

**Online and Offline Rock Music Networks:  
A case study on Liverpool, 2007-2009**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between the online and offline presence and activity of contemporary indie rock bands in Liverpool. It addresses two main questions: firstly, how should the relationship of music, place, and social groups be described and understood in the age of the Internet; and secondly, what can research on local music making suggest about the relationship between online and offline worlds.

These questions are addressed through ethnographic research conducted between 2007-2009. The research involved qualitative analysis of online content, discourse, and connections related to Liverpool indie bands and music events, as well as first-hand observation of offline events and interviews with musicians. On the basis of this, the thesis proposes two main arguments:

Firstly, online presentation and interaction surrounding bands and events are closely connected to offline events, places, and personal relationships. Local music 'scenes' must therefore be understood as both online and offline, and their temporal and spatial (self-)positioning in online space can only be understood with reference to offline places and temporal dynamics.

Secondly, the 'network' is a useful concept for describing and analysing the relationship of online and offline worlds. It is conceptualised in the thesis as the dynamic set of active, enacted, and negotiated connections among those participating in music making. This conceptualisation enables the description of the social world of participants in music making within a particular local environment, which at the same time branches out globally through the active collective online presence of these participants.

The analysis of a band's network structures enables the identification of both its individual characteristics and collective-oriented ties along such lines as genre and style, career stage and success, and aims and strategies. The network complements the notion of the 'scene,' which is defined by an expressed and represented coherence with regard to the aspects of genre aesthetics and ethics; locality; discursive participation and identification; and personal relationships. Moreover, the analysis shows that online technology has provided new means for music networks to function as cultural resource and form part of identities related to music making and place.

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## Introduction

This thesis is about music making, place, the Internet, and social groups. Its main aim is to explore the relationship between online and offline music making in order to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between social and creative activity and the Internet. This aim is addressed through a case study on the online and offline activity and presence of contemporary indie rock bands based in Liverpool. The research was conducted between April 2007 and the end of 2009, a timeframe that includes Liverpool's eventful year as European Capital of Culture 2008. The bands in the study performed primarily in Liverpool; none of them had achieved significant success on a national level; and they were either 'unsigned' or had released records with independent record labels. They all regularly performed at Liverpool rock venues and participated in local music events such as the annual festival Liverpool Music Week.

In order to understand the relationship between the online and the offline as social and creative environments, the ethnographic research was directed at online content, discourse, and connections, as well as offline events. It involved participant observation and qualitative interviews with musicians, conducted both online and offline. This research led to the formulation of two main arguments. The first argument transcends spatially and/or temporally static conceptions of the 'music scene,' proposing instead a definition of 'scene' based on the dynamic relationship between online and offline spaces. The crucial aspects of the music scene, i.e. genre, locality, participation, and interpersonal connections, are created within these spaces, which I understand as constituted by social and creative relationships, as well as discursive and symbolic representations. The second argument regards the music network, a concept which describes the social-creative world of local musicians in the context of translocal or global connectivity. The network definition developed in the thesis thus integrates three theoretical strands: individual-centred understandings of the network, in particular the me-centred network described by Wellman and Frank (2001) and the milieu-based music networks described by Peter Webb (2007); the broad-brush, but empirically rich global network theory of Manuel Castells (1996); and theories of (online) communication technology and society (e.g. Baym 2010). The concept is understood as a dynamic set of active, enacted, and negotiated connections among the participants of music making, and therefore enables the description of the music scene as both online and offline – or, as simultaneously local, translocal, and virtual.



As suggested above, one of the most popular terms used to describe music making in an urban environment has been the ‘(music) scene.’ The term scene has helped associate music and place – more precisely, music and the city. As numerous studies show,<sup>1</sup> this association has been important both in terms of representation of the city in music, and in terms of the city as a dynamic social and economic environment where music making takes place. Despite the attractiveness of the term ‘scene,’ however, its usage as a theoretical and conceptual framework has not been without problems: not only has it greatly varied, the term has also rarely been defined in a satisfactory manner.<sup>2</sup> The thesis therefore offers a critical rethinking of the ‘scene’ concept.

One problem with ‘scene’ has been that the adequate conceptual tools to describe the complex set of local-level connections (i.e. social relationships, as well as exchange of information, goods, money, etc.) to broader translocal or transnational processes of exchange are still lacking. For this reason, the focus of research tends to remain on the local. The term is at times, especially in journalism, employed as a genre-based category without reference to place (e.g. ‘the Goth scene’<sup>3</sup>). However, in recent scholarly literature, including ethnographic studies, it has typically been used to describe music making in a defined locale. This is typically an urban environment that is referred to by the place name (as in the ‘Seattle scene,’ the ‘Glasgow scene’), but is also definable in stylistic terms, as a particular ‘sound’ – i.e. musical aesthetics associated with local character. This focus on a defined locale, while important, might erroneously result in a spatially static conception of local music making.<sup>4</sup>

Besides the places where it is produced and consumed, music also travels: for example, musicians travel physically (e.g. concert tours); music is mediated through international media; recordings reach global audiences thanks to the international record industry; music is listened to and recontextualised in distant interpretive communities. Music also travels in a symbolic sense: aesthetic influences and conventions move across borders – the creative process in this sense is translocal. Moreover, with the appearance of global communication media, music has acquired the means to travel across places globally with unprecedented speed, even immediacy. The individuals and organisations involved in the

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Cohen 2007, Finnegan 1989, Shank 1994

<sup>2</sup> David Hesmondhalgh’s important critique observes the same, pointing to the discrepancy between two separate traditions in scene literature, which draw upon Will Straw’s (1991) definition on the one hand, and Barry Shank’s (1994) approach on the other (2005: 27-30).

<sup>3</sup> Its use in the term ‘Jazz scene’ also referred to a genre, although at the same time incorporated associations with particular cities and venues.

<sup>4</sup> This criticism applies to some extent to Shank (1994) and Spring (2004), both of whom, while providing a detailed analysis of local networks, at the same time downplay the role of translocal connections and processes.

stages of production, distribution, consumption, and performance can be, and often are, geographically widely distributed – for example, both songwriting and production work can today easily be performed through online collaboration. This had often been the case in the past – recordings had been distributed globally, musicians had embarked on world tours and formed international collaborations. Yet the appearance of the Internet has further prompted us to think about place not only in static terms, but also in terms of connectivity and movement. For this reason, the ‘scene’ concept has to enable the understanding of the connections outside the local enabled by technology, including the Internet.

A second inadequacy relating to ‘scene’ is the insufficient theorisation of the aspect of time. On the one hand, there have been discussions of the ‘life span’ (Lee and Peterson 2004), the ‘conservative’ nature (Straw 2001), and ‘mortality’ (Blum 2003) of scenes. Regardless, we do not have the adequate conceptual framework to describe the complexity of ways the construction and perception of scenes relate to such factors as dynamic changes in the social and economic environment, or in the architecture, functions and usage of media technology. Mapping the relationship between the dynamics of Internet technology and the online and offline music scene in particular is an important concern of the thesis.

Equally problematic, and debated to an equally great extent, is what we can refer to as the relationship of the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real,’ or, as will be referred to throughout the thesis, online and the offline<sup>5</sup> – both in general terms, and in relation to music. Debates about the effects of the Internet on music production and consumption have articulated concerns regarding the loss of locality (understood here as the complexity of specific local characters) as a result of the homogenising effects of global communications media. Some have feared the disappearance of local specificities of music making – *The Guardian* provides an illustrative example with the article ‘Has the internet killed local music scenes?’ (Sheffield 2010). The article postulates the declining importance of physical music, local tastemakers, and local places such as record shops and venues on the one hand, and the increasing influence of online blogs as global tastemakers on the other. This tendency, it argues, has resulted in the homogenisation of aesthetic standards. In contrast, others have hailed the possibilities for musicians to make themselves heard through bypassing traditional industry gatekeepers (e.g. Kusek and Leonhard 2005), for fans to form relationships of sharing and collaboration on a hitherto impossible scale (Giesler 2006), and so forth. These possibilities potentially enable the transmission, and therefore reinforcement, of local particularities,

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<sup>5</sup> I have preferred the second terminology since practices of communication, participation, sharing etc. via online means is no less ‘real’ than the same practices via offline means.

values, and aesthetics with the help of global media technology. Yet others (e.g. Kruse 1993) point to the existence of translocal connections in the case of local music scenes in general. This essentially means that scenes have never been purely local anyway, contrary to what the global homogenisation hypothesis presupposes.

The concerns regarding the loss of locality, expressed in connection with music, are related to a broader set of questions regarding the role of global media in societies. These questions have most frequently been raised through notions of community and identity. On one side is the argument that traditional forms of social relationships and community, along with their benefits to both the individual and society, are being disrupted by online – and other forms of potentially global – communication (see e.g. Poster 2006 [1995] and Wellman and Gulia 1999 for the discussion of this argument). The underlying assumption is that through these media, individuals can easily form ties outside their local community, which potentially weakens their attachment to their family, neighbourhood, or nation.

A different concern regards the Internet as yet another form of mass medium, at least as encompassing as television, hence an equal threat to individual freedom and creativity. This viewpoint is related to familiar and long-standing debates concerning mass media and their enabling or damaging effects on society, and the related question regarding the passive or active nature of audiences. Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, influential social theorists of the so-called Frankfurt School, both presented an arguably one-dimensional view of mass media audiences (including popular music – Adorno [1941] – and photography and film – Benjamin [1936]) – even if they differed in their evaluation of the effects of mass-scale production and consumption of culture on society. In contrast, more recent cultural studies and popular music studies scholarship (including British subculture research tradition) understands audiences as ‘particularized and diverse’ (Ebare 2004: par. 10).

Benjamin already argued that the mass-scale accessibility of art produced a decentralising effect on its appreciation and consumption (c.f. Ebare 2004: par. 9). The view that mass access does not necessarily equal cultural homogenisation, but generates varied responses, has been reinforced by studies of ‘particularized and diverse’ mass media audiences, and is echoed by those conceptualisations of the Internet that emphasise the freedom potentially provided by online connections. This includes individuals’ freedom of choosing and/or establishing their own community(-ies); the freedom of pursuing their own interests without being bound by locality and other social determinants; the freedom resulting from the accessibility of information; and democratic freedom resulting from the accessibility of resources and publicity.

The truth, of course, lies somewhere in between the extreme views assuming homogenisation on the one hand, and decentralisation/enliberation on the other. Indeed, what *is* the locality of music? If there is a loss, what is it that is being lost – musical characteristics, relationships, institutions, identities? It is impossible to answer these questions without having a precise idea of what local music making – whether a local ‘scene’ or community – is. And in order to achieve this, we need to be able to give account not only of the relationship of music to the particular online and offline spaces where it is produced and consumed, but also of how connections to other spaces and places are formed and maintained. The premise of the thesis is that only once we have established a relevant, grounded understanding of the relationship between the online and the offline, the local, translocal, and global, can we begin to provide answers to these questions. The main problem lies with the online – offline distinction itself, on both theoretical and analytical levels (c.f. Sterne 1999: 269). The thesis therefore actively and deliberately questions this dichotomy, attempting instead to map the relationship of various spaces and the actors operating within, and across, online and offline spaces. The responses will hopefully be informative for not only academics studying music, place, and (online) communication technologies, but also musicians, music fans, and those in the music industries in any local environment, as well as anyone who is interested in the ways the Internet has changed our social and cultural world, and the ways we create, share, and interact with each other.

The main aims of the thesis are the following: firstly, to provide a valid theoretical and conceptual framework for the description of music making in a partly online, but also locally based environment through an empirically grounded rethinking of the concept of the scene. This would include a description of both the spatiality and temporality of such music making activity. It would also include an understanding of the role of place – the city – in the online and offline practices, including discursive practices of musicians, and the significance of this with regards to music making. Secondly, with the aim of extending our knowledge of social groups, creative activity and the Internet, I intend to provide a framework that, as opposed to maintaining an online – offline dichotomy, and along with it, a sense of loss of locality to globalising processes, would enable the identification of continuities and connectivities between online and offline spaces.

The theoretical framework that helped to address these aims is introduced in Chapter 1. The research conducted for the thesis is interdisciplinary, at the intersection of popular music studies, sociology, cultural studies (in particular ‘cyberculture studies’), and

communication studies. The chapter focuses on two main areas demarcated by the research aims: firstly, the relationship of music making, place, genre; secondly, the relationship between the Internet, music making, and society in broader terms. The purpose is to highlight relevant concepts and findings, as well as some shortcomings of previous studies, and to refine the research aims in view of these.

Chapter 2 proceeds with an explanation of the ethnographic approach and the specific research methods employed in the study, such as the observation of the online presence and activity of bands and music events, as well as offline events; the qualitative analysis of the related online content and discourse;<sup>6</sup> the analysis of online connections; and online and offline interviews with musicians. The explanations also reflect on potential problems concerning the use of such methods. The chapter, moreover, discusses the particularities of the Internet as a research field, the role(s) and position of the researcher in relation to the field, and the ethical issues that arose along the course of the study.

Chapter 3 introduces the broader cultural and discursive environments of the Liverpool indie rock bands in the study. The primary aim is to identify those particularities of the local and online environment that have relevance to the meanings created, reflected on, negotiated, and represented in the creative activity of bands. The first section looks at popular images and narratives regarding the history of rock music in Liverpool that both the musicians and the organisers of music events engaged with during the time of research. Furthermore, it examines the ways three important local particularities shaped music making in 2007-2009, namely the city's status as European Capital of Culture in 2008; the representation of what I call Liverpool's ever-present popular music heritage; and the presence of universities in general, and tertiary-level popular music education in particular. The second section introduces the local context through presenting the bands, events, and the most relevant local venues featuring in the research. The third section presents the online context, i.e. the websites that local bands used for socialisation, content sharing, promotion, and further activities.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the online environment, providing an analysis of the online self-presentation of bands and events and the online interaction centred around them, in which they were also participated. While the two areas are closely related – self-presentation

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<sup>6</sup> Discourse in the thesis is used to refer to both online and offline, written and verbal communication. My understanding follows Michel Foucault's theory of discourse (e.g. Foucault 1989 [1970]), interpreted to refer to 'a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience' (Tyson 1999: 281). I therefore understand discourse to be at all times indicative of particular values, ideas, knowledge, as well as social relationships and positions. For the explanation of discourse analysis as a method, see Chapter 2.

is an important aspect of online interaction, and can itself be negotiated via interaction – Chapter 4 explores the online platforms either specifically designed, or purposefully appropriated for the purposes of self-presentation. It provides answers to questions such as what communicative functions a MySpace band profile fulfils; how it is possible for a band to create, or contribute to the creation of, a coherent identity through online means; and how bands' online activity can be understood in terms of temporality. Through the example of the online presence of a music event, the chapter also examines the importance of visual imagery – besides written and audio content – in online self-presentation, and explores the significance of representations in terms of community and the feeling of belonging. Chapter 5, on the other hand, examines communication on such deliberately interactive spaces as bands' blogs and comments sections. It addresses the ways identities related to music are manifested and maintained through the attitudes, values, and affiliations expressed in online communication, in particular the practices of 'commenting' and blogging on MySpace. The notion of the scene is refined in the two chapters through such aspects as the temporality of structuring online content, discursive conventions, roles, modes and functions of communication, expressions of identity, as well as the expression of taste and genre aesthetics and ethics.

Chapter 6 examines the relationship of place, locality, and the city of Liverpool in particular to the online discourse. It analyses bands' expressions of local identity, as well as the online representation – and creation – of musical tradition and history. It examines the question of how the representation of place is connected to (the representation of) elements of genre or musical style, which elements can also be understood as symbolic connections to other places. Through this, the chapters shows how the levels of the local, the translocal, and the virtual are closely interconnected within the self-presentation of bands and local music events.

Chapter 7 provides conceptual tools for the understanding of music making activities and relationships in a partly local, partly online environment. It proposes a definition and analysis of the temporal and spatial structure of the online presence of bands and events, and introduces the online-and-offline music 'network' as research concept. The concept of the network assists in identifying similarities and ties, as well as differences and boundaries (along relevant aspects defined in the chapter) among bands and other active participants. The 'network' is employed to complement the 'scene' concept and describe music making where boundaries and ties are less clearly definable and defined than in the case of a scene as it has been generally understood.

As a note on style, quotations from websites, as well as from both online and offline interviews, form an essential part of the research, and are therefore often included in the body of the main text. The ensuring of the ethical use of these quotations, including the protection of data, is discussed in the final section of Chapter 2. An attempt has been made to reproduce via quotations the form and characteristics of online writing as well as that of recorded speech. For instance, where the original online writing contained bold text or italics, these are reproduced in the text, along with – deliberate or unintentional – misspellings, uses of punctuation mark-based ‘emoticons,’<sup>7</sup> or the occasional ‘inappropriate’ language.

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<sup>7</sup> Combinations of punctuation marks indicated to express modes of communication, moods and emotions in online writing. As an example, the combination :) is widely used to represent a smile.

## Chapter 1 Literature review and critical discussion

The discussion begins with a critical overview of comprehensive studies addressing the relationship of music, place – in particular the city –, and genre – in particular ‘indie.’ Whether explicitly or implicitly, the aspects of place and genre are both crucial in understanding the formation of social groups and identities in relation to music making. The discussed writings are related in aims and approach in the sense that they are primarily concerned with local-scale music making practices and the connection of these to broader contexts, and mostly employ ethnographic research methods (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of why ethnography is suitable for approaching this research topic). I placed particular emphasis on studies focusing not only on place, but also on connectivity and movement, as theorising connectivity is an essential condition for understanding the relationship of the online and offline. While, as the chapter will show, some authors (Holly Kruse in particular<sup>8</sup>) have successfully described the connective, translocal aspect of music scenes, the role of (online) communication technology in establishing and maintaining these connections still remains to be theorised.

The first section is followed by an overview of studies addressing the social aspect of the Internet, including studies relating to music making and the Internet. Particular attention is paid to the study of online or partly online ‘music communities.’ These studies enquire into the ways the Internet has changed the relationship of music, locality, and social groups (whether focusing on the experience of primarily fans or musicians). I explain the key concepts and relevant theoretical traditions, including ‘virtual community’ and ‘me-centred network,’ and identify some of their shortcomings. The second section concludes with a critical overview of approaches to the study of social groups and online technology, addressing the most important debates and theories that shaped the direction of my research. It reflects on theories analysing the role of the Internet as communication media in the large-scale social and economic shift taking place around the turn of the century. This theoretical strand seeks to understand the relationship between technology and society/culture, which is most typically framed as the social context of technology – or, from the contrary direction, the technological context of society. It also reflects on theories of the Internet as a subjective and collective space of interaction – ‘cyberspace’ – and as new media, arguing that both perspectives have valuable implications. Finally, it introduces macro-level theories of space, time and the Internet in order to provide a broader interpretative framework for the online-

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<sup>8</sup> Kruse 1993, 2003



offline temporal and spatial positioning of participants in locally based music making. These theoretical debates are continuously addressed throughout the thesis. I provide at least probable answers, which are also aimed to help lay the ground for further academic enquiry.

## 1 Music, place, and genre

### ‘Scene’

Studies focusing on the complex set of relationships between social groups – in particular youth groups –, music, and place arose in part as a critique of the so-called subculture theory.<sup>9</sup> The theoretical tradition originally focused primarily on social class and in-group ‘homology,’ and did not integrate the aspect of locality (Dick Hebdige’s (1979) oft-quoted work is a good example). As an amendment to this shortcoming, Andy Bennett (2000) provides a defining study of youth and music based on two main case studies in two separate locations, namely the cities of Newcastle and Frankfurt. Locality is a central concern of Bennett’s work and much of the post-subculture literature – Shane Blackman even refers to this shift of perspective as postmodern subculture theory’s celebration of localism (2005: 16). Understood as the symbolic place, the term incorporates all characteristics particular to a place that are embodied in social relationships and form part of subjective and collective identities, attitudes, and values.<sup>10</sup>

The theoretical movement from the subculture towards alternative perspectives and concepts has also been contemporaneous with a shift in sociology and cultural studies from a structurally biased, macro-socially oriented viewpoint towards a micro-socially oriented one focusing on local practices. Bennett describes this shift in the following way:

In more recent years, [...] the rejection of structuralism as a means of explaining away social processes, combined with an increasing concern with the micro-social, local aspects of everyday life as the focus for critical enquiry, has led to

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<sup>9</sup> The so-called (youth) subculture research tradition evolved from urban sociology and the study of youth delinquency (in particular the so-called Chicago School, e.g. Park 1925; Whyte 1943) and was systematically theorised by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), who applied a structural-Marxist theoretical framework to analyse the relationship between (musical) taste and the youth cultures of post-war Britain such as mods, rockers, or skinheads (discussed e.g. in Bennett 2002: 452-3). Hebdige (1979) provided the first coherent definition of the concept of subculture based on the assumption of stylistic ‘homology’ within the presented groups. Social class as an explanative factor is predominant in both his account and Cohen’s (1987 [1972]) preceding analysis.

