There is very much scope for a well-organised indie lobbying body, but it's going to have to be political to a degree and it's going to have to lobby quite fiercely on our behalf on occasion (MW, March 30 1985, p. 4).

For McNay, the primary responsibility of an independent record label trade organisation was the lobbying of government and other bodies on a variety of key issues. O'Keefe expressed a similar view on the primary focus of the new organisation and suggested that it would do for the independents what the BPI did for majors: 'The IPI will be a lot more politically motivated than the ILA was. It will be more far-reaching in that we will be tackling particular issues that damage the indies - such things as PRS rules, MCPS rules and copyright control' (MW, Mar 23 1985, p. 2). The necessity for a stand-alone trade organisation for independents was testament to the spectacular growth of the sector over the previous decade, as well as illustrating the continued focus of the BPI on the affairs of the majors. However, as Mike Holdsworth, a participant in meetings of some of the early incarnations of AIM, acknowledges, attempts to establish such an organisation were beset by teething problems:

> There had been moments in the eighties when there had been an idea of getting labels together in a sort of AIM-type body and they were disastrous. There was like meetings in the pub, no-one agreed with each other, and it was a very unorganised sort of shitshow, basically. I can't remember what they called it, but I went to a couple of those meetings, and they weren't going anywhere (Holdsworth, 2016).

It was only really in 1998, with the establishment of the Association for Independent Music (AIM), that the independent record label sector finally had an effective trade organisation, one which has played a significant role in lobbying government on perennial themes such as copyright legislation and enforcement, as well as more recent challenges such as those engendered by streaming (see chapter 10). However, the realisation that the independent recording sector had grown to such a point that a collective voice was necessary stems from the era of punk and post-punk and was a product and a confirmation of the shifting nature of organisational relations in the UK recording industry.

The above chapter examined the crucial role played by distribution in the recorded music industry both in practical and ideological terms. Control of distribution was key in ensuring that cultural products could reach the market and, as noted by various stakeholders here, the establishment of new, independent channels of distribution and the success these organisations achieved, was regarded as providing an ideological alternative to the major label paradigm which had historically dominated the industry. The most notable example of this was the formation of the Cartel which was based on collectivist ideals which could be seen to run contrary to the individualism promoted by Thatcherism. Nevertheless, tensions existed within the independent distribution sector between rival distribution companies and many of these conflicts were based on disputes around what constituted *genuine* independence. The mutable nature of definitions of independence as well as the invariably positive value ascription it comprised are most effectively examined in this context.

Chapter 10: 'Freemarketeer in the sense I was a punk': Contemporary discourses of independence

The resilience of debates arising from the punk and post-punk era, and especially those around independent record labels and the cultural esteem that is attributed to independence, can be demonstrated by several recent examples which I will discuss in this chapter. The study has considered the popular music recording sector in the UK during the years in which Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister. In particular, the independent recording industry has been examined, in terms of the commercial challenge it presented to the established major label paradigm as well as a distinct ideological opposition espoused by a part of the independent sector, most notably expressed in the formation of the Cartel. This ideological opposition to the corporate major system existed alongside a general progressive political philosophy which acted as a counterpoint to the social conservatism of Thatcherism. That said, the grand narrative of the post-punk independent sector opposing Thatcherism has long been critiqued (for example, by Malcolm McLaren, as discussed in chapter 7), and subject to counter-narratives wherein the independents embody the enterprise culture that Thatcher and her acolytes proselytised. Speaking in 2019, John McVay, the Chief Executive of PACT (the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television), a UK trade organisation for independent producers in TV and Film, tells a story which deploys various discursive devices to produce meaning:

> I'm a free marketeer in the sense I was a punk. I left school at 16, set up a record label and went around independent record shops selling singles. We were faced by a monolithic music industry and went off and did our own thing (McVay, 30 Oct 2019).

The 'music industry' here, standing in for the major label record industry, is 'monolithic', a metaphor which conveys both its scale and its lack of flexibility in the face of new ideas. The image also communicates a sense of being out-dated, not modern, and unable or unwilling to change. McVay's generalised 'we' grasped the baton presented by The Buzzcocks, the Desperate Bicycles and others, and did-it-themselves (in a manner of which Norman Tebbit would no doubt have approved) taking advantage of the burgeoning independent cultural production infrastructure which included independent retailers. Most notably, McVay draws

an explicit connection between the DIY philosophy of punk and free market economics in a manner devoid of contrarianism, but which instead suggests that such a link is normal, natural, and neutral; in other words, common sense.

10.1. 'Indie stamps of approval': Taylor Swift and 'folklore'.