<sup>10</sup> Elliott asks, in reference to Raymond Williams’ notion: ‘What is locality, after all, if not a structure of feeling oriented about place?’ (2004: 276).

an interest among academic researchers in music-making as an activity via which young people make sense of, negotiate or resist the local circumstances in which they find themselves.

(Bennett 2001: 136)

The following section reflects on studies and concepts of music, time, place, and social groups that emerged from this theoretical shift and the subculture critique.

The concept that perhaps most explicitly links music to place and space – whether virtual or ‘real’ – is that of the *scene*. According to Bennett and Peterson, the scene is a preferable alternative to the term subculture in the sense that it does not incorporate the notion of a dominant culture (2004: 3). Its definition and use, however, has been multiple and shifting, and does not necessarily intersect with the use of the term subculture.<sup>11</sup> The notion of the scene implicates some kind of inward cohesion, as well as an outward projected and recognised (‘globally acknowledged’) image. As Sara Cohen writes, ‘local music scenes need to be understood in relation to broader transnational processes, and they draw our attention to the existence of translocal or transnational scenes’ (1999: 243-244). Or, as Bennett writes in his introduction to the edited volume *Music, Space and Place*, ‘scene [...] has a deeply symbolic value, denoting a process through which places become globally acknowledged centres for particular musical styles’ (2004a: 7).

In ‘Scenes and Sensibilities,’ Will Straw poses important questions regarding the concept, taking a critical stance against his own oft-quoted definition from a previous writing (Straw 1991):

A decade of writing in popular music studies has sought to refine the notion of ‘scene’, but the slipperiness remains. In my own contribution to this effort, I sought to define scenes as geographically specific spaces for the articulation of multiple musical practices (Straw, 1991).<sup>12</sup> Like most attempts at definition, this could not diminish the pertinence and popularity of other uses – like ‘international hardcore scene’ (Billboard, 1994) – whose sense of space was very different.

(Straw 2001: 8)

Despite, or rather because of, this ambiguity, the crucial elements of music scenes need to be identified – including the most obvious one, its link to specific places and spaces.

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<sup>11</sup> C.f. Cohen 1999

<sup>12</sup> According to the full definition, scene is ‘that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization’ (Straw 1991: 373).

In his own analysis of 1950s Toronto nightlife, Straw reflects on the rich relationship of the scene to place – urban spaces in particular.<sup>13</sup> For example: ‘[s]cenes extend the spatialization of city cultures through the grafting of tastes or affinities to physical locations’ (Straw 2001: 15). ‘At the same time,’ he argues, “‘scene” seems to evoke both the cozy intimacy of community and the fluid cosmopolitanism of urban life’ (7). As the latter associations implicitly suggest, the notion of the scene incorporates aspects of time in the sense that particular locations and the practices taking place there embody history – in Manuel Castells’ words, ‘*space is crystallized time*’ (1996: 441 [italics in original]). As Leyshon et al. also observe, Straw ‘argues that a stress on locality is accompanied by a complex historicity:’

[...] a variety of different temporalities ... come to coexist within a bounded cultural space. There is often a distinctive density of historical time within the performance styles of alternative groups: most noticeably, an inflection of older, residual styles with a contemporary *irony* which itself evokes a bohemian heritage ... temporal movement is transformed into cartographic density.

(Straw 1991: 380-381, quoted in Leyshon, Matless, and Revill 1995: 429)

Could the temporal aspect of a scene be described as the dynamic between conservation and transience? In his later work, Straw also argues for the conservative nature of scenes in the sense that they ‘function more and more as spaces organized against change;’ ‘within them, minor tastes and habits are perpetuated, supported by networks of small-scale institutions, like record stores or specialized bars’ (2001: 16). My analysis will demonstrate that this in fact is a crucial function of a music scene – and that particular online spaces and Internet-related habits and attitudes contribute to the elements of cohesion and preservation. Besides the conservative aspect, however, there is a contrary temporal direction. Alan Blum talks about the ‘mortality’ of scenes (c.f. Shank 1994: 191, discussed below): the scene’s constant state of ‘*becoming*, that is, [...] coming-to-be and perishing,’ which Blum links to the ephemerality of ‘fad and fashion’ (168-169). In order to formulate an adequate theory of temporality, we need to have an understanding of how both of these aspects – preservation and constant emergence – are being played out on the level of practices, experience, and symbolic representations.

The time aspect in empirically based accounts of scenes most typically appears in terms of the *lifespan* of scenes. For example, Lee and Peterson (2004) analyse a virtual music

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<sup>13</sup> As Alan Blum phrases it, ‘[t]he scene is certainly connected to the city insofar as cities are thought to be breeding grounds of scenes, places where scenes are fertilized’ (2003: 165) – the scene implies an ‘essential urban theatricality’ (166).

scene based around a musical style – ‘alternative country’ – that, they argue, was in fact created through online interaction, and solidified by ensuing offline events that also reinforced corresponding fan identities. The authors compare the lifespan of virtual scenes to that of music scenes in general and conclude – not entirely convincingly, it seems more like a hypothesis – that the former can last longer, as opposed to scenes that are ‘picked up’ by the media, only to disappear once a different phenomenon is hyped (Lee and Peterson 2004: 198-9). James A. Hodgkinson (2004) similarly describes the discursive construction of a scene, where the musical style of ‘post-rock’ had not been clearly defined prior to its appearance in online discourse either in terms of musical characteristics or as linked to a specific location. It was instead being created in the discourse of online ‘fanzines’ (fan-produced magazines) through the use of certain linguistic devices, verbal images, and subjective mode of writing in the reviews. Apart from such examples, the temporality of scenes has been much less broadly addressed and theorised than spatiality. In my own research, discursive analysis such as Hodgkinson’s is integrated with a reflection on the temporality of the Internet technology that provides the context for the online discourse, as these are closely related.

A further important aspect of the scene is what Blum terms its ‘theatricality’ (2003: 171) or ‘public character’ (172) – we can also refer to this more generally as visibility. The mediated and discursive aspects of scenes are closely connected to this – being talked about and commented on extends visibility. Scenes are constructed on the level of representations through, for instance, the popular press (as in the case of Straw’s Toronto example), as well as participant discourse and the use of in-group and out-group categories. In order to explore music making activity that in part takes place online, it is essential that we determine how these criteria apply to online spaces. Identifying the key discursive elements and the way these are circulated and interpreted will then also lead to a refinement of the notion of the scene.

### Music making and the city

A defining ethnography of (rock) music making within a city, namely the Liverpool of the 1980s, is provided by Sara Cohen (1991). Together with Ruth Finnegan’s (1989) study from the same period (see below), Cohen’s analysis can be regarded as the first coherent social anthropological analysis of locally based music making in an urban environment. The environment is ‘at home’ from the anthropologist’s perspective, as opposed to being located in a distant and hitherto unfamiliar place. Cohen analyses ‘cultural production in a local

context' (1991: 5) through the study of micro-level cultural practices as well as the economic, social, political, cultural, institutional conditions – the macro-level context – of these practices. Her participant observation was directed at a small circle of bands in Liverpool, and involved attending rehearsals, performances ('gigs,' using the in-group terminology), as well as social events. Besides recording interviews and conversations, Cohen tape-recorded performances and rehearsals, and conducted textual analysis of the music. This enabled an exploration of the relationship between meanings constructed via the musical text and meanings expressed via participants' discourse.

Through an integration of the macro- and micro-level, Cohen also draws more general conclusions regarding the relationship between local-based music production and the industrial and technological environment of music making – through, for instance, analysing local musicians' pursuit of a recording contract, or the set of relationships between the band, the management and the record company. While Cohen at times uses the term 'scene,' her analysis suggests the relative absence of the notion from musicians' discourse in Liverpool at the time. Rather, it is the set of local practices, informed and in part determined by broader conditions of the industry, as well as (discursively expressed) attitudes and aesthetics through which a locally based collective sense is constructed and expressed. Her analysis suggests that community arises not merely through personal relationships, but through shared and collectively negotiated meanings and value judgements (expressed by Cohen in terms of dichotomies such as 'authentic' – 'false;' 'pure' – 'impure;' 'art'/'creativity'/the 'male' domain – 'commerce'/'domesticity'/the 'female' domain etc.).

As in her previous work, Cohen's more recent book (2007) explores the actual music making practices of Liverpool musicians as well as participants' perceptions and narratives, with a longitudinal and historical perspective that lends us a view of broader social, economical, cultural and industrial processes. The examples in the study, including the gradual 'exploitation' – in a positive sense – of the Beatles heritage, the career of the Cream club, and projects of urban regeneration in the city centre including the Rope Walks and the Cavern Quarter, all seem to point towards a gradually developing, ever-more-conscious approach on the part of both the city council and the music industries to draw on Liverpool's music heritage and current music life. The Capital of Culture year of 2008 provided many opportunities for the reinforcement of this approach (c.f. Chapter 3).

The term 'scene' still appeared to be problematic in relation to Liverpool in the 1990s and 2000s, or at least not problematised explicitly in Cohen's analysis. Instead, the emphasis

in local discourse appears to be on branding (the Beatles, the Cavern, Cream, and so forth) and ‘the industry:’

It thus became commonplace for local musicians and entrepreneurs to refer to a local music ‘industry’ rather than, or as well as, a local ‘scene’, references that had been relatively uncommon during the mid-1980s when I first started to conduct research on rock culture in Liverpool. Support for the notion of music as a city industry, and for initiatives aimed at developing such an industry, was mobilized by the rhetoric of loss, abandonment and marginality that was highlighted in earlier chapters, and by the tensions that informed that rhetoric.

(Cohen 2007: 144)

The quote emphasises that the ‘notion of music as a city industry’ and the actual – council- or music-industry-led – initiatives arising from this notion have formed part of a gradual, but relatively recent process.

Finnegan (1989) presents an ethnographic study of ‘grass-roots music-making as it is practised by amateur musicians in a local context’ (1989: 3), aimed at uncovering the ‘hidden’ set of practices, organisation and structure of local music-making in the town of Milton Keynes. Her concept of parallel ‘music worlds’ existing alongside one another within the same local environment (classical music, brass bands, folk music, musical theatre, jazz, country and western, and rock and pop) draws both on local participants’ own usage of the term and on Howard Becker’s concept of ‘art worlds:’

Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art. Members of art worlds coordinate their activities by which work is produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in frequently used artifacts.

(Becker 1982: 34, quoted in Finnegan 1989: 31)

Like Becker, Finnegan places emphasis on the study of ‘musical *practices* (what people do), not musical works (the “texts” of music)’ (1989: 8). This approach, also characterising Cohen’s (1991) work, has to a great extent informed and influenced music scene literature in general. With the appearance of the Internet, however, the settings of ‘musical practices’ have expanded to include online spaces.

Barry Shank’s (1994) analysis of music making in Austin, Texas focuses on the 1980s, the time of a major organisational transformation in music making in Austin. Relying on a detailed historical and social analysis, study of local venues and music making practices, institutional analysis, and analysis of the music press, Shank effectively maps the complex

relational structure of economic, social and symbolic exchange that constitutes what he calls the ‘music scene’ of the city. On a more general theoretical level, he aims to demonstrate how ‘the performance of popular music functions as a process of identity formation’ (Shank 1994: x). Musical genre, the surrounding discourse, and the associated practices, attitudes, and values are crucial elements of the formation and expression of identity. Identity is central to Shank’s concept of the scene, and it is also the notion through which he integrates individual experience with the social-cultural-economic context.

Shank’s understanding of the ‘rock ‘n’ roll’ scene, while definable in broad stylistic terms, is not connected to particular styles as closely as it is to place: he consistently refers merely to the ‘Austin music scene.’ The scene in this sense is wherever music making is happening at a particular point in time; but where in particular this can be located – in what venues, in what style, in what forms and with whose participation – keeps shifting. The scene in Shank’s understanding is dynamic and transient:

In each of these successive scenes, a core group of musicians and fans found they could reproduce the structure of their scene for a year or two simply by participating [...] But because of the flux and tension that create the conditions necessary for a scene, no scene can ever last long. [...] once it becomes possible to identify the qualities that define the multiple overlapping relationships among the bands and the fans that constitute any scene, than those definite meanings no longer function without musicalized signifying practice. The music, becoming simply music, collapses back into itself – an aesthetic form to be appreciated within its own set of generically generated expectations. And the scene moves elsewhere. Punk in Austin had built itself upon the fossilized ruins of progressive country.

(Shank 1994: 192)

While this is a very important observation regarding the temporal aspect of scenes, the possible danger of such an understanding is that it always focuses on the most dominant strand of local music making, while fails to account for parallel, less visible music worlds, including the cultural residues that continue to exist in some form once the scene has shifted.

In an important account formulated from a music industry perspective, Andrew Leyshon (2001) conceptualises the ‘musical network’ in order to describe the economy of music in view of the technological changes relating to the digital era. He reflects on both Shank (1994) and Straw (1991) as part of the discussion, and refers to ‘musical scenes’ as descriptions of what he calls the network of musical creativity. He defines these types of networks as ‘centers of musical knowledge;’ as centers not only ‘of production, but also of interpretation’ (Leyshon 2001: 62). As such, these creative centres tend to remain as local agglomerates regardless of the spread Internet technologies – they typically operate in urban

spaces, where they supply material to record companies (63). However, networks – of creativity, reproduction, distribution, and consumption –, as Leyshon himself observes, overlap – the ‘set of overlapping and complementary networks [...], between them, configure the musical economy’ (60). The music networks presented in the thesis involve and serve all functions – production, interpretation, reproduction, distribution, as well as consumption – to varying extents.

### Local, translocal, and virtual

The typology suggested by the title of Bennett and Peterson’s (2004) edited volume *Music Scenes. Local, Translocal and Virtual* is indicative of a central focus on the connection between place and music making. The studies in the volume demonstrate that spaces of music making and music fandom can be virtual as well as being tied to a specific geographical location; besides this, the practices relating to music can also take place in several locations that are in some way – virtually – connected. While Bennett and Peterson make a conceptual differentiation between these forms, I aim to demonstrate through my own study that locally based music making can simultaneously have corresponding virtual spaces, as well as be virtually connected to distant locations, and hence operate on a translocal as well as local level. Furthermore, I will argue that no scene is merely virtual; online music making activity is always embedded in a broader set of online and offline social, economic, and symbolic relationships.

In an inspiring study, Bennett (2004b) analyses the ‘making of a virtual scene,’ the so-called ‘Canterbury Sound:’ he demonstrates how a scene is created by fans merely through online discourse, beginning with a website set up in 1996 about a number of 1960s bands based in or associated with Canterbury. The online discourse includes attempts at defining the ‘sound’ and debates around it; lists of bands and band ‘family trees;’ and decisions regarding the inclusion of bands in the Canterbury canon, as well as identifying those that are situated outside (i.e. the ‘obscure’ bands). The fan community’s relationship to place is characterised by their inscription of their own meanings into various places (pubs, streets) in the city of Canterbury itself through online discourse (Bennett 2004b: 109). This inscribed virtual place then in its turn facilitates the emergence of certain offline events such as the release of a compilation record, and later the establishing of ‘Canterbury Sound’ sections in local shops. In other words, the meanings created online become inscribed into the actual place – at which point, I would argue, the scene also ceases to be merely ‘virtual.’



An important premise of the present study is that for the understanding of the dynamics between music and locality, the conceptualisation of *connections* between places and spaces should be as central a concern as the conceptualisation of the places and spaces themselves. A direct theoretical alternative to the subculture theory that to a certain extent incorporates a focus on connectivity and movement is the concept of the *tribe* or *neo-tribe*, based on Michel Maffesoli's (1996) theory of the 'empathetic' tribe as a form of post-war sociality (St John 2009: 25-26). As defined by Graham St John, 'to be "tribal" [...] is to seek identification and sociality wherever and whenever possible, in association with the micro, fleeting, virtual, consumer-oriented, tragic, yet ever-present and multitudinous' (2009: 25). Resulting from its focus on subjectivity and the individual basis of the collective experience, the notion of the tribe suggests temporality and fluidity with regard to membership.<sup>14</sup> The concept of the (neo-)tribe, as both St John and Bennett point out, has especially been influential in studies of electronic or urban dance music genres such as 'house,' 'techno' or 'rave.' The primary reason for this may lie in the 'demonstrably empathetic, fluid, and transgressive,' and at the same time 'agonistic and intentional' aesthetics of these genres (St John 2009: 26), and the corresponding attitude required by participation in the related collective spaces (clubs, parties). However, the fact that the enacted and embodied subjectivities and aesthetics described are so particular to these genres also proves a limitation for the theory.<sup>15</sup>

More significant in relation to the aims of the present research is the centrality of movement, migration, networked sociability, interconnectedness, and translocal spaces to the studies of neo-tribes. St John, for example, explores the movement of sound systems, DJs and collectives around the globe, analysing the relationships between translocal connections – interpersonal networks – and local dance music cultures. This movement of people and music is facilitated by opportunities provided by the Internet – and in fact partly takes place online. While due to the genre-particular limitations mentioned above my research does not employ the concept of the neo-tribe in relation to music making activity in Liverpool, it retains its emphasis on routes, translocal spaces, and networked sociability. These notions, as will be shown, are relevant to indie/rock music, if in a slightly different sense.

The concepts of both the translocal and the virtual scene can help to draw our focus on the connected nature of places and spaces, as well as the connections themselves. In Paul

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<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the fixed boundaries and coherent identity presumed by the subculture theory (Bennett 1999: 600)

<sup>15</sup> For further critique of the neo-tribe concept, see Hesmondhalgh (2005).

Hodkinson's terminology, translocal connections can be 'abstract' – such as taste – and 'concrete' – maintained through travel, commerce, or the media (2004: 133). His case study of the Goth scene demonstrates how taste can become a form of abstract connection: within the Goth scene, the similarities in makes, items of clothing, accessories, as well as DJ set lists, and individual record and CD collections became 'status criteria by which participants judged and classified others in relation to the boundaries of their scene' (135).

Abstract connections can also be described in terms of an imagined broader context of distant places that inform the behaviour and self-definition of participants of a local scene. In his account of salsa scenes, Norman Urquía describes the way '[i]nformants also emphasize the elements they share with an imagined group of salsa producers and consumers, a phenomenon George Lipsitz (1997) describes as "branching out"' (2004: 99).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Hodkinson observes how online acquaintances among Goths facilitated actual geographical movement, i.e. travelling (2004: 141). He cites this as an instance of the effect of 'media links' (143), but it can also be understood as an example of a mutually reinforcing relationship between the online and the offline. Both concrete connections – such as online hyperlinks and messages – and abstract ones – taste and references to locality – among online and offline sites are a primary focus in the present study.

An earlier research, undoubtedly influential on the quoted studies, is Holly Kruse's (1993) exploration of subcultural identity in alternative music culture across locations in the United States. Kruse contrasts her research with that of Cohen (1991) and Finnegan (1989), who both concentrate on music making in one location (1993: 37-38). Instead, she explores the ways participants negotiate connections across locality based on musical taste – including the *perceived* connections (these could be called symbolic) and the *actual* networks of participants (the latter is exemplified by musicians who know or know of each other [Kruse 1993: 37]). Kruse does not directly conceptualise the network of participants, yet the analysis points towards this direction. She makes a very important observation with regard to the perceived connections – one that is echoed by Hodkinson's notion of 'abstract connections' within music scenes:

[...] when we see the social and economic relationships that link one locality to another and that ultimately place *all* individuals involved in relation to an organised national and transnational entertainment industry, we realise the importance of understanding how, as Jody Berland states, cultural technologies and their

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<sup>16</sup> This understanding can also be related to Benedict Anderson's (2006 [1983]) theory of 'imagined communities.'

accompanying structures move entertainment “from a particular space to a non-particular space” (1992, p. 47).

(Kruse 1993: 38)

The translocal is therefore also to be understood in this sense: due to the transnational-scale interconnectedness of not only the music industry, but also music making as a practice and music as a product (e.g. through genre aesthetics and practices), local identities and practices are informed and influenced by those in other locations. A scene can only be conceived of as such if participants have an awareness of other scenes, in other locations or involving different styles or attitudes, with which it nevertheless shares some characteristics and points of reference.

### Defining ‘indie’

Musical genre and style, as all the studies cited above indicate, are significant aspects of music making practices and experience on the local level. At the same time, genre aesthetics, musical style, and taste arguably also provide the most evident level of symbolic connection to other, distant places. For instance, online fan and/or musician communities form not only around particular artists, but also groups of artists viewed as belonging to a particular genre, sub-genre, or style (e.g. there are numerous online communities for fans of ‘Britpop,’ ‘classic rock,’ ‘metal,’ ‘grunge’ etc.). As a different example, bands that are distant in terms of geography, and often even time, influence each other based on particular stylistic features and aesthetics. A European grunge band in the 2000s will adhere to certain features developed in Seattle during the late 1980s and early 1990s – this can also be described as a symbolic connection. In this sense, genre is translocal.

An extensive genre-based social anthropological analysis is Wendy Fonarow’s (2006) work on the aesthetics, symbolism, and – spatial, symbolic, and hierarchical – structure of ‘indie’ music in the UK. While acknowledging the shifting and therefore almost indefinable nature of this category (‘[w]riting about indie often seems like trying to hit a moving target: as soon as you hit one part, another part has already moved’ [Fonarow 2006: 18]), Fonarow nevertheless draws up a helpful list of criteria along which indie can be delineated.<sup>17</sup> Firstly,

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<sup>17</sup> David Hesmondhalgh (1999) defines the indie genre based on its aesthetic and institutional politics. He explores the roots of indie in the punk genre along with its DIY aesthetics and politics, and how it had evolved to become part of ‘mainstream’ British pop by the end of the 1990s. He argues that the consequences of the partnership and collaboration between independent and major in terms of aesthetics – and ethics, it could be added – are not necessarily negative, as popular opinion would suggest. While convincing with regard to the

indie refers to a mode of distribution through small, independent record labels; this definition is ‘widely recognized by the British recording industry,’ as indicated by the existence of an independent chart (30). As a subsequent development, indie also refers to a genre, which Fonarow understands as to an extent independent of the industrial criterion: ‘[a]dherence to indie’s generic features allows bands that do not have an independent label or independent distribution to be considered by some to have membership within the indie community’ (39). The genre can be described in terms of musical form, musical production and style (e.g. ‘guitar pop’ sound), as well as stage appearance, technology (e.g. simplicity in the case of both), and consumption practices (e.g. many indie fans prefer vinyl to CD – analog to digital) (39-50). Indie can also be defined in terms of a particular ethos and corresponding moral values: the idea of freedom – independence from corporate control – as well as a certain kind of pathos, with romantic connotations (53-56). Finally, it can also be conceived of as a mode of aesthetic judgement, manifest in discursive practice and taste choices (57-68).

While these are all relevant points and in general replicated by my own observations in Liverpool, Fonarow’s lack of more direct engagement with participant discourse results in at least one shortcoming. While her research includes observations conducted during the 2000s (up to 2005), what she fails to emphasise is that during this decade, indie as a genre category very often appeared conjoined with other categories in popular music discourse: either as compounds such as ‘indie rock,’ ‘indie pop,’ and many more (very frequent in the music press) or in the form of self-definitions on the part of bands such as ‘indie / pop punk,’ ‘indie / new wave,’ or ‘indie / alternative.’ Depending on the verbal association, the terms may have different generic, aesthetic, and ethical connotations. On a broader level, they may refer to different elements of the discursive expression and construction of community-orientation and identity.

On the one hand, Fonarow ascribes significance to certain discursive categories used by participants as indications of their subjective experience – for example, music fans attending gigs distinguish between ‘liggers’ and ‘punters’ (2006: 125), which points towards the notion of symbolic capital.<sup>18</sup> However, with these exceptions, and contrary to, for instance, Finnegan (1989), Fonarow’s interpretations do not emerge from the articulated perceptions of participants in the ‘indie music community.’ Instead, they are based on a

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1990s, the model of major – independent dichotomy presented in Hesmondhalgh’s analysis does not necessarily apply in the same way to the 2000s.

<sup>18</sup> In the same way as the discursive categories signifying belonging and being an outsider in Sara Thornton’s influential analysis of ‘club cultures’ (1995).

semiotic reading of signals of power and status, including physical conduct (e.g. proximities at performance venues). To what extent this semiotic reading corresponds to the way participants employ, experience and interpret these signals is unclear.

In my own study, I therefore viewed it an essential task to investigate the various uses of the ‘indie’ category through empirical case studies, and to demarcate the verbal, musical, and visual associations that contribute to its construction and negotiation. The uses of the category apply to the online as well as the offline context: the bands I observed typically either self-released their recordings or release them with local or London-based independent labels; they performed at ‘indie’ venues and ‘indie’ club nights; they featured in ‘indie’ webzines as well as on the websites of the respective indie labels, and so forth. These criteria all contribute to the meaning of indie, yet none of them are to be accepted on their own terms.

## **2 Music, the Internet, and society**

The significance of music in Internet culture, and, conversely, that of the Internet in relation to music consumption, production, distribution, and sharing, is well indicated by the contributions to the volume *Cybersounds* (Ayers 2006). In his afterword (‘On the Future of Music’), Jonathan Sterne observes that ‘the book’s contributors collectively deflate the sense that the Internet is a “special case” of social relations’ (2006: 255). One of the implications of the statement is that the online – offline divide is an artificial and unjustified one in the case of music-related communities and practices. Consequently, rather than viewing cyberspace as an entirely novel and unique territory, research should be directed at understanding the continuities between online and other types of media, online and more traditional forms of communication, socialisation, and exchange. On the other hand, the statement could be reframed to imply that an integrated study of the online and the offline environment can tell us something new about the relationship of music, place, and – local, global or translocal – communities.

## ‘Virtual communities’ and the online – offline dichotomy

The study of the relationship of music and the Internet has in part focused on how the ‘community’ aspect of music, in particular the enactment of music fandom, can be understood in the online context. Especially relevant to the perspective of the present study are understandings of community as a discursive construct, typically formed and negotiated along identification with a particular artist and/or genre or style. For example, Pinard and Jacobs (2006) explore the presence of hip-hop in cyberspace as a ‘cybercommunity’ – which in their understanding constitutes a particular type of ‘imagined community’ (c.f. Anderson 1983). They identify community formation strategies employed by websites enabling the appearance of ‘online publics’ – that is, ‘spaces (artistic, discursive and ideational) created by the interplay between online and offline alternative hip-hop communities’ (Pinard and Jacobs 2006: 85).<sup>19</sup> In a similar vein, O’Reilly and Doherty (2006) apply the method of ‘discursive-psychological discourse analysis’ to analyse fan disputes and negotiations on the band New Model Army’s website notice board. These online discursive activities assist the collective construction of a ‘b(r)and’ – the brand corresponding to the band – as well as establishing a cohesive fan community.

Luther Elliott’s (2004) analysis of an online mailing list dedicated to the Goa or psychedelic trance genre is similar in approach: community here is again understood as a discursive construct, its symbolic boundaries arising from the debates on the mailing list. Elliott’s analysis, however, is unique in the sense that it links the affective involvement in these debates in particular to the construction of community. Furthermore, using the terms ‘intertextuality’ and even ‘intercontextuality,’ he demonstrates how the discourse on Goa trance is linked to other discourses, and how certain contexts are being ‘appropriated’ by participants in order to become part of the discourse belonging to the genre. This example of intertextuality reinforces the concept of a symbolic ‘branching out,’ observed above in relation to (translocal) music scenes.

Community is a central notion not only to studies of the Internet, but also to theoretical work focusing on contemporary society – late modernity, postmodernity, the

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<sup>19</sup> Community in the online environment is in fact marketed as a product. As Elliott (2004) observes, already ‘[m]ore than twenty-five years ago, in an essay on the historical emergence of television, Raymond Williams (1975) presciently identified “community” as a prime target for co-optation, saying, “community is a word that will be exploited by commercial operators and by the political enemies of the now partly independent programming and networking authorities” (p. 149)’ (Elliott 2004: 274). Social networking sites are probably the most obvious online forms of marketed community.

information age, depending on interpretation.<sup>20</sup> But how do we define community in the virtual space? In an influential study, which could nevertheless be criticised for its one-sided celebratory nature, Howard Rheingold describes ‘virtual communities’ as ‘social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace’ (2000 [online]). Through his case study of the so-called WELL (‘Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link’), Rheingold argues for the ‘real’ nature of online communities by demonstrating the subjective significance of the online interaction relationships for the participants involved. He also shows how emotional investment, reciprocal support, and the subjective feeling of belonging contribute to the creation of a ‘place’ online. The online interactions, moreover, are also continued in the form of offline meetings and events (‘By now, I’ve attended real-life WELL marriages, WELL births, and even a WELL funeral’ [Rheingold 2000]), so regardless of the chosen terminology, the studied community is not merely ‘virtual.’

Even studies explicitly aiming to explore online or virtual communities tend to observe that the online cannot be analysed in isolation – ‘[n]obody lives only in cyberspace’ (Kendall 1999: 70). On the one hand, participants’ online experience is rooted in their offline life, even if online communities enable, and in some cases actively encourage, identity play. On the other hand, the online experience also impacts on offline or ‘real’ life in various ways. Dodge and Kitchin argue for the continuity between online and offline identity, incorporating memories, experiences, personality, social relations, and so forth (2001: 24). The ways memories and experiences are enacted online, however, are still to be studied in detail.

The analysis of user discourse, in particular expressed values, attitudes, affiliations, attachments, and dissociations, is crucial in understanding the relationship of online and offline on the level of experience, practices, and social identity. A more recent study that remains within the ‘online community’ framework is Joyce Nip’s investigation of ‘the

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<sup>20</sup> The changing nature and roles of traditional communities have been a concern since the rapid waves of urbanisation of modern times, and a similar discourse has accompanied the appearance of the Internet and mobile technologies. As Hampton and Wellman observe:

Despite the breathless ‘presentism’ of current discourse about the colonizing of cyberspace (reviewed in Wellman & Gulia, 1999), scholarly debate about the nature of community arose out of earlier concerns about the transition from agrarian to urbanized industrial societies (e.g., Durkheim, 1893/1964; Tönnies, 1887/1955).

(Hampton and Wellman 1999: 476)

The ‘breathless presentism’ characterises both sides of the late-1990s debate regarding the effect of cyberspace on community, participants of which ‘assert that the Internet will create either wonderful new forms of community or will destroy community altogether’ (Wellman and Gulia 1999: 167).

autonomy of online communities in relation to their offline counterparts' (2004: 409) based on the articulated 'goals, norms and sense of belonging' (412) on the online bulletin board of the so-called Queer Sisters group. Nip concludes that

[...] online spaces are not necessarily autonomous from their offline counterparts. Rather, the autonomy of the online community is contingent upon technology and a number of conditioning factors, the most important of which is the original purpose and intention behind creating the online space.

(Nip 2004: 410)

The term 'counterpart' may itself be problematic in the sense that it maintains and reinforces the binarism of online versus offline spaces and communities. More helpful is Nip's focus on discourse, through which she demonstrates the mutual interlinkedness, or even interdependence, of discourses on various – whether online or offline – platforms, and also identifies the points of discrepancy (419-420).

In other words, the relationship between the online and the offline is generally acknowledged, yet it is not systematically explored and theorised. As Sterne points out, even where the dichotomy is criticised, an adequate analysis is lacking:

On-line analyses of Internet culture use a hybrid approach – often combining, in various degrees, ethnography, autobiography, and textual analysis. Often, their goal is to explain the workings of online culture in an ethnographic or discourse analysis style. Many of these studies conclude by criticizing the on-line/off-line dichotomy that posits a split between the Internet and everything else. Although they offer this criticism, they do not develop it: Most subjectivity-oriented analyses of the Internet are founded on a dichotomy between on-line and off-line culture, in which on-line culture is mediated and off-line culture is not.

(Sterne 1999: 269)

While Sterne already made this observation before the turn of the century, more than a decade later the systematic problematisation of the relationship between the online and the offline still proves a challenge.



## Online interaction

Marjorie Kibby (2000) presents an analysis of an online ‘music community’ (based on web survey, email interviews, and the qualitative analysis of written exchanges) forming around the real-time chat page of American country/folk singer-songwriter John Prine on the website of his record label Oh Boy Records. Her usage of the term ‘community’ is based on the observation of ‘a belief in a commonality, although [the participants of the chat page] are dispersed geographically and disparate in needs and experiences’ (Kibby 2000: 91) – in other words, the criterion of belonging is subjective to the participants. At the same time, Kibby also employs criteria belonging to a more ‘traditional,’ and more objectively oriented definition:

The Prine Chat Room constituted a community, where community is understood in the sociological sense as meaning a group of people who share social interaction and some common ties between themselves and other members of the group, and who share a defined place or area for at least some of the time.

(Kibby 2000: 96)

The shared ‘area’ in this case is of course virtual. Kibby’s analysis is aimed at the connection among fans on the one hand, and between them, the performer and the record company on the other. The life-cycle of the community – the temporal aspect – is also explored through the discussion of the event of closing down the chat page, along with the antecedent triggering instances. While her ‘community’ is close to the early ‘virtual community’ of Rheingold (2000 [1993]) or the ‘virtual scene’ of Bennett and Peterson (2004) in the sense that what she identifies as the community aspect is played out online, in relative isolation from offline ties, it is precisely in the instances that lead to changes in the community that the relationship to offline events is shown (e.g. the relationship between events in Prine’s life/career and the dynamics of fan discussion) – even if the author fails to make this explicit.

The idea of discourse-based community is refined by Kibby through the demonstration of the internal hierarchical division of roles based on individual contribution to the online discussion, expressed by the participants through the use of such labels as ‘the regulars’ or ‘regs’ and the ‘newcomers’ (2000: 97). Online communities, she points out, are ‘subject to the interpersonal dynamics of any face-to-face community, as well as the communicative and social effects of anonymity’ (91). Along with the findings of my own research on the

interactional dynamics online music forums,<sup>21</sup> whereby I distinguished certain discursive roles based on contribution, Kibby's analysis helped to formulate some of the research aims for the present study: I aimed at identifying expressed roles and motives in the online discussions related to the bands and music events – basic roles such as fan and artist, as well as more refined discursive roles that would unfold from the online discussion. My hypothesis was that besides, or instead of anonymity – a feature that has received a lot of attention in scholarly literature (including the recent Baym 2010), yet is not a typical feature of MySpace, even less Facebook, on the contrary (c.f. Zhao et al. 2008; Davis 2010) –, other architectural features of the interactive interface contribute to the structure and characteristics of online interaction and self-presentation. So while it is possible, even necessary, to assume a continuity between the online and the offline, the online environment bears its own structuring characteristics, and this possibly corresponds to an interpersonal dynamics unique to online spaces.

Kibby is not only concerned with the meaning of community, but also the nature of fandom:<sup>22</sup> what it means to be a (John Prine) fan to the people observed in the online context, how fandom is experienced and performed. Performance, notably, takes place through the act of telling stories – the 'ritual sharing of information' (2000: 96). An account similar in focus as well as some of the findings – the motif of story-telling as a performative act – but concerned with an offline environment is Daniel Cavicchi's (1998). The book presents a self-reflective insider's exploration of the Bruce Springsteen fan culture with a focus on fans' discursive and behavioural practices. Fandom as a conceptual framework is understood by Cavicchi as a means of making sense of music, as well as the enactment of an identity and of belonging to a community ('I tried to show how a group of specific fans have used, variously and at different times in their lives, concert going, listening, tape trading, and reading to release tension, reaffirm values, create a sense of self, and meet others' [1998: 10]). His definition of community in turn is grounded in the fans' observed discourse. Community and corresponding fan identities are constructed primarily through the emphasis on the word 'story,' which gains meaning in the context of fans' own practices of story-telling (for instance, the frequent stories about becoming a Bruce Springsteen fan), as well as Springsteen's songs, life, and performances (Cavicchi 1998: 173).

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<sup>21</sup> Online-based research conducted in Hungary as part of a Sociology MA degree at the University of Szeged, the results of which were published as 'Subcultures, Taste Cultures, Fan Communities? The Audience of Rock Music within the Space of the Internet' (2007 [MA Thesis; originally in Hungarian language])

<sup>22</sup> The first comprehensive enquiry into the concept of fandom is the volume edited by Lewis (1992). See also Hills (2002) for a more recent theorisation of fan cultures.

The discursive focus in the study of music-related virtual communities or (partly) online music scenes can be a logical continuation of the study of fan cultures and identities. Besides fans, however, the respective artist is also in some way implicitly present in both Kibby's and Cavicchi's account: in Kibby's example, events in the artist's life influenced the dynamics of online fan discourse, while in Cavicchi's case, Springsteen's framing of his live performances as telling 'stories' impacted upon the specific ways of communicating fandom. An important question to pose is whether the online environment, where musicians and fans may interact within the same space, has the potential to change musician – fan dynamics and the meaning of fandom (and even the meaning of 'artist'). While my thesis does not directly address the theory of fandom, it examines the relationship of artist/musician and fan/audience in an online context. The dichotomy of artist – fan will be actively questioned through an analysis of discursive roles, attitudes, and affiliations expressed via online communication, interpreted in view of the broader offline context. In other words, it is the online enacting of fandom in particular that will be conceptualised.

As a further point, the particularities of genre should also be considered in the understanding of fan identity. For instance, in Kibby's analysis the specificities of the performer – fan relationship are in part characterised by the fans' anticipation of interacting with the performer as a person, and it is the performance conventions and ethics of the singer–songwriter genre that ensure the possibility of such interaction taking place, both during and outside the performance. From these conventions and ethics follows a subjective feeling of community with the artist on the part of the fans, along with a sense that they form part of the performance. The online space reinforces and shapes this collective sense; nevertheless, the online reinforcement is necessarily preceded by the particularities of the relationship.

While Kibby emphasises the continuity between the offline and online music fan community, Jones in his reflection on the research proposes that '[t]he Internet's insertion into industry and fan practices has meant that relations of audience/performer/space/geography/time are made problematic and have shifted in ways that have not yet been analysed' (Jones 2002: 12). He even applies the term 'new music communities' to indicate the shift, which implies a qualitative – if yet undefined or un-theorised – difference between traditionally organised music-based communities and those aided by 'Internetworking technologies' (Jones 2002). A key aspect of this qualitative difference regards space and geography – the 'transglobal local(s)' made possible by the Internet (13). He quotes Fenster, who

[...] wrote of the emergent spatial relations in the political economy of the international music industry and the local cultural practices of popular music and the ‘importance of local spaces, performances, and experiences ... increasingly tied together by social networks, publications, trade groups, and regional and national institutions ... (in) locally-dispersed formations’ (1995: 83).

(Jones 2002: 13)<sup>23</sup>

Somewhat contrary to the implication of the term ‘new music communities,’ this statement reinforces the importance of placing the study of the relationship of the Internet, music making and place into the context of previously existing social, spatial, and industrial relations and practices. The present research therefore, instead of hypothesising a qualitative difference between the two, aims at looking for continuities – based, for instance, on genre conventions – alongside new types and structures of relationships.

The bulk of the defining studies on ‘online’ or ‘virtual communities,’ complete with further analyses of virtual interactive worlds such so-called MUDs (‘multi-user dungeons’ – see e.g. Markham [1998] and Kendall [1999]), date from the late 1990s or the turn of the century. Arguably, there is a relationship between the focus and conceptual approach of this research and the object of study, that is, relatively closed spaces of online interaction, clearly defined as a particular space or virtual place such as a newsgroup, a message board, or a MUD. While most authors, including the oft-quoted Wellman and Gulia (1999), seem to accept that the boundaries of communities are not fixed, the use of the concept of community itself appears to correlate, on the one hand, with a certain spatially bounded quality – in terms of cyberspace, i.e. a website, a newsgroup, a particular online game, and so forth – and on the other hand, a more or less clear group identification on the part of participants. The latter is typically expressed through affective investment, and is independent of the extent to which this identification forms part of their daily life and their identity as a ‘whole.’