Even the most ardent defenders of independent music must (reluctantly) admit that the word 'indie' no longer truly embodies the DIY movement. Many of today's popular indie bands are signed to major labels and their subsidiaries, but still produce music that possesses an agreed upon 'indie' quality and sound (take the uber-popular Arcade Fire, for instance). In reality, plenty of big label artists have earned indie stamps of approval, and it seems Taylor Swift is the next in line (Landry, Natural Music, 2020).

> Taylor Swift's eighth studio album, folklore, was released on July 24, 2020, by her record label Republic Records which is a subsidiary of Universal Music Group (UMG), the world's biggest music corporation. The online music publication Pitchfork viewed it largely favourably, awarding it 8 out of 10 and predicting its niche in Swift's stylistically diverse catalogue, 'folklore will forever be known as Taylor Swift's "indie" album, a sweater-weather record released on a whim in the blue heat of this lonely summer (Mapes, Pitchfork, July 7 2020).

Landry in the Natural Music blog quoted above, asks the titular question 'Is Taylor Swift's new Album an Indie Record?' Locating Swift's work in the milieu of 'indie champs' such as Lana Del Ray, Mazzy Star and Phoebe Bridgers. Landry suggests that the 'tranquil, folky' nature of the album means that it, at least, *sounds* indie, if indie is considered as a 'sonic, stylistic phenomenon' (Landry, Natural Music, 2020). This is, of course a world away from 'indie' as an industrial and organisational framework existing outside the corporate structure of the majors but it also suggests a deviation from indie as an agreed upon sound and image epitomised for Stuart Cosgrove and Neil Spencer by the jangling guitars of the Smiths. The fluidity of definitions of indie is, once again, in evidence here but what remains consistent is the sense of it having inherent *value.* Independence is positively ascribed, and therefore is a powerful rhetorical tool in the storytelling contest of the creative industries. The framing of 'folklore' as an indie

album is designed to elicit affiliation and produce cultural meaning. This, of course, serves to drive the economic decision-making of investors and consumers.

10.2 'Some kid in South London making Grime records': Discourses of power and resistance

Another contemporary example of how notions of independence are still central to discourses in popular music culture, and one which counters the suggestion that independent should now be understood, predominantly, as a marketing device, is presented in the context of debates around streaming and, particularly, remuneration for record labels and artists. In addressing a Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport Select Committee as part of a wider Parliamentary Enquiry into the Economics of Music Streaming, Yvette Griffith, co-chief executive and executive director of the Jazz Re: freshed label, defines the independent sector in familiar terms:

> The reason why a lot of the indies exist, it really is, first and foremost, the music, you know, the commerciality if that exists, kind of comes second to that. It really is about identifying talent. For us, it's a vocation, we're doing it because we believe in the music, we believe in the artists that we're working with. It's not just 'can this artist make us money?', you know? It's about making sure that there's a really varied and creative and diverse sonic landscape out there and a constant pipeline of new talent to come through (Griffith, Feb 4 2021).

Griffith presumes to speak for the indie label sector (which is elsewhere in the hearing depicted by the CEO of AIM Paul Pacifico as a vastly disparate and diverse set of interests), collectively, and using linguistic parts of speech such as the generalised pronoun 'we', with the accompanying object pronoun 'us', gives a very clear sense of the artist- friendly 'indies' operating in opposition to the implicit generalised 'they' of the majors. There is a clear suggestion that the independent sector, in contrast to the majors, is pursuing a set of goals which are not only outside of the mere pursuit of profit but are driven by moral principles; in this case, the selfless desire to produce a diverse musical environment for the audience, and to promote emerging talent. As outlined throughout the thesis, many of these debates around independent labels and the extent to which they provided an alternative to the major label system in an ideological sense, really began to emerge in the UK in the punk and post-punk era. By 2021, the notion of the moral superiority of indies has become something like conventional wisdom, an orthodoxy which is resilient and adaptive in the face of