I will argue that this correlation can be explained by the dominant patterns of a certain type of usage of online technology. During the 1990s, newsgroups, MUDs, message boards,

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<sup>23</sup> While it needs to be accepted that changes in spatial relations do occur thanks to Internet technologies, Jones also warns against technological determinism, and emphasises the role of users – whether individuals or organisations – in determining the pattern of spatial distribution:

[...] spatial distribution of music does not change in and of itself. It is the desires of those who seek to hear music and those who seek to have it heard that motivate it (in the fullest sense of the term) [...] it is Internet users (individuals, industry and institutions) that cause music to be distributed. (Jones 2002: 14).

At this point Jones also makes a reference to Lipsitz (1994: 4).

mailing lists, and interactive games were very popular ways of collective online interaction and socialisation. However, as Sterne rightly observes, ‘as the World Wide Web grows, its cultural content – the *character* of its “interactivity” – changes’ (1999: 279). Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman also remark the following:

Although a good deal of CMC research has investigated group interaction online, a group is only one kind of social network, one that is tightly bound and densely knit. Not all relations fit neatly into tightly bounded solidarities.

(Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman 1999: 76-77)

The development of online interaction patterns after the turn of the century have entailed that this observation is increasingly justified. The appearance and rapid world-wide (or at least online-world-wide) spread of social networking sites such as MySpace.com, Facebook.com, Twitter.com and their predecessors, the dominance of weblogs alongside, or instead of, traditional news sites and newsgroups, the phenomenon of participatory press, the appearance of all-encompassing reader commentary are evidence of a new phase of online interaction, forming part of the development of what is known as the Web 2.0 structure. In their analytical overview of social networking sites, boyd and Ellison reflect on this structural shift in online interaction:

While websites dedicated to communities of interest still exist and prosper, SNSs [social networking sites] are primarily organized around people, not interests. Early public online communities such as Usenet and public discussion forums were structured by topics or according to topical hierarchies, but social network sites are structured as personal (or ‘egocentric’) networks, with the individual at the center of their own community. This more accurately mirrors unmediated social structures, where ‘the world is composed of networks, not groups’ (Wellman, 1988, p. 37). The introduction of SNS features has introduced a new organizational framework for online communities, and with it, a vibrant new research context.

(boyd and Ellison 2007 [online])

As an indication of the shift in interaction, Nancy Baym makes a conceptual distinction between online ‘communities’ and ‘networks’ on the basis that as opposed to communities, networks have no clear boundaries such as being ‘located at one website or hav[ing] the same mailing address’ (2010: 90). In the Web 2.0 era, boundaries of communities – where, indeed, this concept is applicable at all –, criteria of belonging, or the notion of identification have to be understood in ways that are different from concepts relating to the dominant interaction

forms of the 1990s. More 'traditional' online communities do continue to exist alongside the new forms; nevertheless, the more recent ways of social interaction and participation in communities remain to be studied and theorised systematically, especially since most of the founding research was conducted before the appearance of this most recent phase.

Hodkinson also very accurately points this tendency in relation to the rapid spread of online journals: 'in recent times there has been a significant shift among internet users towards the use of individual web logs ('blogs') and, in particular, interactive online journals, as a means of social communication' (2007: 626). He asks 'to what extent increasing use of the person-centred online journal is liable to encourage individualistic patterns of interaction and identity' (627). At the time of his research the scale of this change had not even been as evident as around 2007-2009, since social networking sites, including MySpace and Facebook, had not yet reached their peak (as Hodkinson himself observes in Note 2 [647]). Furthermore, band blogs on MySpace (analysed in detail in Chapter 5), for example, are a different format from the individual-based journals analysed by Hodkinson (he observes that 'the vast majority of blogs are created, maintained and centred upon a single individual rather than a group' [626] – band blogs are an obvious exception).

Importantly, Hodkinson's analysis points (even if not explicitly) to the crucial role of music as a driving force in the shift in usage. The Goths previously active on forums switched to LiveJournal to maintain individual-based blogs, which nevertheless retained the connection structure of the forums. The example indicates that music-related communities can make the transition to new communication platforms very rapidly, which underlines the necessity of studying music-related online activity and content in order to understand the Internet as social space.

Besides an increased focus on music, the proposed shift in perspective also needs to incorporate the general tendency from anonymity or partial anonymity, which characterised many of the studied online communities of the 1990s, towards using online resources and facilities as an extension of one's (semi-)public social identity. As Zhao et al. rightly point out, earlier studies of anonymous environments such as MUDs, chat rooms, and bulletin boards (e.g. Rheingold 2000; Turkle 1995; Surratt 1998) concluded that 'individuals tended to play-act at being someone else or act out their underlying negative impulses in the online world' (2008: 1817). In contrast, more recently emerged online environments are 'nonymous' (non-anonymous) and this architectural structure entails different strategies of identity presentation. For instance, the social networking site Facebook encourages the use of real-life names along with other identifications such as profile photographs and the display of membership of

institutions. These elements, moreover, already characterised MySpace profile pages before the appearance of Facebook (Davis 2010: 1105). Similarly, bloggers often do not hide their identities, and in general, it has increasingly been possible to ‘track people down’ online (academic and other professional social networks such as Academia.edu and LinkedIn.com illustrate this trend). Thanks to the increasing interconnectedness of online spaces through social networking sites, blogs, news sites, or the combinations of these, the Internet, I will argue, has increasingly functioned for users as individual-based network of simultaneously specialised *and* general, public *and* private spaces. In simple terms, the online experience has continuously moved closer towards the complexity of offline life, relationships, and identities, and our theoretical and methodological framework needs to reflect this.

### Community as ‘me-centred’ network

Individual ties and the subjective experience of belonging are a crucial aspect of any applicable definition of community.<sup>24</sup> The notion of subjectivity is also inconceivable without the notion of a community or society as referential point – regardless of the extent to which this is imagined. The Internet is a set of media through which individuals interact in certain ways, and in order to understand its relationship to community, we need to explore the ways the *feeling* of belonging – understood in a broad sense to include aims, attitudes, tastes and affiliations –, as well as the (social) *actions* that constitute community and subjectivity, can be created, reinforced, or dissolved through online channels of communication.

The focus on the subjective aspect of community leads to the theory of the personal or ‘me-centred’ network. Today, in Western-type societies, computer-mediated communication plays an increasingly important role in the process of maintaining personal networks. The ‘emotional aid, material aid, information, companionship, and a sense of belonging’ provided by network members (Wellman and Frank 2001: 233) can be aided by online interaction (as Rheingold’s study also shows). A systematic study of personal networks needs to focus not only on the structure of the relationships, but also the social environment and practices – the ‘milieu’ – of the users. For this reason, it appears fruitful to integrate the analytically oriented personal network perspective (as exemplified by Wellman and Frank 2001) with the concept

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<sup>24</sup> Weber calls attention to the subjective aspect of community through revising the ideas of Tönnies:<sup>24</sup> he distinguishes communal and associative relationships between people, the former being characterised by ‘a subjective “sense of belonging together”’ (Weber 1968: 41, also quoted in Cavicchi 1998: 160).

of the social milieu on the one hand, and with an understanding of locality and translocality on the other.<sup>25</sup>

Peter Webb (2007) employs a primarily individual-centred notion of the ‘milieu’ (drawing on Durrschmidt 2000) for describing music worlds: the milieu in this sense refers to the context of social and economic position, knowledge, locality, and belief system in which any individual operates. At the same time, it ‘illuminates the notion of a network that has a particular density in terms of connections, relevancies, typifications, commonalities, and aesthetics’ (Webb 2007: 30). If the Internet reinforces the ‘networked individualism’ described by Castells (2001) – that ‘virtual communities are “me-centred” networks or “personalized communities” wherein sociabilities are privatised’ (Castells 2001: 128, also quoted in Bell 2007) –, then a theoretical and analytical approach based on social network is particularly relevant for the study of music cultures that are at least partly online-based.

Music making as a cultural industry operates within its own translocal network of individuals and organisations, maintained through a flow of products, money, information, and symbolic capital. This is very accurately captured and theorised by Leyshon (2001) in his already quoted study of ‘musical networks.’ Leyshon describes the economy of music as operating through ‘complex networks of social relations that link actors, organisations and technologies’ (2001: 57). This network theory is based on Jacques Attali’s (1984) conceptualisation of the networks of composition, representation, and repetition, which Leyshon applies in a narrower sense in order to rethink the relationship between the music industries and contemporary digital technology.

As Leyshon implies in relation to networks of creativity such as the music scene (2001: 62), industrial, professional, and collaborative networks also function as symbolic networks, transmitting, changing, and conserving taste, values, and aesthetics. Nevertheless, his study does not proceed to analyse how this symbolic and aesthetic content is produced on the micro-level. Webb’s study is valuable in showing the ways personal-based networks lead to the formation of broader creative and professional communities. It does not, however, analyse the role of communication technology in the operation of these networks, i.e. the flow of information, goods, and symbolic meanings. It therefore also fails to reflect on the effect of technological changes on the dynamism of networks – and vice versa. The thesis proposes to analyse the relationship of the music network as a spatial structure of relationships, the

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<sup>25</sup> For very similar reasons, I did not directly employ as theoretical framework the otherwise influential Actor-Network Theory (ANT) – see e.g. Law and Hassard (1999), Latour (2005). Nevertheless, it is important to note here that the theory provides valuable insight into the relationship between individual agency, objective relations, and technology that is very much relevant to the study of the Internet and society.



Internet as technology and interactive space, and users – i.e. musicians, bands, music fans, or promoters operating within the same local environment.

### Social networking sites

The structure of the so-called social networking sites ('SNSs'), that is, individual profile-based online spaces such as MySpace.com, Facebook.com, Last.fm or Bebo.com, is practically a direct online representation of the me-centred network. Music, whether in the form of shared content, an element of individual taste statements, or band and fan pages, is a key element of these online spaces in general, therefore the study of social networking sites can be highly informative with regard to the study of music-related online activity. Since social networking sites are based on individual profiles, some of the relevant scholarly research focuses on self-presentation (boyd and Ellison 2007). Typically, the content elements displayed on profiles correspond to a variety of categories (e.g. basic personal information such as date of birth, location; main interests; favourite quotes etc.), depending on the profile structure of the given SNS. Besides these elements, Donath and boyd 'suggest that "public displays of connection" serve as important identity signals that help people navigate the networked social world, in that an extended network may serve to validate identity information presented in profiles' (2004, quoted in boyd and Ellison 2007). The elements of self-presentation could therefore be divided into two main categories: personal profile information and relational or network information. While studies of SNSs have primarily concentrated on individual profiles, bands' pages on social networking sites can be interpreted along the same aspects. My analysis of the online self-presentation of bands offers an exploration of both basic types of shared information in the particular context of locally based music making.

The distinction between earlier forms of public CMC and social networking sites, as pointed out earlier, is a crucial one, and studies of the nature of SNS-based networks as well as offline networks are also essential if we aim to understand the way people use the Internet in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. However, to date no systematic research has been published regarding the relationship of music making or music scenes and online social networking. While the thesis does not attempt to provide a systematic, large sample-based social network analysis, it proposes to employ a social network approach in order to map the complexity of online and offline spaces and meaningful relationships of music making.

## Conceptualising the Internet and society

Theories of the relationship between the Internet and society have been crucial in informing the present research. As observed above, studies of music networks (such as Webb 2007) have not necessarily provided sufficient analysis of the relationship of (online) technology and networks. Exceptions to this are some case studies on ‘virtual scenes’ or communities (e.g. Kibby 2000, Lee and Peterson 2004, Hodgkinson 2004) – these, on the other hand, vary in the extent to which they provide a dynamic analysis of scenes and communities, or an adequate theorisation of the relationship between the online and the offline.<sup>26</sup> In general, in order to be able to draw conclusions regarding the relationship between online activity and offline experience, we need to consider the role and positioning of the Internet in relation to society, as well as society’s relation to the Internet.

### **Subjectivity and the development of communication technology**

Critical theorist Mark Poster identifies the two main strands of innovative intellectual thought aiming to understand the ‘general conditions of life’ around the second millennium as the theories of postmodern culture or society on the one hand, and the discussion concerning the vast technological changes in communications systems and media on the other (2006: 533).<sup>27</sup> Acknowledging the merits and productivity of both of these theoretical strands, he establishes a need for their integration into a coherent theory of cultural and social conditions superseding the modern era. This integrated theory would at the same time enable the identification of the limitations of both discussions: ‘a critical understanding of the new communications systems requires an evaluation of the type of subject it encourages, while a viable articulation of postmodernity must include an elaboration of its relation to new technologies of communication’ (533).

Innovations such as the Internet and other communications technologies (e.g. the mobile phone, the mp3 player, or the combinations of these) are not only intriguing – and at

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<sup>26</sup> Hodgkinson’s (2007) is one of the most valuable studies of the relationship between a ‘translocal’ music scene and changing online technology.

<sup>27</sup> The development of communication, along with other technological developments from the final third of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, has been accompanied by the sense of a new era – a different type of society resulting from a structural shift, generally theorised as the ‘postmodern’ era or the ‘information society.’ The postmodern or the age of information is generally contrasted with the modern era, which in the Western world had grown out of industrialisation processes, the accompanying economic and political system of capitalism, the Protestant ethic as an underlying set of moral principles, the philosophy of rationalism, and gradual secularisation.

the same time potentially threatening – phenomena because they are (re)shaping the structure of human interaction and information exchange. Through restructuring our communicative habits, they even have the potential to change the way we define ourselves as individuals, position ourselves in society and are positioned as subjects. According to Poster, the rational, coherent and centred individual of modernity is morphing into something fundamentally different along with the technological developments (2006: 534). This postmodern subjectivity is typically understood as more fragmented, more fluid than the modern individual.<sup>28</sup>

Changing practices of listening to music may in fact be an important area where this shift can be grasped. Anahid Kassabian (2002) proposes a theory of subjectivity based on the phenomenon of ‘ubiquitous music’ – music that accompanies other activities, such as music in working, business or retail environments, or is heard as part of television programmes, films, audio books etc. The presence of ubiquitous music entails the development of a particular – ubiquitous – type of listening, characterised by a so-called ‘sourcelessness’ (Kassabian 2002: 137), as well as a particular type of subjectivity constructed through this mode of listening. This is based on a type of *connected* consciousness, on the experience of being ‘networked-through-music’ (140). It needs to be emphasised that online spaces form an important part of this context of listening, since music, whether as a deliberate product, as the topic of discussion, or as accompanying other content, is ubiquitous on the Internet. Studying the world of music is therefore crucial if we want to understand the relationship of the Internet to subjectivities and collectivities.

There is a parallel dimension to the effects of technology on subjectivity and collectivity which receives less emphasis in Poster’s discussion: while changes in technology necessarily affect the individual subject as well as the social environment, developments in technology are themselves informed and influenced by the (changing) cultural and social context. A different way of phrasing this problem is by recognising and locating the

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<sup>28</sup> The idea of the fluidity of identity, of the interconnectedness of subjectivities and the dynamic relationship between social and individual structures is grounded in several theoretical strands, including the undermining of fundamental binary oppositions of modernism by post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, as well as Deleuze and Guattari’s (1977) ‘deterritorialization’ and model of the non-hierarchical rhizomatic structure. Social theories regarding the performative aspect of identity have also contributed to this notion of the postmodern (c.f. Erving Goffman’s theory of the presentation of self or the performativity of gender and sexuality as theorised by Butler [1990]). From a different perspective, with reference to the particular economic and political conditions of the era following the modern, the postmodern self has been theorised as a self primarily constructed through practices of consumption (Hankiss 2006).

artificiality of the technological – social divide.<sup>29</sup> As Christine Hine asserts in her *Virtual Ethnography*, it is ‘unhelpful to think of technical and social as two different things’ (2000: 33). The Internet can be seen ‘as thoroughly socially shaped both in the history of its development and in the moments of its use:’

The ways in which the Internet is currently understood and used are the upshot of historical (as an embodiment of Cold War military ideals or as a triumph of humanitarian ideals over said military ideals), cultural (through mass media in differing national context), situational (in institutional and domestic contexts within which the technology acquires symbolic meaning), and metaphorical (through the concepts available for thinking about the technology) shaping.

(Hine 2000: 32)

The emphasis here is on socio-cultural shaping and embeddedness: ‘the technologies that we end up with could always have been otherwise’ (33). Importantly, it also follows from the socially shaped nature of technology that ‘[i]n analysing the Internet, what might seem technical features or inherent characteristics are [...] open to ethnographic investigation’ (34). Rheingold similarly draws attention to the role of users in adapting the available technology for their own – we can add, socially and culturally conditioned – uses and requirements:

A continuing theme throughout the history of CMC is the way people adapt technologies designed for one purpose to suit their own, very different, communication needs. And the most profound technological changes have come from the fringes and subcultures, not the orthodoxy of the computer industry or academic computer science.

(Rheingold 2000)

The observation draws attention to the importance of studying the way people use and engage with technology, as well as the ways in which patterns of usage, attitudes, and needs influence or shape new technology. Contrary to Rheingold’s suggestion, however, ‘subcultures’ or ‘the fringes’ are not the exclusive sources of change – the ‘mainstream’ use of social networking sites such as MySpace.com or Facebook.com provides fairly obvious counter-examples. These sites have constantly evolved, to a great extent as a result of general, everyday usage patterns – amongst them practices of music consumption, promotion, and sharing –, constituting a history of subtle breaches and extensions of the originally intended usage.

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<sup>29</sup> Convincingly arguing for the social-cultural embeddedness of our technological world, Sterne (2003) provides a thorough and insightful social history of what he terms ‘audile techniques’ and the corresponding sound technologies. He presents a detailed analysis of the mutual relationship between scientific as well as popular notions regarding the nature of sound and hearing and the technological innovations related to sound.

## ‘Cyberspace’ and the Internet as ‘media’

The Internet will be understood in the thesis as an aggregate of interactive spaces, connections between spaces, (multimedia) texts, and connections between texts.<sup>30</sup> This definition can be considered as an integration of a number of perspectives. Steve Jones’ initial premise in *Doing Internet Research* (1999a) reiterates the role of technology in shaping of our social, cultural, and ideological world: ‘[t]he Internet is not only a technology but an engine of social change, one that has modified work habits, education, social relations generally, and, maybe most important, our hopes and dreams’ (1999b: 2). While the claim in this form is too general – it does not consider inequalities in access to the Internet, nor the variety and inequalities in its usage –, it does justify the necessity of a continuing critical enquiry with regard to the medium and its social context. The Internet is defined here as ‘a social space, a milieu, made up of, and made possible by, communication (the cornerstone of community and society)’ (ibid).

‘Cyberspace studies’ as a broad theoretical strand echoes Jones’ interpretation in its understanding of the Internet as social space. Rheingold provides the following definition of the concept:

**Cyberspace**, originally a term from William Gibson’s science-fiction novel *Neuromancer*, is the name some people use for the conceptual space where words, human relationships, data, wealth, and power are manifested by people using CMC technology.

(Rheingold 2000 [online])<sup>31</sup>

The definition implies that the primary connotation of the term cyberspace is the *subjective* experience – the world of the Internet conceptualised by participants as a spatial environment. At the same time, however, it also incorporates the notion of *collectivity*: the essence of cyberspace is its connectedness, the flow of information, meanings, goods, power, and so forth among people using the Internet. In a sense, a parallel can be drawn between this concept of cyberspace, and the notions of space and locality as they are understood in the present thesis. ‘Locality’ is used to refer to the meanings, values, and identities associated with a geographically definable place that are at once subjective and collective.

As well as ‘space,’ the Internet has been theorised and described as a medium, in comparison with other media. Even though its global range suggests the use of the term ‘mass

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<sup>30</sup> See also Chapter 2 for the conceptualisation of the Internet as research field.

<sup>31</sup> The reference is to Gibson (1984).

medium,' a crucial difference between the Internet and other mass media such as television, radio, or the printed press is its personalised use and content,<sup>32</sup> as well as the variety of the offered patterns of communication. The Internet enables many-to-many communication, as well as both synchronous and asynchronous communication (Cresser, Gunn, and Balme 2001: 469). Rafaeli defines the following five distinctive qualities along which communication on the Internet can be delineated: 'multimedia, hypertextuality, packet switching [i.e. oblivious to the routes of information], synchronicity, and interactivity' (Newhagen and Rafaeli 1996: 4).

At the same time, studies of communication media assume the existence of an audience corresponding to each particular medium – but how is audience to be understood in relation to the Internet? There is no straightforward answer – precisely because of the complicated patterns of communication. Representing the perspective of communication studies, Sonia Livingstone discusses the meaning and (ir)relevance of 'audience research' in the age of the Internet, while also reflecting on the unique communication pattern of online media:

[...] mediated communication is no longer simply or even mainly mass communication ('from one to many') but rather the media now facilitate communication among peers (both 'one to many' and 'many to many'). Perhaps even this distinction – between peer-to-peer and mass or broadcast communication – is becoming outdated as new and hybrid modes of communication evolve.

(Livingstone 2004: 76-77)

In more concrete terms, I would argue that the extent of participation – indeed, mass-level – in the production of content makes the traditional mass media perspective – implying content produced by a relatively smaller group of people for the consumption of the masses – irrelevant. The masses are potentially or actually producers and consumers at the same time within a highly complex hierarchical system, where hierarchy is primarily determined by access to information and the visibility of content. As my analysis will show, the usage of MySpace by musicians and fans confirms this.

I also propose that the Internet be understood as media in the plural, for the reasons that it is not only 'multimedia' in terms of representation, but also incorporates traditional media such as radio, television, telephone, alongside its own unique communication channels with diverse – one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many – sender and receiver patterns. In accordance with this, an ethnographic study of the Internet necessarily needs to consider the

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<sup>32</sup> This applies even if with the ever-growing number of television channels, including thematic channels, and the digital technology-induced changes in television viewing possibilities, in the Western world at least television itself is becoming at least potentially more and more personalised.

particularities of the different forms of online communication such as websites, weblogs, message boards, chat rooms, and so forth, along with the (increasingly) integrated forms of the mentioned media. It is only through the mapping of the specific patterns of communication and exchange that an understanding of the hierarchical structures of new media usage may become a possibility.

### **Global flows and local contexts**

The studying of relations of time and space in the context of the online and the offline are central to the aims of the present study. This includes consideration of the levels of the virtual, the local (the city), the translocal (connections between the city and other places around the world, whether concrete or symbolic), as well as the global (through the global music industry and the potentially global music listener public). Global technologies of communication and information influence not only our notions of space and distance, of time and duration, but also shape and structure our movement, as well as the movement of information, money, goods, and the distribution of power. Internet technology – in conjunction with other types of communication technology such as ‘video, cable television, photocopying, personal computers, faxes, satellite communication’ (Connell and Gibson 2003: 64) – has not only shaped the ways we listen to music, it has also enormously broadened the available selection of music, helped to create new markets, drawn ‘more places [...] into the reach of companies distributing music beyond its own region’ (Connell and Gibson 2003: 251). It has assisted musicians not only with the distribution and marketing of their music, but also with organising concert tours (Kruse 2010: 632), establishing translocal fan bases, record contracts, and the list continues. Moreover, it has influenced music itself, establishing new translocal paths of influence, inspiration, and creative collaboration.

The viewpoint of international homogenisation emphasises that today local cultures are constantly being shaped by global processes and influenced by global patterns (industrial, social, aesthetic, etc.) according to a hierarchy of power relations. Global media play a crucial role in the transmission of global patterns. On the other hand, local cultures have the potential to gain space for global-level representation through the same media, which means the process is not unidirectional. Understanding the dynamics between these two counter-directional but simultaneous processes is crucial if we aim to locate music making worlds that

are simultaneously locally based and connected to other places, as well as a global music industry, through communication technologies.

On the macro-level, Arjun Appadurai's (1990) theory of 'scapes' offers a response to the question of whether global flows and influences result in homogenisation or enable heterogenisation based on localities. His 'ethnoscapes,' 'mediascapes,' 'technoscapes,' 'finanscapes,' and 'ideoscapes,' based on the notion of 'global cultural flow,' provide a valuable theoretical framework for transcending traditional understandings of global economy in terms of more deterministic centre – periphery models (Appadurai 1990: 296). The concept of 'scapes' emphasises movement and connections: for example, ethnoscapes are constructed through the movement of people – tourists, immigrants, refugees, and so forth (297); technoscapes refer to the (unequal) distribution of technology, based on local conditions as well as global routes (297-298); mediascapes are typically 'image-centred narrative-based accounts of strips of reality' that form 'complex sets of metaphors by which people live' (299). His theory reinforces the idea that a theoretical integration of the local and the global must focus on connectivity.

### **Space, time, and the network society**

Along with movements or flows, the concept of the *network* is crucial in any theory of contemporary global society, economy, and culture. Manuel Castells, the groundbreaking theoretician of the 'network society,' dedicates separate chapters for the aspects of time and space in *Rise of the Network Society*, the first volume of his trilogy *The Information Age* (Castells 1996, 1997, and 1998), while emphasising the interconnectedness of the two aspects. The theory of the network society, primarily due to its macro-scope, has proven to be a highly influential framework for studying cultures in the age of the Internet. I present an overview of the key concepts relevant to the questions posed in the thesis, as Castells' concepts suggest possible directions for the resolving the observed dilemmas in relation to the local and the global, cultural homogenisation and heterogeneity.

Castells' theory of space is significant because it arguably applies to virtual as well as physical spaces. Through arguing for the theory's relevance to the online context, I also intend to demonstrate that 'space' is a valid framework for theorising the Internet and understanding online practices. Castells characterises the interaction between technology (which enables global flows), society, and space through two central notions: the 'space of flows' versus the 'space of places' (1996: 407-459). The more dynamic 'space of flows' is



employed to indicate interconnectedness and (structured) movement, and can thus be compared to Appadurai's 'scapes.' 'Spatial forms and processes,' Castells writes, 'are formed by the dynamics of the overall social structure' (441). At the same time, however, he also thinks of space itself as structure: 'space is not a reflection of society, it is its expression' [...]'Furthermore, social processes influence space by acting on the built environment inherited from previous socio-spatial structures' (441). In this sense, his understanding of space is close to what we more generally understand as 'place' – a geographical environment with layers of history, visually manifesting the social structures that have occupied and inhabited it.<sup>33</sup> In the following chapters, I aim to demonstrate that online spaces may in the same way have their own histories and inscriptions evident of social relationship structures, and can therefore be experienced by their users – inhabitants – as a 'space of places' as well as 'space of flows.'

Time, on the other hand, is described by Castells as 'local' in the sense that it is specific to a given context. He argues that in the network society, time uses 'technology to escape the contexts of its existence, and to appropriate selectively any value each context could offer to the ever-present' (464). While this concept in itself is both vague and debatable, it can be accepted that spaces, including virtual ones, have their corresponding time structures in experiential terms. Whether these are spaces of flows, of movement, corresponding to Clifford's (1997) 'routes,'<sup>34</sup> or spaces of places, i.e. fixed locales or 'roots,' they are being formed by time – by history –, and they themselves shape – social and experiential – time.

Castells' network is a *global* network,<sup>35</sup> and its main nodes are *global cities* – the sources and meeting points of global flows of information, money, goods, people, and labour force. The global city in his understanding is a process 'by which centers of production and consumption of advanced services, and their ancillary local societies, are connected in a global network' (Castells 1996: 417). Importantly, Castells emphasises translocal interconnectedness in the sense that the 'global city phenomenon' cannot be reduced to the urban cores at the top of the hierarchy: everything is interrelated ('the urban roller-coaster [of growth and crisis] at different periods, across areas of the world, illustrates both the

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<sup>33</sup> Castells himself defines place as '*a locale whose form, function and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity*' (1996: 453 [italics in the original]).

<sup>34</sup> Clifford (1997) uses the term 'roots' to refer to local particularities and 'routes' to describe the connections between these, as embodied by movement of people and cultures.

<sup>35</sup> See also the similar description of Ulf Hannerz: 'the world has become one network of social relationships, and between its different regions there is a flow of meanings as well as of people and goods' (Hannerz: 237).

dependence and vulnerability of any locale, including major cities, to changing global flows') (415).

It also follows from this global interconnectedness that the process of 'globalization stimulates regionalization' (Castells 1996: 411), that is, flows of information and resources to and from a local region can reinforce the existing local economic and social conditions. This concept provides an answer to the (cultural) homogenisation versus heterogeneity debate mentioned above. While phrased in general terms, the same also applies more specifically to the world of music making and the music industries. Nevertheless, while Castells' is a perfectly logical model, supported by his analysis of the functioning of actual cities and megalopolises, it undoubtedly lacks as regards people's everyday practices and making sense of their environment.

My own research takes place within a city, and understands the local as the city environment. This understanding, on the one hand, incorporates the notion of global interconnectedness in the sense that the activities and discourse of the observed musicians, fans, organisers of events, and music industry representatives are interpreted in the context of translocal or global flows. This may refer to the global dynamics of the industry (such as the trend of moving towards live performance as a primary source of income instead of record sales), as well as aesthetics and practices related to musical genre and style across localities.

On the other hand, a second aspect of the global network, in simple terms, is the fact that culture transmitted via global media is nevertheless always received, interpreted, and integrated within localised contexts. As a result, the reception of certain content, goods, and so forth will never be homogenous all over the globe. The process whereby global media culture is re-interpreted within a local environment – such as the home, the neighbourhood, the city, the region – has been termed 're-territorialisation.' The theory of re-territorialisation is a direct critique of the so-called 'deterritorialisation' claim, often made in relation to electronic media, typically with a varying extent of collective anxiety (and, perhaps, accompanying nostalgia for locality in the traditional sense).

Networks of music making are not arbitrary or chaotic but economically, politically, and even geographically structured. Moreover, in the same way as Castells observes in connection with the 'global city,' smaller levels such as locally based music scenes, scenes around record labels etc. – may have social-economic-symbolic structures parallel to the levels above, while functioning as smaller individual units in themselves (1996: 411). My ensuing examples are to be considered as an attempt to establish, firstly, whether a network connected to a specific geographical locale, the city of Liverpool (not encompassing the city

but comprising a particular segment), can be considered such a unit; and secondly, in what ways it is connected to wider networks of music production, distribution and consumption.

### **Experience of time and space**

Castells himself observes that the role of the Internet, along with other communication technology, is crucial in maintaining the ‘space of flows:’ ‘[t]he first layer, the first material support of the space flows, is actually constituted by a circuit of electronic exchanges’ (1996: 442).<sup>36</sup> It is the electronic network that ‘links up specific places, with well-defined social, cultural, physical, and functional characteristics’ (443) – which functional characteristics determine the weight and role of places within the network.

This theoretical framework, however, is not adequate for the consideration of time and space as *experienced* in relation to online technology. The relationship of the Internet to time and space in terms of social experience is described through the notions of *speed* and *immediacy* by John Tomlinson (2007). The concept of speed is a well-chosen one as it effectively combines the aspects of space – in the form of distance – and time, and incorporates their interconnected nature, but at the same time focuses on the collective subjective experience. Tomlinson understands speed as a cultural construction particular to societies and historical eras. Modern societies, in particular industrialised, urbanised areas are characterised by the experience of fast pace, which arises in tandem with the experience or narrative of ‘the conquest of nature by mechanism’ (Tomlinson 2007: 9). The experience of fast pace includes a large number of incidents within one day and the felt demands of this (2-3).

As the next phase, the combination of globalisation and the new media technology of our contemporary society – the ‘telemediated experience’ (Tomlinson 2007: 94) – has led to the emergence of a sense of *immediacy*. Along with Zygmunt Bauman (2002), who speaks of ‘liquid modernity’ in relation to contemporary society, Tomlinson does not accept the clear distinction between modern and postmodern society (clearly embraced by Castells), emphasising continuity instead, and identifying the shift as the shift from a culture of speed to one of immediacy. It is this view, rather than Castells,’ that informed my understanding of the relationship of time and space of people operating in culturally and socially situated

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<sup>36</sup> The second layer is its nodes and hubs, while the third layer is ‘the spatial organization of the dominant, managerial elites (rather than classes) that exercise the directional functions around which such space is articulated’ (Castells 1996: 443-444).

environments. As the examples in Chapter 7 will demonstrate, the immediacy enabled by the Internet has entirely tangible effects on the careers of bands and the life-cycle of a locally based music scene.

In both Castells' theory of space and Tomlinson's principle of immediacy, the influence of the idea of 'time – space compression' as a result of late modern technology, originally phrased by David Harvey (1990), is evident. 'Time – space compression,' in other words, refers to the shortening (or rapidity) of time and the shrinking of space – the reduction or disappearance of distance due to increased mobility and new media technology. This theory might imply a tendency towards 'spacelessness' or 'no sense of place' (Meyrowitz 1985), that is, the dissolution of localities due to increased interconnectedness and all-encompassing mediatedness. As Meyrowitz observes, the constant presence of the 'whole world' within the domestic environment through television and the radio has led to the dissolution of boundaries between the public and the private. The same argumentation has been applied to the Internet, yet this will be challenged in the thesis through the observation of the particularities of online communication and its embeddedness in offline context.

## **Summary**

A review of existing literature regarding, firstly, music making, place, and genre, and secondly, as music making and the Internet, as well as the relationship between the Internet and society, has enabled the refinement of the aims of the study stated in the Introduction. I have observed that since its first in-depth conceptualisation by Straw (1991), the notion of the 'scene' has been an important tool for describing the relationship of music, place, and in most cases, genre. At the same time, its academic usage has been too ambiguous, and often too vague, to be uncritically employed for the purposes of my research. The thesis therefore seeks to identify critical criteria on the basis of which the concept can be rethought and (re)defined.

Firstly, both ethnographic studies of music scenes (e.g. Bennett 2000; 2004b) and more theoretically oriented studies (e.g. Straw 1991; 2001) have focused on place and locality, and have thus been highly informative with regard to the objective of my research to describe the relationship of music making and place in the age of the Internet. However, I have also pointed out that connectivity – between spaces or places – and movement – of music, musicians, ideas – has received less scholarly attention – Kruse (1993; 2003) is a notable exception. In order to make up for this shortcoming, I will integrate the concept of the

scene with theoretical strands describing the relationship of individuals and collectives to the Internet in terms of an individual-centred network, and employ the concept of the network to complement that of the scene in describing music making in an offline and online context (Chapter 7). This network concept can be viewed as an extension of Leyshon's (2001) description of the musical scene as a network of creativity. Such a framework will also enable the description of connections of locality to more distant spaces and places. The focus on connectivity through the concept of the network, moreover, also helps us to focus on less 'dominant' or clearly visible music making activity and social groups – as I observed in relation to the definition provided by Shank (1994), scene research has a danger of accentuating the most visible aspects of a city's music making activity.

Secondly, in line with most scene research, I aim to address the question of genre through looking at not only to place and locality, but also translocal interconnectivity – as emphasised by Hodkinson (2004). In particular, I aim to look at the role of online representations and discursive activity such as self-presentation and interaction in the establishment and maintenance of translocal symbolic connections relating to musical taste, genre, and style (Chapters 4 and 5). The empirically grounded ethnographic exploration of participants' discursive as well as music making practices helps to understand what 'indie' means in the present local and online context. As observed, regardless of the existence of invaluable studies of indie (from a variety of perspectives – Hesmondhalgh 1999; Fonarow 2006; Bannister 2006; Strachan 2007), the fragmentation of the genre evident from the variety of genre labels in use has not been sufficiently reflected on. While providing a comprehensive exploration of indie as a genre is not an aim of the thesis, the analysis offers tools with regard to the understanding of genre in its relationship to place and communication technologies.

Thirdly, I look at the temporal aspect of music scenes, which, apart from some – largely theoretical – reflection on the lifespan (Lee and Peterson 2004), the conservative nature (Straw 2001), or the mortality (Blum 2003) of scenes, has not formed as important an aspect of understanding scenes in popular music studies as spatiality. I will demonstrate how the dynamic between conservation and transience implied by Straw's and Blum's theories, as well as Shank's analysis, is manifested on the level of symbolic representations, online and offline practices, and the experience of participants in music making. In broader terms, I also demonstrate that temporality is a crucial aspect whereby the continuities as well as discrepancies between online and offline spaces can be grasped.

Fourthly, the thesis will also demonstrate how visibility and representation, two crucial aspects of scenes (corresponding to the aspect of 'theatricality' in Blum's

terminology) are to be understood in the online context. In particular, it will point to the ways in which online technology has enhanced the visibility of scenes and music networks. Following up on the influential works of Finnegan (1989) and Cohen (1991), the mentioned objectives are achieved through a study of ‘musical practices’ understood as both online and offline, and including discourse and narratives.

In broader theoretical terms, the findings of the research suggest a need for deconstruction and integration of the levels of the local (the city), the translocal (concrete and symbolic connections between places and localities), and the virtual (online). This becomes possible through, firstly, the study of the representation of space, place and locality in the online context – Chapter 6 will show how the integration of the three levels is manifest in the online presence and discourse of bands and music events. Secondly, it becomes possible through a focus on interpersonal connections with the help of the network concept (Chapter 7). The ‘post-subcultural’ concept of the ‘neo-tribe,’ while also placing the emphasis on connectivity rather than place, appears too genre-specific, and therefore not convincingly applicable to the subjectivities, practices, aesthetics – the ‘logic’ (c.f. Straw 1991) – of indie. Hodkinson’s (2004) ‘media links’ is a helpful framework, but here such translocal links are also understood as ones reinforcing the relationship between the online and the offline.

Along with other authors, I have identified a need for directly and critically addressing the so-called online – offline dichotomy, whereby the former is perceived as mediated, and the latter as direct (Sterne 1999: 269), and the former is associated with globalisation and homogenisation, and the latter with locality, community and heterogeneity. The thesis performs this through an exploration of the continuity of (self-)representation, experience, social relations, and practices across offline and online spaces, which leads to the mentioned integration of the levels of local, translocal, and virtual. The grounded definition of the scene that arises from this exploration reflects this continuity.

As part of the exploration of social groups and the Internet, the thesis, moreover, directly engages with the question of technology and the social, acknowledging the relevance of both the ‘social construction of technology’ hypothesis and the impact of technological structure on the social. With regard to the former, I aim to demonstrate some ways in which usage patterns have shaped the architecture of the Internet. This perspective also draws attention to the crucial role of music and music making in the shaping of online communication technology, highlighting the necessity of studying music and the Internet. With regard to the latter perspective, I aim to demonstrate the ways certain structural features have shaped communication relating to music. For example, the artist – fan dichotomy, a

critical point in both Kibby's (2000) and Cavicchi's (1998) account, is questioned through an analysis of the discursive roles, attitudes, and affiliations expressed through online communication. The analysis will demonstrate that the particularities of this online communication are in part due to features of the media.

Nonetheless, instead of hypothesising a qualitative difference between 'new music communities' (Jones 2002) and more traditional ones, the thesis also aims at looking for continuities. These are most evident in relation to genre conventions: the 'traditional' ethics and aesthetics of indie also inform participation within the more novel spaces of the Internet, and are therefore also traceable in online representations and practices. The Internet can enhance the visibility of these, and may also serve to visually preserve them. A further way to critique the 'new music communities' hypothesis is to point to structural differences between particular kinds of online interaction forms and the way these shape, and are shaped by, music and music making. In the Web 2.0 era, especially in relation to SNSs, 'communities' have to be understood differently from the 1990s, when most of the conceptually founding academic literature was produced. The conceptual framework proposed by the thesis, in particular the use of the network concept and the understanding of spatiality and temporality through social and communicative practices, reflects the mentioned structural changes, as well as the corresponding changes in usage and experience. The research methods and perspective that enabled the addressing of the aims presented above are discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 2 Researching the online and offline world of music making**

This chapter explains the ethnographic research methods employed in the study. The main stages – and therefore problematic areas – of ethnographic research can be identified as the following: the selection and sampling of cases; the question of access; the process of observation and interviewing (and further complementary methods in the present case); the recording and organising of data; data analysis; and finally, ethnographic writing (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007). As a first step, a definition of the ethnographic approach is offered – what it involves in more general terms, how it is understood in the thesis, and in what ways it contributes to the achievement of the identified objectives. I also reflect on the specificities of the Internet as research field. This is followed by the introduction of the specific methods applied for the generation and analysis of data (namely observation and qualitative description, interviews, content and discourse analysis, qualitative analysis, and network mapping and analysis), along with an explanation of the objectives of these methods and a number of potentially problematic issues. The second section of the chapter focuses on the participant observer approach assumed in the study. Firstly, the researcher's role – more precisely, roles – and self-positioning in relation to the field is established, which is followed by a discussion of questions arising in connection with the so-called 'insider knowledge.' Finally, the ethical questions arising from the study are addressed.