challenges from contrary belief. The resilience of this paradigm says something about how power relations are viewed and appeals to deeply entrenched narratives of power and resistance, of dominance and defiance. Griffith is the co-chief director and executive director of Jazz Re: freshed label, a non-profit organisation with a staff between 1-10 people, which explicitly sets out to help new talent take its first steps on the road to making a career in music, eschewing multi-release contracts or the paying of advances to musicians. As such, they can hardly be regarded as representative of the independent recording sector as a whole, yet the rhetoric of her contribution to the hearing suggests a collective identity shared by *all* independent record labels regardless of scale, organisational structure or commercial ambition. There is a sense here of what Gabriel refers to as the *attribution of unity* in storytelling where a diverse set of objects can be portrayed as indistinguishable. The panel also includes Rupert Skellet, general counsel of the Beggars Group, a label group founded by Martin Mills and including various luminaries of the UK post-punk era such as Rough Trade and 4AD, as well as more recently-formed independents such as Young Turks. Their most successful label in recent years has been XL whose phenomenal success with Adele has elevated the Beggars Group to profits of $83 m in 2019 (Ingham, 2021). The business model of Beggars is not even remotely similar to that of Jazz Re: freshed, relying on life of copyright contracts and multi-release deals. In this sense, Beggars would appear to be closer in nature to Universal, Sony and Warners than to Jazz Re: freshed or any similar niche labels. The principle defining characteristic which allows them to be grouped together for the purposes of the debate on the economics of streaming (and, indeed, qualifies them for membership of AIM) is that they are *not majors.* This is not to say that Beggars possess anything like the industrial or financial power of 'the big 3', as Skellet ruefully acknowledges in a manner reminiscent of various stakeholders voices from down the years and recounted in the pages of this thesis: 'It's very competitive between labels and we've found where we've had artists that are successful in the singles market like Grime artists - you know when they come to the end of their deal, majors swoop in, offer them silly money, and that's it' (Skellet, Feb 4 2021). Nevertheless, Beggars are a powerful player in the UK and global music market and are driven by a very different set of imperatives than a small, non-profit label. In the context of the Parliamentary Enquiry, it is worth interrogating what Griffith hopes to achieve in framing the independent sector positively in opposition to the majors. The

contributions of Griffith, Pacifico and Skellet are designed to persuade government decision-makers (in this case, MPs) to support their sector by legislating favourably for them with regards to streaming; its purpose is to create affiliation which will then create value-perception and drive strategic decision-making in relation to government policy.[42] The familiar and widely accepted orthodoxy of the artist-oriented music-driven independent sector has narrative plausibility especially when pitted against the corporate majors. Furthermore, such storytelling is effective as Wheeldon points out:

> Since 2000, there have been several UK-commissioned reviews of the economic effectiveness of intellectual property law. All have concluded that policy-making tends to be more influenced by stakeholder rhetoric, rather than by rigorous and measurable evidence-based research (Wheeldon, 2014, p. 7).

This is not to impute a cynical or devious motive to any of the stakeholders involved here; they may genuinely believe that the independent recording sector operates in a more virtuous fashion than the major label sector and is, therefore, deserving of legislative protection. They may also believe in a broader sense that the major labels tend to oligopolistic practices when unfettered by legislative restrictions and that, naturally, this is a bad thing in any industry.

Tom Gray of the band Gomez also presented evidence to a select committee on the same issue and in castigating the majors' reluctance to change their practices with regards to contracts in the age of streaming, invoked the familiar rhetorical trope of the beleaguered artist as a persuasive device: 'You think that some kid in South London making Grime records now has a chance when they are negotiating a deal with Warners or Sony or Universal?' (Tom Gray, Nov 24, 2020). Gray's question is clearly rhetorical and the asymmetrical power relations between new artists and what Gray describes as 'global multinationals' is a given. The figure of 'the kid' as with Mason's 'guy with a carrier bag' or McNay's 'ordinary bloke' or McLean's 'big guys in suits' is a part for the whole metonymy, a personification embodying the aspiration of an entire social group. Again, Gray's goal in deploying this sympathetic figure is to create affiliation to drive

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[42] A recurring rhetorical theme in these debates is that these independent labels are authentically British whereas the major labels are multinational corporations headquartered in the USA.

strategic decision-making and as such he is making another contribution to discourses of power as part of the storytelling contest of the creative industries.

10.3 'This makes us different': The Guardian and 'autonomy' as a persuasive device

In September 2020 while browsing the website of the Guardian I received a message which requested I donate to the newspaper, on the grounds that:

> The Guardian has no shareholders or billionaire owner, meaning our journalism is free from bias and vested interests – this makes us different. Our editorial independence and autonomy allows us to provide fearless investigations and analysis of those with political and commercial power. We can give a voice to the oppressed and neglected, and help bring about a brighter, fairer future. Your support protects this (Guardian, Sep 27, 2020).

Unlike many newspapers trying to make ends meet in the digital era, the Guardian is accessible on a free and unrestricted basis and, instead of paywalls, asks its readers to make voluntary contributions on a one-off, monthly, or annual basis. It is owned by the Scott Trust, a trust set up in 1936 by the owner of the Manchester Guardian, John Scott, as a means of ensuring the paper's editorial independence in the belief that ownership by a large publishing company might compromise the paper's historically liberal political stance.

This appeal immediately prompted reflections on the credibility issues surrounding NME in the late 70s and through the 80s in relation to their ownership by the media conglomerate IPC, a relationship which compromised NME's status as a progressive and anticorporate force in an environment where these counter-cultural values were highly prized. In fact, as argued previously, it can be observed that the influence of IPC lead to a depoliticisation of and an increased cultural conservatism in the NME, especially when the paper wasn't insulated by the high sales volume of the late 70s and the first year or two of the 1980s. The Guardian's entreaty utilised the persuasive potential of the rhetoric of freedom and framed the Guardian as a protagonist in an ongoing struggle to bring the powerful to account. What's more, by donating a relatively small amount to the Guardian's finances, the reader could become a fellow protagonist in the narrative

and help make a stand for the 'oppressed and neglected' (and who wouldn't want to do that?).

Katharine Viner, the Guardian news and media's editor-in-chief, addressing the Society of Editors' annual conference in Salford in 2018 explained the rationale behind the Guardian's persuasive messaging:

> Many readers didn't understand the challenging commercial reality facing all news organisations, but once we told them more, they expressed real interest in wanting to support the Guardian. This was helped by the fact that any money made by the Guardian has to be spent on journalism, because of our ownership structure with no shareholders or owner (Waterson, Nov 5 2018).

So, underpinning the Guardian's appeal, and providing powerful rhetorical ballast, is the lexicon of independence ('free', 'autonomy', 'independence'); furthermore, readers are invited to actively participate in a narrative with a profound underlying moral, one which relies on long-standing culturally embedded assumptions of power and resistance, and which suggests the potential for a Utopian happy ending, 'a brighter, fairer future'. The purpose of the message conveyed here is to generate a positive value-perception in the reader to influence economic decision-making; in short, to encourage them to donate money. As such, it provides a useful example of how *independence* remains a resilient and powerful rhetorical tool.

10.4. 'Here's where the story ends': final thoughts

These contemporary and, in some ways, competing narratives of independence demonstrate several factors which are relevant to my study:

- They convey the sense that independence (and synonyms such as autonomy and freedom).is a contested term, and that definitions are provisional and contextual and, as such, reflect Creswell and Crotty's theories on how meaning is socially produced.
- Independence, however defined, is ascribed positively, it is something prized and valued. In common with other nouns around which there is a presumption of objective

consensus, such as ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’, this has become something approaching conventional wisdom, *the well-known fact*. Independence is *a good thing*.

- In combining these points, we find that whatever definition of independence the storyteller deploys, they or the organisation which they represent are *part of it.* Independence carries such an inherent cultural value and has such a profound influence on the strategic and economic decision-making of stakeholders that conveying at least the *appearance* of independence is a powerful tool for creating and managing affiliation in the discourses of organisations or individuals.
- The process of communicating narratives of independence (or any narrative).is not just dependent on the storytelling virtuosity of the storyteller, but also the interpretive repertoires of the audience. Meaning is produced in a dialogic process and the audience carry a set of assumptions with them based on factors such as prior knowledge, social context, receptivity, and existing relationships, and these factors, far from being monolithic and immutable, are also provisional and contextual.

I will now return to the four research questions outlined in chapter 3 and summarise the key findings of the research in relation to them.

Lester D. Friedman in *Fires were started: British cinema and Thatcherism* asked the question of whether British cinema of the 80s ‘reflects or critiques Thatcherism, do these films act as commentary or in opposition to this powerful political philosophy?’ (Friedman, 2006, p. xx)

If we repurpose this question to ask it of the UK popular music recording industry (particularly the independent sector), any answers we reach are likely to be ambiguous, contradictory, perhaps even paradoxical. Certainly, there was notable involvement in political activism among musicians and an engagement with progressive political and social causes such as anti-racism, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and the anti-apartheid movement, causes which were broadly oppositional to the government. A persistent axiom in discourses around UK popular music culture in the 1980s (expressed in these pages by Billy Bragg and Johnny Marr) is that being a musician in the UK in the 80s was intrinsically political and politicised movements such as Red Wedge presented a conspicuous challenge to the government of Margaret Thatcher. Although Red Wedge, and its supporters at NME, failed to achieve its primary objective, which was the removal of Thatcher and the Conservatives from office via the ballot box (Thatcher

was eventually undone by the internal machinations of the Conservative party), the movement did promote a variety of progressive social issues that challenged the socially conservative orthodoxies of Thatcherism. Neil Spencer argues that the enduring success of Red Wedge was in foregrounding these social issues:

> What people don't realise about Red Wedge, we were preaching to the kids, we were trying to raise political awareness in young people … and if you go back and look at the agenda we set out in the pamphlets that we issued and so forth, you'll find that the ideas are still completely relevant and some of them you take for granted (Spencer, 2018).