In his overview of researching cybercultures, Bell observes that research conducted in cyberspace has opened up old methodological debates (2001: 187). A fresh research field may undoubtedly encourage a researcher attitude with enhanced self-reflexivity and flexibility – Hine's (2000) defining work on 'virtual ethnography' exemplifies this attitude. The online environment, however, is only part of my research setting: online spaces of social interaction are all embedded in the kind of social worlds that have formed the object of critical enquiry in the social sciences for more than a century. The methods of research, correspondingly, have to attest not only to an awareness of the different social environments in which critical enquiry takes place, but also the continuities between them. The present chapter proposes a valid research methodology for the study of the relationship of the online and offline social spaces within which music making activity occurs. The approach of ethnography with participant observation was chosen as best suited for this purpose. Rather than relying on an artificial separation of online and offline spaces, ethnographic methods instead help to understand the qualities of their interconnectedness. This objective is achieved by focusing on the experience



and practices of participants, their mutual interaction with the specific environments in which they operate, and the meanings generated and negotiated as a result of this interaction.

## **1 The ethnographic approach**

The present study employs a number of distinct research methods bound together by the ethnographic approach. ‘Ethnography’ is undeniably a broad term, with definitions and applications varying across authors and studies. As a method originally developed in social anthropology (Cohen 1993: 123) to then become more and more popular in other disciplines, it has traditionally been placed in opposition to quantitative sociological methods such as survey research. Moreover, according to Atkinson and Hammersley, it has ‘[i]ncreasingly [...] been compared and contrasted not just with experimental and survey research but also with interview-based studies, macro-historical analysis, political economy, conversation and discourse analysis, and psycho-social approaches’ (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007: 2) – in other words, methods not only on the quantitative end of the scale, but also primarily qualitative ones. In spite of this, some authors do include qualitative interviews and even discourse analysis within their ethnography (see e.g. the ‘extensive netnographic analysis’ of Giesler [2006: 22], applied to the studying of online file-sharing). Dirksen, Husing and Smit (2010) define their online and offline enquiry as ‘connective ethnography,’ a method appropriate to the analysis of connections between people, objects, and texts in simultaneously online and offline settings. Their methods, very similarly to the present study, include discourse analysis, offline interviews, participant observation in both offline and virtual spaces, and online textual analysis. In studies such as Giesler’s and that of Dirksen et al., ‘ethnography’ primarily connotes an approach, and not one single method. In the present enquiry, the term is to be understood in the same sense: as a complex set of methods linked by the same approach, but including methods closer to the quantitative end of the continuum.

The specific requirements of ethnography depend on the particularities of the research object and setting. Nevertheless, it is also possible to identify typical and essential characteristics of the ethnographic approach. Ethnography ‘in the anthropological sense,’ according to Cohen, ‘is the description and interpretation of a way of life (or “culture”),’ and ‘should focus upon social relationships,’ which in the case of popular music means ‘emphasising music as social practice and process’ (1993: 123). One central feature is ‘a

fundamental commitment to developing a deep understanding through participation and observation' (Hine 2000: 41). Underlying this commitment is an epistemological assumption that knowledge about the social world can be generated through an immersion in naturally occurring settings, as opposed to, for instance, experimental environments (c.f. Mason 2002: 85). A second key quality is the 'initially explorative character' of ethnography (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007: 4), which can also be referred to as a 'grounded' approach. This means that the key categories within the study – participants, relationships, locations – are determined throughout the course of the research, instead of being incorporated into the research design in advance.

The conventions of ethnography change over time and across social contexts (c.f. Clifford and Marcus 1986: 6). Along with the emergence of the Internet as a research setting, the conventions of online ethnographic research – sometimes termed 'netnography' or 'cyberethnography'<sup>37</sup> – have also been established. For instance, as opposed to 'traditional' ethnographies conducted in locally bounded settings such as a village, a school, a festival and so forth, virtual ethnography places greater emphasis on the analysis of written text and content in general, corresponding to the characteristics of online media. The online context also allows a variety of researcher roles such as active participation (e.g. through contributing to a message board) or 'lurking' (observing without making one's presence known in any way). At the same time, it often helps the researcher to maintain a degree of 'naturalness' that is at times more problematic to achieve in an offline setting (for example, because one can be more visible offline).

However, 'cyberspace never stands still,' as Bell rightly observes, 'so neither can the ways we think about researching it and researching in it' (2001: 187). The importance of this statement cannot be overstated. The Internet and the ways we use online media have undergone enormous changes since the first coherent ethnographic studies conducted in the virtual world. Technological improvements such as broadband and wireless connection have ensured an increasing speed and access to online content. The so-called Web 2.0 turn is manifest in the ubiquity of user-centred websites; free and editable online content; news sites that encourage discursive participation by allowing comments; the 'blogosphere,' that is, the multitude of all kinds of blogs (online journals) along the whole range of the personal – professional continuum; the appearance and rapid spread of social networking sites such as MySpace; user-based information portals such as Wikipedia; and content-sharing websites

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<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Ignacio (2006), Rybas and Gajjala (2007), Perkins (2010); also Farnsworth and Austrin (2010) for a discussion of ethnography in 'new media worlds.'

such as the video sharing site YouTube. These technological changes are accompanied by evolving modes of use and participation, as well as changing relationships between the online and the offline. The latter, in very general terms, can be described as an increasing interconnectedness of the two modes – in other words, the increasing integration of online media into the social world and people’s lives.<sup>38</sup> Shifting modes of participation require flexible research methods, along with a researcher role that is sensitive to the modes of participation typical within the research setting.

Conceptualising the field is essential in order to determine the kind of knowledge that will be generated in the research (Beaulieu 2005: 183). The Internet here is viewed as a set of communication media as well as a collective of interactive, informational, and content sharing spaces that are embedded in a broader offline social context. While it could be argued that this understanding incorporates a variety of perspectives, these are equally relevant. According to Bell, the terms ‘virtual ethnography,’ ‘cyberethnography,’ ‘cyberspace ethnography’ – and we could include ‘nethnography,’ and so forth – treat cyberspace as ‘a distinct and discrete world’ (Bell 2001: 196). This is a valid observation, even if there are important counter-examples, such as Hine’s (2000) ‘virtual ethnography,’ which incorporates an awareness of the broader context. In enquiries using these notions, the assumption of a virtual or online world as a bounded entity is already made on a methodological level, even if the findings and conclusions may point to the interrelated nature of the online and the offline, and even if the aim of the research may be the transcendence of this boundary – as has often been the case. The present study aims to explore the online world through its relationship with the broader social context.

In her virtual ethnography, Hine proposes a movement ‘away from holism and towards connectivity as an organizing principle,’ and, referring to Olwig and Hastrup, suggests ‘viewing the field, rather than a site, as a “field of relations”’ (Olwig and Hastrup 1997: 8, quoted in Hine 2000: 60). The forthcoming chapters intend to demonstrate that connectivity as an organising principle can be extended to the offline spaces and entities that form part of the enquiry. Hine views this type of ‘connective ethnography’ as a complement to ‘space-based approaches’ (Hine 2000: 62). Similarly, the thesis does not contest the importance of thinking in terms of spaces, while also exploring their interconnectedness.

A further issue related to the object of study can be phrased as *selectivity*: thinking about what is left out of the research and with what consequences. A great amount of online

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<sup>38</sup> On the embeddedness of online communication technology in everyday life, see Baym (2010).

content is public and therefore accessible. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of online interaction, even in the case of social networking sites, is private – taking place in the form of email-type private messages or instant messaging. Furthermore, some content is limited in terms of its publicity – for example, bands’ updates are visible to their online ‘friends’ or members of their group, but not to the occasional visitor. Similarly, certain offline settings are relatively private, such as rehearsals, meetings, friends’ encounters, private parties, and so forth – as opposed to public events, such as live shows. While music making practices potentially also take place in private or semi-private spaces public ones, there are two sets of reasons for their exclusion from the core data. The first group concerns ethics as well as access. While some private communication is potentially accessible – e.g. upon request from the informant –, the use of this type of data raises ethical concerns. Anonymity is usually one possible solution; in the present case, however, we deal with a relatively small number of bands and events, where identification is not difficult for someone with a certain amount of local knowledge. The second group of reasons is theoretical and concerns the aims of the research: the conceptualisation of the ‘scene’ as local and online music making is primarily concerned precisely with what is visible and accessible to participants (as well as others) – the level of collective practices and meanings. There certainly needs to be an awareness of the inherent partiality of ethnography in the context of the present study. Nevertheless, the choices of exclusion and inclusion are indeed strategic, and not arbitrary ones.<sup>39</sup>

The process of data generation

### **Observation and qualitative description**

The core of my ethnography consisted of observation and qualitative description conducted both in the online and the offline setting, with the primary focus on online spaces.

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<sup>39</sup> Hine similarly reflects on the necessary selectivity of her ethnography:

The ethnography constituted by my experiences, my materials and the writings which I produce on the topic is definitely incomplete. There were many strategic choices to be made about which sources of information to visit, and which connections to follow. In particular, the ethnography is partial in relation to its choice of particular applications of the internet to study.

(Hine 2000: 80)

The generation of data<sup>40</sup> from the online content involved, firstly, familiarising myself with the online content. This meant locating, reading, and listening to the content of the relevant music websites, such as the MySpace and Facebook profile pages of bands and events, other types of bands' websites, and online reviews and interviews related to music making in Liverpool. Secondly, it involved saving snapshots of these websites, organised according to band (or event) and dates. The time frame was between April 2007 and December 2009, but the data collection process was not even: during the first, exploratory phase of the fieldwork, I systematically read, listened to, and saved the websites or profiles of all rock bands encountered in Liverpool. This 'pool' then enabled the selection of a narrower sample.

The initial process of getting familiar with the environment of music making was informed by written, oral, and aural popular music histories. The discovery of the rock music world of Liverpool through online and offline participation was simultaneous. Participation involved attending gigs, contacting bands after shows, reading the online press, keeping up-to-date with bands' websites and profiles, listening to the music available online and purchasing CDs. This was compounded by attending various other cultural events taking place in the city, such as theatre performances, exhibitions, and festivals involving multiple art forms; beginning to play in bands myself and performing at various venues in Liverpool, most of which featured performances by the bands I observed; joining a contemporary dance group and becoming involved in dance performances; attending different venues, pubs, and clubs involving various forms of music making activity and socialising. These activities were accompanied by further reading and listening, which helped me to place my empirical experiences in a wider cultural – historical context.

Once a narrower sample of bands, venues, and events was selected, I read and saved band blogs, news entries, updates, profile comments on a regular basis to be able to perform longitudinal comparisons and attempt to capture the dynamics of online interaction and content. Of course, at the same time I also kept an eye out for new bands and events, which meant a continuous and reflective process of narrowing and broadening of the pool. It also meant that I was able to reflect on the temporal dynamics of local music making, including the formation of new bands, the disappearance or re-grouping of others, the progress of their careers, and so forth.

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<sup>40</sup> Even though the term 'data collection' is often used in ethnographic accounts, I accept Mason's view that 'it is more accurate to speak of *generating* data than *collecting* data, precisely because most qualitative perspectives would reject the idea that a researcher can be a completely neutral collector of information about the social world' (Mason 2002: 52).

Temporality was therefore also a crucial aspect in relation to the recording and organising of online data. Online content is in continuous flux and requires constant attention in order to keep ‘up-to-date.’ At the same time, a significant proportion of online content remains accessible even after losing its immediacy, and continues to function as an ‘archive.’ As mentioned above, music websites were saved and organised according to dates. On the one hand, the temporal position of the data provided important contextual information. On the other hand, the organisation of online ‘snapshots’ according to dates also facilitated a longitudinal focus, in certain cases enabling observations throughout a band’s career, or through the unfolding of a locally organised event series from its initial stages. Blogs are – perhaps obviously – already organised according to dates, indicating that time is not merely an important analytic concern in the study, but also a relevant structural – organisational aspect for participants.

Offline observations primarily concerned music events in Liverpool such as live shows – gigs – and were recorded in the form of field notes following the events. Photographs and other documents such as flyers complemented the field notes. Participating in music events enabled me to observe the features of performances including musical qualities as well as visual appearance, the behaviour of participants including musicians and the audience, the use of geographical space(s), and the nature and content of the interaction taking place during the event – for instance, between the band and the audience. These occasions, moreover, presented opportunities to engage in conversations with musicians and maintain friendly relationships with my informants, as well as other members of the audience. The conversations complemented the data generated through interviews (see below) and websites.

The type of online data relevant to the research – the content of websites – is to a large extent public, and the same applies to the music events where the offline observation took place. The problem of access<sup>41</sup> therefore arose in a more indirect way. A certain amount of insider or ‘local knowledge’ in the Geertzian sense<sup>42</sup> is necessary for the researcher to be able to interpret content in relation to the particular environment and to judge its relevance and significance. In ethnography, this process of ‘making sense of’ content can be referred to by the term ‘immersion’ in the field. For example, my research required an existing familiarity with the music style(s) of indie rock/pop in terms of its musical and performance conventions, its audience, recording conventions, and industry. It also required knowledge of the functioning and user practices of social networking sites, and in particular familiarity with the

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<sup>41</sup> C.f. ‘Access’ in Atkinson and Hammersley 2007: 41-62

<sup>42</sup> Geertz 1983

ways bands and musicians, music fans, music industry representatives, or the music press use online spaces. While the ‘local’<sup>43</sup> particularities of the research environment had been unfamiliar and formed the object of my enquiry, contextual knowledge assisted participation and orientation in the research setting.

## **Interviews**

In order to enrich as well as control data generated through qualitative observation, I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with some of the musicians playing in the observed bands (six interviews in total). The interviews were aimed at generating knowledge about the following main themes: bands’ experience(s) of music making in Liverpool; their relationship with fellow musicians, their audience, local venues, and record labels; their professional (musical) and career aims and objectives; their use of the Internet as a band and individually as musicians; and their perception of the role of online interaction, content sharing, and socialisation in the activity and career of the band. The interviews were also intended to shed light on the musicians’ relationship to Liverpool as a city, and the relationship between their attitudes towards the city and their online activity.<sup>44</sup>

Half of the interviews were conducted online and half face-to-face. I applied the strategy of leaving the choice with the interviewed musicians in order to maintain as ‘natural’ an environment as possible. This enabled me to draw conclusions regarding communicative practices within the studied music-making environment. There are clear advantages and disadvantages to both forms, arising from the particular characteristics of online written versus face-to-face verbal communication. Perhaps obviously, the offline interviews produced more data in volume, as for the people involved it proved less time- and energy-consuming to speak than to write. At the same time, written communication was more precise, focused and to the point, which was advantageous in the sense that I received the types of responses I had been looking for. On the other hand, the freer wanderings of face-to-face conversation also produced plenty of informative data – for example, personal attitudes such as enthusiasm or irony were more visibly expressed face-to-face. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees deliberately chose online communication, and even with those musicians who opted for a

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Local’ here refers to the ‘inside’ of the field (as in ‘local knowledge’), including the online and the offline.

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix 1 for a sample of the list of questions used in the interviews.

face-to-face interview, communication via email and online messages appeared effortless and a usual practice.

The selection of the sample of musicians/bands to be interviewed was informed by the observations of the first phase of the research. The bands were in each case approached via MySpace or email, i.e. online means. This corresponded to the usual practice in such situations as feedback from the audience, a request to play a show from a promoter, a request for collaboration from another band, and so on. Throughout my fieldwork all bands and musicians proved easily approachable, open, and expressive of interest, even enthusiasm about the research. The only difficulty I encountered was organisational: in two cases, following initial interest and responsiveness, the interviews were eventually abandoned due to reasons relating to the timetable of the respective bands. The majority of the interviews were conducted with one single interviewee representing a band, with the exception of one face-to-face interview, which included three band members (again, the choice of this was left to the musicians and their convenience and availability). The set-up including three members was revealing with regard to the dynamics and roles within the group: while in the other cases information regarding group dynamics within the band was provided by one member and therefore filtered through their experience, in this case it was directly observable through the dynamics of communication. To complement the semi-structured interviews, the research also drew on informal written and verbal communication. The former included emails and other online messages specific to the social networking sites the bands used; the latter took place primarily at live events.

## Methods of data analysis

With the aim of attaining a complex view that would enable a grounded understanding of the social, spatial, discursive, and symbolic structure of music scenes based in a simultaneously virtual and a local environment, the analysis was conducted on multiple levels. The primary units of analysis were defined as the following: firstly, bands, selected on the basis of location (Liverpool), musical style (indie rock/pop), career stage (bands either at the beginning of their careers or without having achieved major national-level success by the time of the research), and professional status (unsigned or releasing records through (an) independent label(s) – the individual bands are introduced in Chapter 3). Secondly, music events involving local bands – including one-off shows, music festivals, and other event



series. Thirdly, websites, conceptualised as interactive spaces representing a band, an event, a venue, and so forth. Fourthly, (hyper)links, that is, the connections among online spaces and/or representations. The methods of content and discourse analysis, qualitative analysis, and network mapping and analysis were employed in order to account for these four levels.

### **Content and discourse analysis**

Content and discourse analysis was employed for analysing the text of websites of bands and events, in particular blogs and so-called comment sections, but also including biographies, news, descriptions, announcements, and sent by bands via circular email or other (semi-)private means. The application of the method is based on the understanding of the Internet as an aggregate of texts, as well as a site for interaction (Mitra and Cohen 1999: 180; Hine 2000: 50). While this view originates from the – constricting and somewhat outdated – perspective that regarded the Internet as a mass medium (Mitra and Cohen 1999: 180)<sup>45</sup>, content analysis is a valid method for analysing written online content. In addition to considering the qualities of the written text, the method also enables the exploration of the text's connections to other texts, both online and offline.

The interpreter of the online text – the reader, viewer, listener – also forms part of the text, not only in the form of an implied audience/readership, but in many cases, and to an increasing extent, actively contributing as an author. Mitra and Cohen (1999: 186-9) rightly name the blurring of the reader versus writer distinction as one of the key features of web textuality; the analyses will show that the disappearance of this distinction is also connected to the blurring of boundaries between such roles as musician, fan/audience, and music critic. Discourse analysis in particular focuses on the role of the speaker, and more generally the social and cultural context that makes the text meaningful.<sup>46</sup> The online text, as any other, is always embedded in particular social and power relations. Finding answers to questions about 'who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints?' (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 13) informs us about these social and

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<sup>45</sup> See also Morris and Ogan (1996), who argue for the conceptualisation of the Internet as a mass medium on the grounds that this would also lead to a revision of the concepts of 'mass' and 'medium,' and may even provide fresh answers to some longstanding questions of the field of mass communications research.

<sup>46</sup> 'The text becomes ethnographically (and socially) meaningful once we have cultural context(s) in which to situate it.' (Hine 2000: 52)

power relations, both on the broader, global level – such as the level of the music industries – and the local level – the relations among participants in a particular segment of music making originating from a defined place.

Participation in, and attachment to, music making in a local context is articulated in a large part through interactions: within their discourse, speakers express, share and negotiate opinions, values, knowledge, and group affiliations. Giesler argues that '[d]iscourse, as the means through which the field speaks to itself, plays a major role in the operations of the field' (2006: 49). Thornton (1995) demonstrates how 'discourses of difference around dance culture's claims to authenticity and space should not be treated as "innocent accounts of the way things really are, but ideologies which fulfil the scientific cultural agendas of their beholders" (p.10)' (Elliott 2004: 282). Cavicchi assigns a crucial role to the study of conversations and narratives (stories) in fan culture, emphasising the importance of treating them as representations of meaning, as opposed to mere texts (1998: 19). In a similar vein, Hodgkinson approaches the concept of the (so-called 'post-rock') scene as 'one created through discourse, where shared use of language about music serves itself to construct a musical community (collaboration made possible by a sense of musical community only arising once the virtual scene of post-rock had been discursively constructed)' (2004: 222). Furthermore, genre in music is also negotiated through (collective) value judgements, that is, discursive expressions of musical taste on the part of music consumers (Frith 1996: 67).

I analysed the text of blogs and MySpace profile comments according to keywords and key motifs (e.g. 'friends/family,' 'rehearsing/songs,' 'collaborations,' 'attitude/career,' 'own gig review,' 'travelling/gig'), conversation modes (e.g. meta-commentary, retrospective), and implied audience (e.g. close friends, music consumers). Selecting a period of approximately one year, I made comparisons between bands' blogs along such criteria as frequency of posting, content, attitude to the (implied) audience, attitude to the medium of communication, authorship, and speaker identity. Profile comments were compared according to their frequency, content or purpose of message (e.g. anecdote, information request, praise of song, invitation to play gig), and speaker identity (e.g. profile owner, 'friend band,' press, fan). The purpose of this was to uncover the underlying motives and implicit and explicit aims of communication, as well as the enacted relationships between the communicating musicians and their audience. I also aimed to identify the themes and topics most important and relevant to the bands, along with their corresponding attitudes, values, and preferences. It helped to discover articulated attitudes towards music-related practices (songwriting, rehearsing, recording, performing, promoting and selling music, requesting and negotiating feedback,

etc.) and towards the local – or translocal – environment of music making. The comparative analysis, moreover, enabled the identification of similarities and differences among bands in these respects.

## **Qualitative analysis**

Besides analysing written online content, I also conducted qualitative analysis of non-written content such as images (e.g. the photo albums on bands' profile pages), music (primarily the uploaded tracks), and video material (e.g. promotional videos, live concert videos). Although the majority of online content analysis in the relevant scholarly literature still primarily concerns written text, on the Internet, multimedia content forms a complex set of interlinked texts. The different media – words, images, sound – are organically intertwined, and are to be interpreted with reference to each other. For instance, bands typically used a combination of all mentioned media forms for self-presentation purposes, and all forms appeared as elements of online communication between musicians and their audience.

Online structural characteristics such as website architecture and the particularities of communication media<sup>47</sup> affect the interaction taking place. Structural features were therefore also analysed, including types of content, organisation of content, facilities for interaction, facilities for linking, displaying localities, and the ways of presenting music. The exploration of such features informs us, firstly, about the environment of the interaction around bands and events. This includes the interface where interaction takes place, the available means of self-presentation for participants in the interaction, access and availability for participation and viewing, and so forth. Secondly, it informs us about the ways content – such as biographical information on a band, music, or information on live shows – is presented, which may share similarities with, or differ from, traditional ways of sharing information among participants in music making. Thirdly, it is informative with regard to the possibilities for musicians and other participants to establish connections, that is, the facilities for socialisation or 'networking' activity, as well as the forms in which such activity is represented.

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<sup>47</sup> See Baym (2010) for a detailed overview of social groups, identities and online communication media, and Davis (2010) for MySpace.

## Network mapping and analysis

The theoretical basis of the method of online network mapping is the understanding of the Internet as an aggregate of connections as well as an aggregate of spaces: '[t]he ontology of the World Wide Web is more than simply a question of space, sites, or pages; it is fundamentally concerned with links and motion' (Shields 2000: 145, quoted in Bell 2001: 190). Mapping these links has been one way of studying the structure of cyberspace<sup>48</sup> – yet to my knowledge the method has to date not been employed in order to understand online activity related to music making. I mapped networks of online hyperlinks displayed on bands' online profile pages, in particular online 'friendship' connections, with the help of network analysis software UCINET,<sup>49</sup> and analysed these according to such features as structure (the number of nodes and connections, the ratio of incoming and outgoing connections, 'patterns' in the network such as subgroups and isolated nodes), locality (the geographical location of the nodes, corresponding to the location indicated on the profile page), and type of entity represented by the nodes (band, individual musician, record label, venue etc.). The aim of this was to explore the structure of the online communal space occupied by the bands and music events.

A shortcoming of some of the earlier studies mapping connections is the exclusive focus on online links, without a theorisation of the connection of these to offline sites and entities. As an amendment to this, Heath et al. in their study of 'genetic knowledge production' propose that we extend the links to be explored beyond the hyperlinks connecting websites: 'methodological strategies for mapping these emergent technosocial processes must be attentive to the nodes and interventions that link online and offline sites' (Heath et al. 1999: 451, quoted in Bell 2001: 192). Extending the analysis of my online network maps of MySpace links to include their relation to offline sites and entities answers Heath et al.'s call for 'an itinerant methodological approach that traces connections between on- and off-line milieux' (1999: 452). In my analysis, the online relationship structures indicated by the

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<sup>48</sup> Dodge and Kitchin (2002) provide an overview of studies using mapping in cyberspace: firstly, topological maps of online networks based on relative locations as opposed to actual geographical ones, and including various structural information such as hierarchies, traffic, etc.; secondly, the mapping of 'information spaces' – both based on 'asynchronous' communication such as email or Usenet, and 'synchronous' communication such as chat or the so-called virtual worlds. The latter includes methods of semantic and conceptual mapping, e.g. of websites. Further examples include the mapping of interaction in chat rooms as well as the content of posts resulting in a visualisation termed 'conversational landscape.'

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 6 for more details.

network maps were compared to the relationship structure(s) observable in the offline environment. The significance and meaning of the links – e.g. whether they stood for a particular kind of exchange, symbolic tie, and so forth – were also established with reference to the offline environment of music making.

According to Bell, one of the main problematic areas of mapping online connections is determining the number of links we need to follow ‘in order to get a sense of an “area” of the web’ (2001: 194). While this is a valid concern, the demarcation of the relevant area – that is, the online space occupied by Liverpool musicians, music fans, events, event organisers, promoters, and so on – was in fact one of the primary goals of the present ethnographic study. Within this area, the choice of the networks to be mapped is certainly selective: in line with the aim stated above, the analysis focused on exploring the connections among online spaces belonging to bands and some other participants in music making on the social networking site MySpace.

A further problematic area identified by Bell is the ephemerality of websites – the fact that online spaces and online content may easily disappear without a trace (Bell 2001: 194). My analysis relied on the view that this ephemeral quality should be built into the research design: longitudinal comparisons of snapshots – network maps – taken at different points in time help us to understand the ways the online landscape is in constant transition. They can lead to determining the extent to which the Internet can be viewed as an up-to-date information source for people involved in music making and music consumption, as a collection of sites for synchronous or quasi-synchronous interaction, and as an archive of content.

## **2 Participant observation**

As a preliminary point, the role of the researcher, as communicated to the informants within the observed environment and as appearing in the ethnographic writing, is not constant and fixed throughout, but ideally maintains a certain amount of flexibility. The role needs to accommodate, firstly, the various stages of the research: for example, becoming familiar with the setting requires complete ‘immersion,’ with a conscious openness and flexibility towards a large variety of information and sources. Following the generation of a certain amount of qualitative data on the bands, I was able to conduct interviews with a narrower focus, using categories established on the basis of the already collected data. Secondly, the role also needs to accommodate the different methods employed: for example, observation in an online

context requires active browsing – exploring – and interactiveness, while the content analysis of online text requires a more detached and controlled (i.e. less flexible) researcher role. We therefore need to take caution when assuming an automatic correspondence between ethnographic research and participant observation, as has been frequent in methodological accounts, or making broad statements with regard to researcher role and the field, even within the context of one study.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, while the degree of participation and the mode of observation is not the same in all aspects of the research, the term ‘participant observation’ characterises the relationship of the researcher to the field and the type of knowledge generated.

### Insider knowledge

In traditional ethnographic writing, a symbolic boundary is drawn between the ‘inside’ of the field and the ‘outside.’ Maintaining this terminology, participation to a varying extent relies on knowledge ‘internal’ to the observed culture, i.e. arising from the experience of members of that culture. This ‘insider’ knowledge influences the research design, the chosen settings and methods, as well as the interpretative and analytic process. Cavicchi’s ethnography is a successful attempt to ‘understand the experiences of people in their own terms rather than the terms of outsiders’ (Cavicchi 1998: 10).<sup>51</sup> The root of this approach is the so-called native anthropology, whereby the researcher observes their own culture, their ‘own community, who share your values and experiences,’ making use of their insider knowledge (Cavicchi 1998: 11). Cavicchi observes that ‘native’ does not refer as much to geography as to the relationship with the informants (ibid.) This premise especially applies to the virtual environment, where boundaries of social groups can be drawn along a variety of factors outside, or in conjunction with, geographical location – such as interest, taste, profession, political views, alongside more traditional categories such as gender, race, and class. In the present case, relevant aspects also include music making activity and musical preferences.

This study can to an extent be considered ‘native anthropology’ on grounds of my familiarity with the online context, including the ways bands and music listeners use social

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<sup>50</sup> C.f. ‘Observation and participation (according to circumstance and the analytic purpose at hand) remain the characteristic features of the ethnographic approach.’ (Atkinson et al. 2001: 4-5, quoted in Mason 2002: 55)

<sup>51</sup> Cavicchi acknowledges the influence of Unni Wikan’s ‘experience-near anthropology’ (Wikan 1990: 1991).

networking sites. In more general terms, music-related online spaces were not an unfamiliar territory.<sup>52</sup> From the middle of the 1990s, when I first acquired Internet access, I had been active online as a music fan, receiving and contributing to newsletters, posting on music forums on a daily basis, editing fan site content, regularly visiting bands' and artists' websites, reading online music magazines, managing the online presence of bands I played in, and so forth. I had also been registered on MySpace, Facebook, and further sites that proved relevant for the research, having established my own online 'friendship networks,' which from my arrival in Liverpool at the end of March 2007 onwards included an expanding number of bands and musicians based in the city.

At the same time, the city of Liverpool as a living environment and cultural space was a new setting, along with the music making activity taking place there at the time of the research. I had learnt about Liverpool's musical past and cultural history, but the 'here and now' of the research field was an unknown that bore similarities to the remote field of 'traditional' (as opposed to 'native') ethnography. Finnegan is aware of the danger of '[b]eing too much of an insider (and ceasing to be a detached observer),' which is enhanced when one is researching one's native community (1989: 343, also quoted in Bennett 2002: 456). For this reason, as Cohen observes, 'many anthropologists deliberately adopt a position of naivete and distance when writing ethnographies in order to make the familiar seem strange' (1993: 125). Here, the duality of being 'native' in one sense – in the online setting – but also a newcomer – in Liverpool and to contemporary music making in Liverpool –, has ensured a productive balance. On the one hand, knowledge of the online environment – alongside general experience of the music making and online activity of amateur rock bands elsewhere – assisted the process of locating the relevant virtual spaces occupied by local bands and music fans, interpreting the activity taking place in these spaces, and establishing meaningful criteria of analysis. On the other hand, the ritual of arriving in a new environment and consciously and systematically familiarising myself with it helped to maintain a necessary distance and 'outsider' perspective. A systematic – even if flexible and adaptive – research design, the rigorous recording and analysis of data, along with constant self-reflection in relation to the field was nevertheless essential in order to avoid the dangers of becoming 'too native' and losing the critical-analytical insight. It is this approach that Hodkinson terms 'critical insider' (2004: 131).

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<sup>52</sup> As opposed to, for example, the studies of Markham (1998) or Boellstorff (2008), who explore online environments previously unfamiliar to them – MOOs and SecondLife, respectively – as part of the research. Markham in particular, taking an 'autoethnographic' focus, analyses the process of becoming familiar with the unknown virtual world.

## Positioning oneself in the research setting

Self-positioning in the research setting and presenting oneself towards informants is another key aspect of contemplating one's role as a researcher in an ethnographic study based on participant observation. As has been observed by ethnographers, '[t]hose we try to understand actively try to understand us as well, and to locate us within their cultural landscape' (Duranti 1994, quoted in Fonarow 2007: 16) – and the way researchers are perceived influences the data that is generated (Fonarow *ibid.*). Moreover, whilst we can view ourselves as participant observers, whether and to what extent we are being considered 'insiders' by those who are being observed is not necessarily evident (Bennett 2002: 464). For this reason, it appears important to consider the key elements along which one is identified in the research setting.

With regard to the offline observations, a distinction needs to be made between my informants and general participants. The former refers to the interviewed musicians, their fellow band members, who were familiar with my research, as well as a number of musicians in other bands who knew about my research and my interviews. The latter refers to the remainder of the people attending the same events, including some of the musicians who could see me at gigs, but I either never engaged in conversation with them or never engaged in conversation about my research, so they would have been unaware of my particular role as 'observer' in that environment.

To informants, the following elements of my identity and self-presentation appeared to be of consideration: firstly, my status as a foreigner, more precisely, as a foreign student and researcher. I often received questions regarding my country of origin – in fact, it struck me during my fieldwork that 'where are you from' was a question people very frequently asked each other during introductions, even if both speakers were from the UK or Liverpool. In other words, place of origin appeared a very important factor of identification.<sup>53</sup> My status as foreign student/researcher, however, proved to be a familiar scenario, a category my informants, being in Liverpool, were accustomed to and did not find problematic or unnatural, even though none of them actually belonged to the same category.

Secondly, my status as specifically a PhD student: from my introductions accompanying the first requests for participation in the research, my informants were aware of this status, and I often received polite enquiries, expressing genuine interest, with regard to

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<sup>53</sup> This is not the case in my home country (the question, unless someone is an obvious foreigner, i.e. does not speak the language, can even be interpreted as impolite in Hungary).



the progress of my dissertation as well as my professional career plans. Thirdly, my status as musician: this applied primarily to the latter phase of the fieldwork, as I did not play actively in bands during the initial period. From the autumn of 2008 onwards, however, I had been an active musician in two bands, performing at the same venues as my informants, even if in a different musical style (electronica performed with live instruments and vocals). This meant that my participant status was evident to my informants and accepted by them (although the extent to which they were familiar with my music making activity varied). In some cases, their awareness of my background knowledge made it easier for them to express their ideas and observations regarding music making in Liverpool, and they generally felt free to talk about music to someone they assumed to be sharing some of their experiences and concerns. In this sense, my participant status as musician proved beneficial for the generating of ethnographic data.

Fourthly, my status as music enthusiast, evident both to informants and other participants from my conduct at live shows: attending on my own, paying attention to the performances throughout (as opposed to going to the bar and chatting to friends, for instance), taking photos and making video recordings. In other words, I was always visibly engaged – the extent of this varied, but I was always visible as a member of the audience and was aware of this visibility. At some events, this kind of conduct contrasted with being an enthusiastic fan – that is, in cases where some members of the audience were jumping and dancing right in front of the stage. On other occasions, where stereotypical ‘fan’ behaviour was absent, the same conduct – paying attention itself and being close to the stage – meant being perceived as a fan of the performing band.

In the online context, I did not deliberately make myself visible as a researcher – for instance, I did not set up a separate account or website for my ethnographer persona. Instead, I used my existing identity on MySpace, Facebook etc., with the corresponding profiles and circles of friends. Notably, however, my profiles were somewhat adjusted for the purpose by deleting some personal data. This was an attempt to make my profiles as bare and ‘neutral’ as possible to avoid too much information (taste, preferences, and other identity markers) getting in the way of eliciting responses from the people I observed, and to gain more control over self-presentation during the interactions. Using my profile(s), I ‘befriended’ the bands I encountered or joined their ‘groups,’ which meant that I could be perceived as a fan. If someone chose to click on my profile they would also recognise me as a musician, as my

profile pictures indicated this, along with my ‘top friends’ on MySpace,<sup>54</sup> which included the two bands I participated in. My ‘top friends’ also included some of the bands I observed as an indication of my affiliation with them, as well as a way of thanking them for their contribution.

In the virtual space, the question of ‘lurking’ arises – the term refers to the practice whereby observation is a one-way process as opposed to a dialogue, which as ‘a research technique’ is ‘widely condemned by virtual ethnographers’ (Bell 2001: 198). The perceived unethical nature of lurking, arising from the invisibility of the researcher and the resulting lack of awareness of being observed on the part of the subjects, could be an argument for participant observation where participation is indeed active. However, I would argue that this dilemma is not necessarily relevant in the same way in the context where MySpace and other social networking sites are dominant. In this type of virtual environment, ‘lurkers,’ that is, unidentified visitors – viewers, listeners – are an accepted presence and not typically unwelcome, in particular in the case of band profiles, where one of the primary aims is sharing music with as many visitors as possible. Practices which make one visible, such as adding the profile owner as ‘friend,’ leaving a comment, or contacting the profile owner in some other form is not necessary, and not always expected. Once again, this reinforces the idea that the Internet is a changing ethnographic environment, and therefore it is imperative that we apply our methods reflexively and with critical understanding of the field.<sup>55</sup>

### **3 Ethical issues**

Any research that concerns human beings – as the objects of study, as the author of artefacts that are the objects of study, as participants within the observed spaces, and further possible ways – raises important ethical considerations. As Hine observes, ‘it is the ethnographer’s task to find out during the ethnography what is considered sensitive, not as an additional task but as part of the ethnography itself’ (Hine 2000: 24). The present study took place in both online and offline settings, in a variety of spaces, each with its own particularities regarding human involvement. The three primary issues requiring ethical

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<sup>54</sup> The structure and layout of profiles on the named social networking sites are explained in detail in subsequent chapters.

<sup>55</sup> Markham warns of the same by referring to a ‘shifting ethnographic site’ (Markham 1998: 61).

justification were identified as the following: firstly, the question of privacy; secondly, data protection; and thirdly, the potential risks and benefits of the research to those involved.<sup>56</sup>

With regard to the ensuring of privacy and informed consent, two different strategies were followed. The first regarded my informants – that is, interviewees and members of bands observed as primary examples. I sought written informed consent from them to the use of their contribution as well as the collection of data regarding their online presence and activity. In the case of bands observed but not interviewed, or band members who were not interviewed, a written consent was requested via email following the provision of an Information Sheet (see Appendix 2). In the case of interviewees, however, I requested a printed consent form to be signed in person in every case. The use of names with citations followed individual preferences: most interviewees were happy to be quoted with their full name and none of the informants requested to remain anonymous. A collective consent to refer to the band name in the thesis was also requested on behalf of all members in the bands observed as primary examples.

The second strategy was employed in relation the observed online interactions and content, where the units of analysis were not bands or individuals, but patterns of discourse or links. During the discussion of message boards and comments sections of websites, a number of contributors are quoted or paraphrased anonymously without individually obtained consent. Furthermore, the thesis also refers to websites outside the ‘property’ of the bands in focus, such as profiles of other bands, profiles of events and venues, news sites, music portals involving reviews, as well as websites of radio stations and record labels. In these cases, names are used without having obtained individual consent. Since the content of these websites are typically made available for wide distribution and general information and resource, referencing them arguably does not breach privacy.

Regarding the protection of the recorded data, strict measures were followed. The data has been stored on a personal computer with encryption, disallowing access to anyone but myself. Participants of the research have been and continue to be kept informed not only about the submission of the thesis, but also any subsequent publication(s). The thesis will also be made available to participants, especially since my interviewees repeatedly expressed their interest throughout the course of the research.

The risks of participation were considered minimal. Nevertheless, I ensured that all participants were aware of my continuous availability to discuss any potential concerns as

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<sup>56</sup> The research project received approval by the Non-invasive Procedures Sub-Committee of the University of Liverpool Research Ethics Committee on 06 March 2009.

well as other questions, and provided contact details on the Information Sheet (in addition to the online contact details already in possession of the informants thanks to our online communication preceding interviews). On the other hand, participation held a number of potential benefits for the participating musicians: the publication of information relating to them may serve as promotion of their music to readers of the thesis. Even more importantly, the interviews themselves, as well as – it is my hope – the arguments and conclusions of the thesis can provide a reflection on strategies of communication, promotion, as well as cooperation within – or outside – the local music making community, which may be useful for the participating bands' careers in the future.

## **Discussion**

Ethnography as an approach, involving a complex set of methods, appears the best choice to seek answers to the questions posed by the research for a number of reasons. Firstly, while my setting is definable in terms of locality – music making in a particular city –, it is at the same time also virtual, translocal, and potentially global. This requires an approach that enables a simultaneous focus on both location and connectivity. Secondly, the channels of communication in the observed setting are various: they include online interaction – both public and private or semi-private, ‘official’ (e.g. related to event organisation or record releases) as well as informal, and multimedia in nature, combining video, images, music, and written text; and offline, face-to-face interaction. The variety of these channels requires a combination of methods enabling an effective understanding of all of them. Finally, the participants and locations themselves were determined during the course of the research, which required an exploratory approach.