In this sense, much of UK popular music culture of the 80s presented an ideological challenge to the 'powerful, political philosophy' of Thatcherism.

Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated here, many independent record labels were set up as a consequence of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and, indeed, the entrepreneurship of the independent sector reflected the values of Thatcher's enterprise culture. The essential compatibility of popular music culture and capitalism has been outlined by various commentators (Frith and Street 1986, Cloonan 2007, Stahl 2013) and the lexicon often used to describe independent record labels – 'flexible', 'innovative', 'unbureaucratic' – were also positively ascribed to the 'self-starters' and 'vigorous individualists' that featured so prominently in the rhetoric of Thatcherism. The Cartel represented a notional collectivism, a formalisation of the participative and democratic impulse of the DIY movement of punk and post-punk, however, this collective impulse never extended to independent labels and distributors who were not part of the ingroup, and The Cartel and its members were often accused of elitism and snobbery. As early as 1983, Simon Frith spoke of the failure of the independent record sector, as epitomised by Rough Trade, in posing an enduring challenge to the industrial paradigm dominated by the majors: 'Pop music has failed then, to realise the political fantasies that were piled on punk … the idea of an 'alternative' record business turned out to be wishful thinking' (Frith, 1983, p. 18).

Regarding what constituted the defining characteristics of independence in the popular music recording sector in the late 70s and through the 80s, the picture remains

ambiguous, but there are two distinct strands of argument around which such definitions cling: firstly, independence as a purely industrial-organisational term relating to the production and dissemination of cultural products; and secondly, independence as something more nebulous, based around a ‘spirit’, an approach or way of doing things. The first independent chart defined independence in terms of distribution - a record label must be distributed by an independent distribution company. However, this criterion changed in the mid-1980s on grounds that seemed more to be a matter of convenience than principle, with eligibility for inclusion now being based on not owning manufacturing facilities. Throughout discourses of independence during this period, there seems to be considerable scope for what Shackel (2005) refers to as *Humpty-Dumptying*, the arbitrary redefinition of a word to suit a specific provisional and contextual argument. The term *humpty-dumptying* is derived from an exchange in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*:

> ‘When *I* use a word’, Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I want it to mean, neither more nor less.’
> ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master … that’s all.’ (Carroll, 1962, pp. 74-75).

So, through this arbitrary and selective redefining of independence, distribution companies such as Pinnacle and Spartan, which were undoubtedly independent in an industrial-organisational sense, could be portrayed as not really independent, in the sense of not possessing the correct kind of cultural and political motivation (to return to Gabriel’s attribution of motive trope from Chapter 3). This example of the production of meaning supports Creswell and Crotty’s account of how humans construct reality through a social process based on their own social and historical perspectives. Furthermore, in discourses around the collapse of Rough Trade Distribution which came to represent the symbolic end of the attempt to create a new paradigm, challenges were made to the conception of the labels who formed the Cartel as ever being ideologically distinctive:

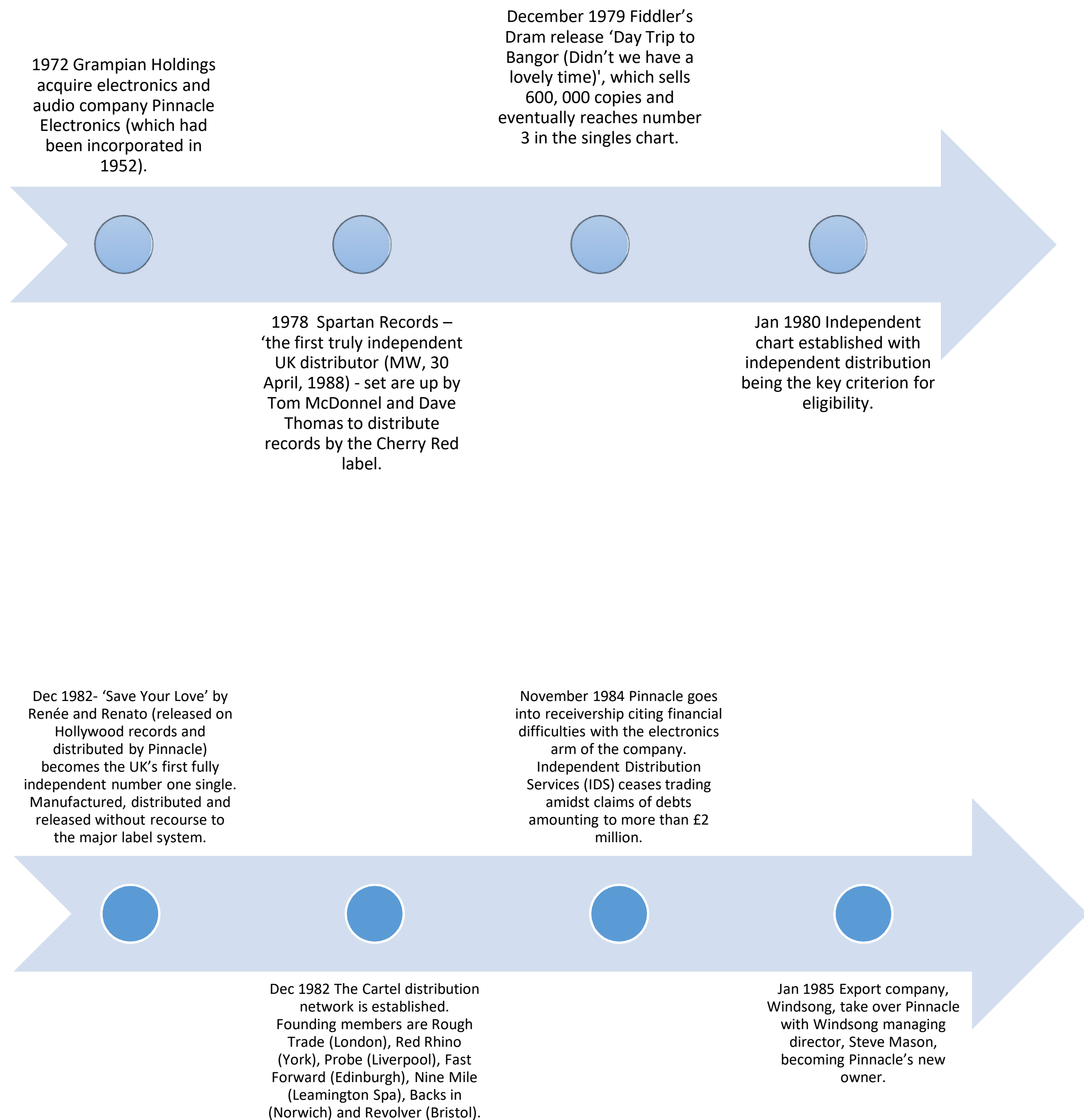
> The music industry is by its nature entrepreneurial. The ‘independent’ – in the sense of the worker-director with his or her own small company - is the highest form of that. Clearly some independent companies have priorities other than the bottom line. But whatever their principles all record companies are

> ultimately judged not by their philosophies, but by whether they produce music people want to buy. The major Rough Trade labels all now seem to have found solutions that will enable them to continue as entrepreneurs. Does it matter what they call themselves? (MW, May 18 1991, p. 4).

If the research process undertaken here has taught me anything about discourses it's this; yes, it does matter. It matters very much what organisations call themselves. The control of discourse is crucial in producing meaning which then informs value-perception and inspires decision-making in stakeholders. While the industrial organisation of the Cartel may be no more, the interpretive frameworks created by discourses around independence in the punk and post-punk era have been more resilient and, as outlined here, they still underpin a cultural conception of the recording industry, most saliently in the framing of major and independent record labels and their respective contribution to popular music cultural production. In short, although many of the organisations from this phase of popular music cultural production are long gone or have changed character significantly, the legacy of the period is in the enduring power of the narrative of independent labels as a progressive and emancipatory counterpoint to the reactionary majors. Many of the most persistent and powerful features of this narrative were produced in discourses around independence in the punk and the post-punk era. As argued throughout, discourses are not just a means of *expressing* meaning, they are a means of *producing* meaning, as part of an ongoing storytelling contest, a ceaseless process of dispute and negotiation, of reproduction and reformulation, of dissonance and consonance, of discord and harmony.

Appendix 1:

Timeline of key events in UK distribution 1978-1991



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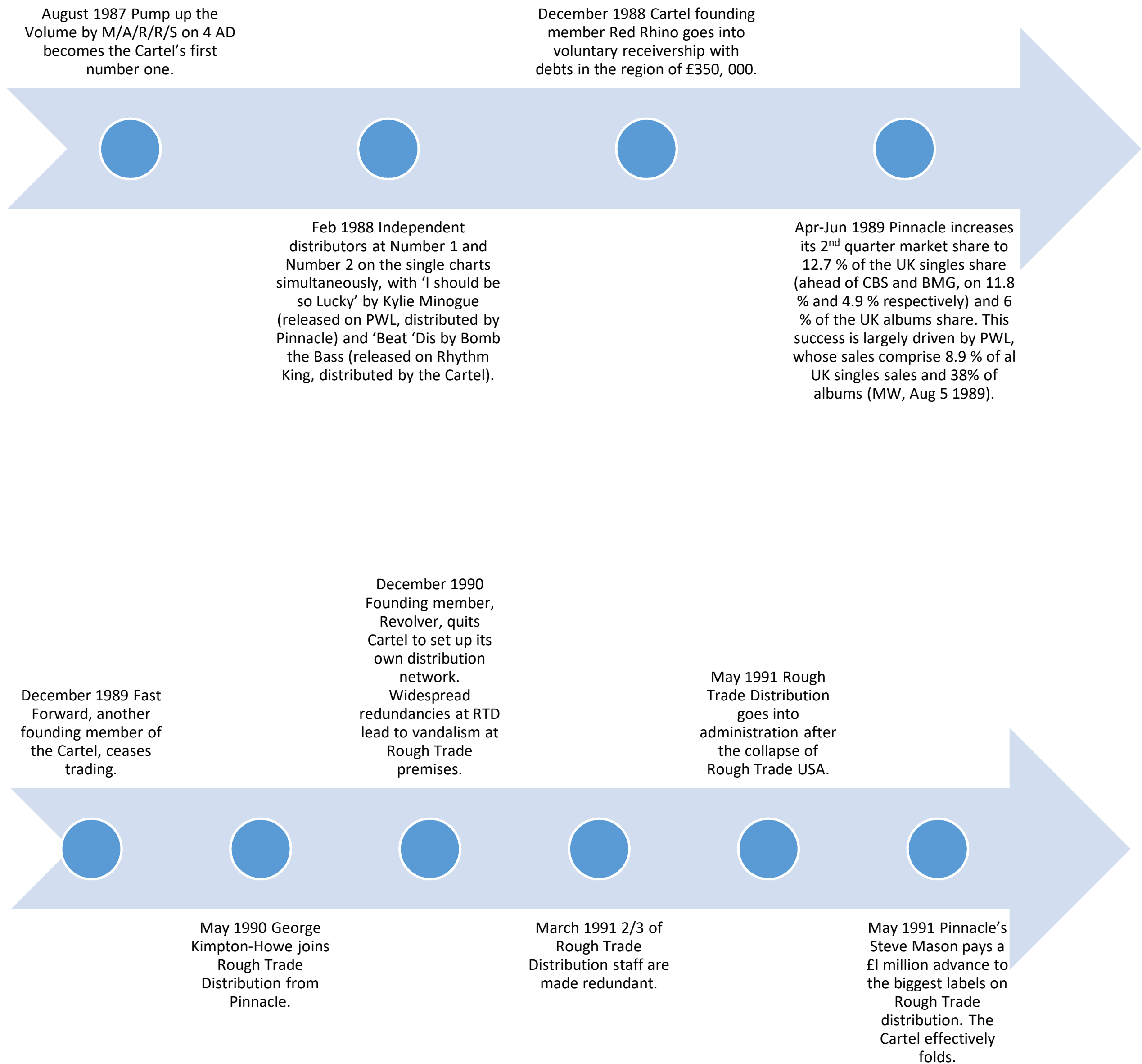

Appendix 2:

Typology of recorded music companies

This typology does not attempt to produce an exhaustive classification of recorded music organisations throughout the history of recorded sound but rather seeks to create a general categorization of organisations as they were characterised by various observers in discourses during the period under examination. As has been frequently argued here, such categorisations are provisional and contextual (in line with Creswell and Crotty's observations on the production of social meaning and Wheeldon's on storytelling and sense-making). Meaning ascribed was contingent on various factors, for example, the year in which an observation was made or the relationship of the observer to the organization. There are many examples of this throughout the thesis, however, one example that can illustrate the mutable nature of types is the depiction by Geoff Travis of the labels related to the Cartel in the early 80s as forming their own 'world' (Stanley, 2013, p. 579), a world founded on superior taste and ideological purpose in comparison to rival organisations. In December 1990, the same organisation was depicted by a disgruntled ex-employee as a 'corporate monster' (NME, Dec 5 1990, p.2), and an incompetent one at that. The moral virtue attributed to Rough Trade and associated organisations was frequently contested through the late 70s and the 1980s.

The major labels (and their distribution wings): In 1989, the major labels outlined in Music Week's market survey were WEA, Polygram, EMI, BMG, MCA and CBS. Today, as a result of processes of acquisition and merger there are three major labels: Universal, Sony and Warners. Although, the specific companies that comprised the majors at any given time have varied, the depiction of the majors in popular music discourses tends to remain fairly stable – a good example of what Gabriel refers to as the attribution of fixed value in narrative storytelling. Rob Dickens alludes to this characterisation when invoking an image of the corporate record label as a 'blind, stumbling, out-of-date enterprise' (MW, Aug 4, 1984), and images of 'bureaucracy-laden corporate behemoths' abound in popular music discourses. However, despite frequent predictions of imminent obsolescence, the majors have proved to be resilient, using a variety of means to protect their considerable market share.

Major independent labels (or independent labels with major distribution): This subgroup includes a set of influential record labels that arose in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s such as Island, Chrysalis and Virgin, who were routinely described as independent and not independent throughout discourses of the period depending on the perspective of the observer. Thus, Jim Reid cites the Sex Pistols being on Virgin, as a reason why he wanted his band, the Jesus and Mary Chain to sign to a major in 1985 (Howe, 2015, p. 66), while a music week article in August 1989 wrote of Island's acquisition by a major that, 'the national media turned up in unprecedented numbers when Island lost its independent status and became part of Polygram' (MW, Aug 5, 1989, p.31). As outlined in the main body of the thesis, all three of these labels, would be acquired by majors in a period of consolidation in the late 80s and early 1990s, however, prior to this the main reason for their exclusion from the independent recording sector (and thus, for example, the independent charts).was the contested area of distribution. All these labels were distributed by majors and, therefore, not proper independents.

Large indie distributors and associated labels: This subgroup includes the more successful and prominent independent distributors such as Pinnacle, Spartan and IDS but with the notable exception of Rough Trade Distribution and the Cartel. Sandy Mclean depicted Spartan as 'the big guys in suits' (McLean, 2016), and Mike Holdsworth referred to Pinnacle as a 'straightforward financial distributor' (Holdsworth, 2016). The defining feature of these companies, according to detractors, was the pursuit of profit, 'capitalism… the absolute evil' (Cavanagh, 2000, p. 183). This motive of prioritizing financial gain over cultural value was also attributed to the most successful UK independent label of the decade, PWL, who, although, wholly independent in an industrial-organisational sense were portrayed as being outside of a certain definition of independence which was based on a perceived ideological and cultural value.

Independent labels associated with RTD and the Cartel: This subgroup includes labels such as Rough Trade, 4AD, Mute, Creation, Earache, and Beggars Banquet as well as the network of regional distributors that formed the Cartel such as Red Rhino, Probe and Revolver. Central to discourses around these organisations was Gabriel's attribution of motive in narrative storytelling; the motive behind these organisations' efforts was

what Holdsworth describes in terms of creating products which possessed 'cultural … and political value' (Holdsworth, 2016).

Independent labels associated with independent distributors other than the Cartel:

This subgroup contains a hugely diverse and often very successful group of labels including Ritz Records who specialized in Irish MOR and were distributed on Spartan, Hollywood Records who released 'Save your Love' by Renée and Renato through Pinnacle , Flair Records who were also distributed by Pinnacle and released singles by Black Lace among others, and Music for Nations, a UK-heavy metal label, distributed by Pinnacle, which launched the careers of a number of enduringly successful metal bands. The marginalization of these labels in popular music discourses (particularly those relating to the recorded music sector) is attributable to the perceived inferior value of their cultural products as well as to the absence of their audiences from contemporary discursive terrains.

Small independent labels: The do-it-yourself ethic, which was an integral part of the punk and post-punk era, was a feature of various areas of popular music cultural production (including music fanzines and live music promotion) but found its most notable expression in the independent recording sector. The Desperate Bicycles' 'Smokescreen' EP was an early champion of controlling the means of production of recordings and the band's own label, Refill Records, was launched on the back of an original run of 500 singles. Technological developments in recording and a proliferation of independent record labels facilitated greater access and participation for a wide range of small record labels including labels such as Mute which was originally conceived as a vehicle for owner Daniel Miller's home recordings, but which grew to be one of the most successful UK record labels of the 1980s, featuring internationally successful acts such as Yazoo, Depeche Mode and Erasure. Nevertheless, the figure of the small label owner wasn't usually approved with Steve Mason depicting, 'the guy … with 500 singles in a plastic bag' in negative terms, as insignificant and unprofessional.

This is a broad typology of organisations examined in the thesis, however, it is acknowledged that such categorisations are often disputed and that, other than perhaps the majors, there are no universally agreed upon categories of record labels during the period under examination.

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