I have argued that a study with an ethnographic approach can also involve methods that are more towards the quantitative end of the imaginary scale. There is no reason why methods that traditionally belong to ethnography such as thick description and qualitative interviews could not be complemented by discourse analysis and network mapping if, in the latter cases, the choice of the units of analysis and the collected data are informed by data generated through the more qualitative methods. This also applies vice versa: uncovering structures such as networks of relationships can lead to further questions and the setting of further goals for observation and qualitative description. Interviews have already been widely applied in ethnography, and proved valuable sources of complementary as well as controlling data in the present analysis. These observations further undermine the already disputed

qualitative versus quantitative divide in research methodology, and point towards a more creatively adaptive perspective.

It is essential to continue to transcend the initial enthusiasm surrounding the emergence of Internet, which often produced descriptive accounts of the environment itself, concentrating on structural aspects and patterns of usage, in isolation from the social (as well as cultural, economic, political etc.) embeddedness of online media. The first step to achieve this goal is to employ research methods that do not presuppose a separation of various online and offline media and settings of social interaction, but instead enable the understanding of the connections, continuities, possible overlaps, and differences between them and their specific uses – a welcome approach of more recent ethnographic oriented studies. The research conducted for this thesis therefore adheres to and proves the significance of the ultimate defining trait of ethnography understood as a fundamental approach to the production of meaning: that the analysis and the conclusions of the research arise from the meanings created in ‘the field.’

### **Chapter 3 Indie rock in Liverpool: bands and the discursive, local, and virtual environment**

Popular music, past and present, is a crucial element of Liverpool's popular image(s). Producers, consumers, and promoters of culture in Liverpool – including musicians, concert goers, and the local press – have constantly redefined their relationship with the city and its popular culture, while also maintaining an engagement with the past. The context in which this relationship is enacted and articulated is only partly local in a geographical sense. The Internet has provided new, and perhaps alternative, spaces for creating, socialising, networking, running businesses, negotiating, evaluating, and preserving. The chapter therefore asks the following questions: what particular cultural configurations, events, and narratives shaped indie rock in Liverpool at the time of the research? How was the musical past present in this segment of contemporary local culture – can it be described in terms of an articulated relationship to a definable (popular) cultural heritage? Lastly, in more general terms, how can we understand and describe the environment of local music making in the age of the Internet?

In order to provide answers to these questions, the chapter introduces the broader local and online cultural, technological, symbolic, and discursive context of indie rock music in Liverpool. The discussion follows my own course of gaining knowledge about the field as a researcher. The chapter is divided into three sections: it commences with a brief and necessarily selective reflection on the relationship between the city of Liverpool as a place and popular music, presenting a number of narratives that offer interpretations of this relationship.<sup>57</sup> I identify three important particularities affecting indie music making at the time of the research. The focus is then narrowed to local aspects of music making: the observed bands are presented, followed by a description of the most important venues and sites of music making, well as a number of important events. Finally, the online context is described in terms of the online spaces within which the bands and events represent themselves and are represented. In line with the focus on individual and collective experience in the thesis, the notion of participation in these particular environments is conceptualised. While the three themes – narratives, the local and the virtual context – are discussed in

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<sup>57</sup> In relation to the construction of narratives of the local, Bennett quotes Chaney (1993), who 'has suggested that urban life, rather than complying with a commonly acknowledged, "objective" social narrative, comprises a series of competing fictive interpretations of particular urban spaces' (Bennett 2004: 217-218).

separate sections, the process of becoming familiar with these aspects of context was essentially simultaneous.

## 1 Narratives of the city and sound

The past as ‘a value for the present’

Liverpool is world famous for popular music. Local artists have had so many Number One hits that in 2001 the Guinness Book of Records named Liverpool the world ‘City of Pop’. A 2008 Arts Council survey also named Liverpool ‘the UK’s Most Musical City’ so there’s definitely a lot to be proud of.<sup>58</sup>

These are the lead-in words on the website of the popular music-themed exhibition ‘The Beat Goes On,’ which opened in the World Museum Liverpool in the middle of Liverpool’s year of European Capital of Culture, 12 July 2008. The sentences draw on a public perception and recognition of Liverpool as a place for popular music, and identify this recognition as a source that could nurture the city’s own identity and pride.

From an ‘outside’ perspective, in terms of an internationally recognised image related to popular culture, it is a cliché to equate the city of Liverpool with football on the one hand, and popular music – or specifically the Beatles – on the other. A look at the ‘local history’ or ‘local interest’ section of any Liverpool book shop or library will confirm this, as even today the majority of books will be either on the topic of football or on the Beatles and pop music. While we need to treat clichés as precisely that – broadly generalised, simplified, and conservative perceptions, at the same time, it is also important to recognise that the image of the city, especially in popular culture and in the popular media, both as perceived *by* others and in terms of self-presentation *to* others, has indeed been to a significant extent based around these two main themes.<sup>59</sup>

In fact, football and popular music are to a significant extent interlinked in Liverpool’s popular culture, for instance, in the form of songs and the activity of singing together in support of a team. The two themes are also connected to representations of Liverpool as working class culture(s). Currently, Liverpool football chants are typically based on the re-writing of popular songs, keeping the melody but adapting the lyrics to the praise of either the

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<sup>58</sup> Available: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml/exhibitions/thebeatgoeson>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>59</sup> Besides these two themes, the city’s historical status as maritime city and port thus as the link between Britain and the world, its mercantile history and culture, the sea and the river Mersey, the so-called ‘scouse’ dialect, as well as comedy as an art form have been equally important motifs in the city’s representation, and the list could be continued.

actual Liverpool FC football stars or the praise of the loyal supporters – the ‘Kop’<sup>60</sup> – themselves. The praise of midfielder Steven Gerrard to the melody of the Beatles’ ‘Let It Be’ (1970), playfully utilising the original lyrics, is such an example: ‘When we find ourselves in times of trouble / Stevie G runs past me / Playing the game with wisdom, Stevie G [...] Let it be, let it be, let it be, Stevie G / The local lad turned hero, Stevie G.’<sup>61</sup> As another example, the version of the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’ by another ‘Merseybeat’ group, the Beatles’ contemporaries Gerry and the Pacemakers (1963), has by now become the ultimate Kop anthem; the words ‘You’ll never walk alone’ are famously inscribed in the Shankly Gates entrance of Anfield Stadium.<sup>62</sup> These acts of recycling songs associated with local artists in order to reinforce local identity connected to a different aspect of popular culture – football –, and a different source of local pride – the local team –, provide excellent examples of Liverpool’s self-referentiality and the city’s constant engagement with its own past within the realm of popular culture. What the example of the link between popular music and football can show us is that nostalgia has been a very important emotion and approach within the representations and self-definition of the city of Liverpool, not only in the form of reflection, but also in a ‘restorative,’<sup>63</sup> that is, (re-)creative and reinterpretive sense.

The association of the city with the Beatles – including the canonising process and concrete cultural response relating to this association (such as tribute bands and events, exhibitions, theatre shows, and so forth), as well as the tourist industry that has been built upon it – appears to be another example of the prominence of constant creative engagement with the city’s past in its popular culture. In other words, participants of the city’s popular culture have drawn on its history as a source of renewal. While the cultural influence of the Beatles is of course a world-wide phenomenon, it also operates in a particular Liverpool context. What may be surprising is that the active, planned and in part business-, in part cultural preservation-oriented ‘exploitation’ of the legacy of the Beatles in Liverpool is a relatively recent phenomenon. The failure on the part of the city to recognise, let alone actively celebrate the heritage of the Beatles during the whole of the 1970s – instead, its

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<sup>60</sup> Originally ‘Spion Kop’ – the term refers to the side in Liverpool’s Anfield Stadium occupied by the core of Liverpool Football Club supporters.

<sup>61</sup> Available: <http://www.fanchants.com/football-songs/liverpool-chants/stevie-g-let-it-be>. Accessed: 06 November 2010. I also have to thank Boglárka Kiss for making me aware of this chant.

<sup>62</sup> The gates were unveiled in 1982.

<sup>63</sup> Boym differentiates between ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ types of nostalgia (Boym 2001: 41). Restorative nostalgia recreates the past as ‘a value for the present;’ it usually emphasises the image of the home. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, is less concrete - it is merely a longing for a place and a time far away, the ‘lingering on ruins’ (ibid.).



decision to completely close and even knock down the place that is most strongly linked to the Beatles in the city, the Cavern Club, in 1973, in order to be replaced by a car park – is notorious. According to rock photographer Mark McNulty's account, the tourism industry associated with the Beatles was actually not initiated by the city council, but through private enterprises, including the first shop and meeting place dedicated to the Beatles, the Cavern Mecca (McNulty 2008: 30).

McNulty also gives account of the installation of a viewing platform in 1981 during the excavation of the original site of the Cavern, whereby he, along with other observers, 'used to go down and watch them digging like it was the unearthing of some Roman ruins and not just a nightclub from eight years previously' (McNulty 2008: 30). This instance – the excavation – can be viewed as a symbolic moment at which Liverpool – the council, the cultural industries, artists and the general public – began to reinvent itself and its popular culture through an active and creative engagement with its own history. Since then, and in particular during the past fifteen years, events such as the Mathew Street Festival – taking place yearly during the August bank holiday weekend – and the International Beatles Week – coinciding in time with the former but lasting a whole week – have been hugely significant in terms of, firstly the self-definition and (self-)representation of the city; secondly, the image of the city as perceived from outside; and finally, in terms of situating Liverpool and the Beatles in contemporary popular culture, and the Beatles within Liverpool's own popular music culture.

The definitive role of the events in Liverpool's external image is proven by the size and international composition – extending to the United States – of the audience drawn by the Week. In terms of Beatles fandom, as my own past experiences as an actively networking Beatles fan in Hungary confirm, the event of International Beatles Week in Liverpool, and the act of attending the Beatles Week as a kind of pilgrimage, definitely has an important and internationally perceived symbolic role. The role of the events in situating the Beatles within Liverpool's popular music culture is demonstrated, for example, by the simultaneous featuring of performances of tribute bands – not solely Beatles-tributes, but also tributes to other canonised acts and even contemporary indie/rock bands – and other contemporary local and international acts, whether rock, pop, country, singer-songwriter or folk-influenced. As its name suggests, in terms of location, Mathew Street Festival is centred around the Cavern Club.<sup>64</sup> Since its reopening close to its original site, the club along with the street has retained

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<sup>64</sup> Besides the Cavern, Mathew Street was also home to another iconic club, Eric's, from 1976-1980.

its role as the strongest geographical symbol of the Beatles and as one of the most symbolically meaningful sites in Liverpool. The Cavern Club today consists of two stages in two separate rooms. Outside the events in August, the front stage generally houses tribute performances or acts that musically conform to more ‘traditional’ genres such as sixties-style rock’n’roll, while the more spacious back stage area is mainly used for contemporary rock gigs. Once again, musical past and present are made to co-exist literally under the same roof, and are thus symbolically integrated within one place.

In light of this context, the questions that logically follow regard the ways indie rock bands currently performing in the city relate to this popular music heritage and to Liverpool’s self-reflexivity. What part do common associations with Liverpool, such as the Beatles or the legacy of the groups around Eric’s club, play in the self-definition and identity of contemporary rock bands? Do they see themselves as continuation of this heritage, or on the contrary, do they make attempts to distance and differentiate themselves from it? In particular, how is this identification, or the lack of it, related to the online context? Liverpool’s popular music past and history is represented in certain forms in the online world – does this have any affect on the online presence and self-presentation of contemporary bands? Has online presence – that is, the occupying of a space not tied to geographical place – influenced or changed the relationship between bands and the city? Answering these questions requires a closer look at the relationship of the bands to place and locality as acted out within the online spaces they occupy.

### Popular music heritage and the Capital of Culture

By ‘place,’ I refer to the geographical, physical, often named or at least nameable entity, while the term ‘space’ is used to indicate a complex notion which includes the subjective sense and experience of place, the social and cultural, lived aspect of place – place as inhabited. In a more abstract sense, the latter is also used to refer to the subjective sense of location, connection, and orientation, and thus is also used in relation to activity, presence, and orientation in an online environment. The city as actual geographical place, living and creative space, and dynamic social and economic environment, is directly linked to music making as a creative – industrial process and music as product. As Connell and Gibson observe, ‘[m]any sites, or wider geographical regions in which musical production and consumption occur, become linked with particular sounds, styles or musical approaches (such as the “Motown” sound, or New Orleans jazz)’ (2003: 14) – or, as an example closer to the

theme of the thesis, ‘Mersey Sound’ or ‘Merseybeat.’<sup>65</sup> This association, Connell and Gibson continue,

[...] is often due to concentration in infrastructure for music production and for musical cultures in particular areas (for example, cities with an abundance of recording facilities, live venues or access to inexpensive technology), but may be equally attributable to a process of mythologising place in which unique, locally-experienced social, economic and political circumstances are somehow ‘captured’ within music.

(Connell and Gibson 2003: 14)

The relationship between the infrastructure and the place myth in fact is to be understood as part of a system of dynamic and mutual influencing relations.

The conceptual framework set out by Cohen (2007) in her book on the city of Liverpool and its popular music culture is a also useful way to think about the relationship between (popular) music and the city. One set of questions posed relates to the way music influences the city, the second one concerns the way the music is defined by the environment, that is, the city:

First, the book aims to consider the specificity (both actual and perceived) of popular music and its impact on city-making. [...] The second main aim of the book is to examine the impact of urban de-industrialization and economic restructuring on the popular music culture of Liverpool and on the musical production of the city.

(Cohen 2007: 38, 40)

Or, as stated in the online resource of ‘The Beat Goes On’ exhibition, ‘[t]he relationship is a two-way one, in which the city influences music and music influences the city.’<sup>66</sup> In her case study from the 1980s’ Liverpool, as well as more recent work synthesising the findings of her research during the 1980s and the 1990s, Cohen (1991; 2007) traces the links between economic conditions and popular music. Economic conditions not only determine the opportunities for music making – including the conditions for the music industry –, but also the individual economic and social status of the musicians, which in turn influences their individual decisions and music making activity. During the severe economic recession of the 1980s, a common discourse regarded rock music as a potential ‘way out’ for young working-class people with no stable employment. In reality, few bands managed to ‘make it’ beyond

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<sup>65</sup> Inglis (2010) provides a rich critical and historical analysis of accounts of 1960s’ ‘Merseybeat.’

<sup>66</sup> Online resource produced by the University of Liverpool Institute of Popular Music. Available: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml/exhibitions/thebeatgoeson/resource/sounds>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

local level, which at that time would have meant a contract with a major record label. Nevertheless, music making still functioned as a steady source of income during the economic crisis for some musicians, and even in lack of an income it provided an invaluable source of enthusiasm, creative outlet and personal satisfaction for many (Cohen 2007: 43-44).

One aspect of the ‘way out’ narrative is the motif of leaving Liverpool in order to make it big elsewhere – during the 1980s, this typically meant London –, and this narrative itself drew on the well-known story of the Beatles.<sup>67</sup> It has also been influential in the discourse about Liverpool’s rock music. In her analysis of the notion of the ‘Liverpool Sound’ as used in music journalism, Cohen identifies elements relating to the motif of leaving the city (Cohen 2007: 55-67), coupled with simultaneous feelings of yearning (a ‘reflective’ type of nostalgia in Boym’s terminology) – perhaps a nostalgic retrospection on the part of those who left the place.

Following these general observations regarding the relationship of the city as place and popular music, I would like to highlight three defining particularities affecting indie rock music in Liverpool in 2007-2009. One particularity is the status of Liverpool as European Capital of Culture, along with the geographical, economic and cultural context that this status has provided. In contrast to the 1980s, at the time of the research rock music making in Liverpool was no longer tied to the ‘way out’ narrative framework. Music making, along with various other forms of art and popular culture, had been embraced by the ‘Capital of Culture’ movement, which spanned the years from the city winning the title in 2003 up until at least 2009, when the previous year’s boom was still felt in terms of both finance and a spirit of initiative. (With regard to both online and offline media representation, it is telling that the *Liverpool08.com* website<sup>68</sup> continued its e-mail newsletter and corresponding offline brochures to promote cultural events during 2009, using the same visual design as in ’08.)

The Capital of Culture events offered various opportunities for performance and media representation for local bands. The band Married to the Sea, for example, were granted the opportunity to play Glastonbury festival in the summer because they were selected along with a small number of other bands as part of a Capital of Culture event in Liverpool. The band’s guitarist also drew attention to the easier availability of financial resources, and the boost this can provide to music making activity:

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<sup>67</sup> In fact, Ringo Starr himself drew upon this narrative in his own Capital of Culture contribution, the song ‘Liverpool 8’ (2008), first performed at the opening ceremony outside St. George’s Hall on 11 January 2008: ‘Destiny was calling, I just couldn’t stick around / Liverpool I left you, but I never let you down.’

<sup>68</sup> Accessed: 06 November 2010

In general, [it was] the little things that help the other things – more people come in [to the city] so there’s more money, there’s people who have ideas, get money to open a new venue, to open this new studio – that I’m sure must have got money from the Council or ’08 stuff ... so generally, [it meant] just a bit of a boost – financially, and I think, [in terms of] morale, to the city.’

(Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009)

Apart from this comment, concrete references to the availability of funding were not made by the bands I observed – yet it was observed by other participants in local art and culture, such as amateur dance groups. In fact, art and music in general were thought to exist in a dynamic cross-fertilising symbiosis in Liverpool, as observed by one of the interviewed musicians (from the band a.P.A.t.T.): ‘There seems to be a fairly healthy art scene in Liverpool, and it is good, especially for more “experimental” bands like ourselves, when the music and art scenes crossover, to provide slightly more unusual shows or experiences.’<sup>69</sup> The Capital of Culture may have reinforced this mutually inspiring relationship. In general, the musicians I spoke to looked back upon the year as an exciting and eventful one, and they all felt its significance in the cultural development of the city.

The enthusiasm regarding 2008 does not mean that musicians have not faced economic difficulties or disadvantages recently in relation to, for example, London, or even Manchester – cities with arguably more opportunities and available economic resources. At the same time, according to McNulty, nowadays it is more typical for bands to choose to stay in Liverpool and pursue their careers in the city than in previous decades (McNulty 2008: 173). This certainly applies to some of the bands I observed – for example, 28 Costumes had been relatively successful in Liverpool for several years and have expressed no intention to move elsewhere (see below for more details). Nonetheless, many other bands, including Elle s’appelle, commuted regularly between Liverpool and London in order to attend radio appearances and live shows, so they in fact were partly based in the capital.

The second particularity is Liverpool’s ever-present and alive popular music heritage. The Beatles as a cultural phenomenon are ubiquitous, as are references to more recent canonised artists and scenes from Liverpool. Only during the year of 2009, for instance, the punk scene around the now legendary Eric’s club during the late 1970s, which included such Liverpool bands as the Teardrop Explodes, Big in Japan and Echo and the Bunnymen, was remembered, firstly, in the form of a photo exhibition at the National Conservation Centre (‘Sound and Vision,’ featuring Francesco Mellina’s work); secondly, in a book published that

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<sup>69</sup> Online interview with Jonathan Hering/Master Fader (02 May 2009)

year (Whelan and Florek 2009); thirdly, in the feature film *Awaydays* (2009), premiered in Liverpool during the festival SoundCity 2009 ('followed by an afterparty where the legendary Eric's Club [was] recreated for one night only'<sup>70</sup>), in which the football theme was again combined with the themes of popular music, youth and the urban environment; and fourthly, in the form of a musical entitled *Eric's*, premiered in September 2008 at the Everyman Theatre.

The engagement with the city's popular music is also expressed *within* local popular culture. Self-referentiality is evident in the following three ways: firstly, in the music itself. Many unsigned bands I encountered consciously attempted to re-create the stereotypical 'Liverpool sound' in terms of, for instance, using the characteristic 'jangly' guitar sound and multi-part melodic male vocals. A more direct example is the abundance of tribute acts playing music traditionally associated with Liverpool, such as the music of 'Merseybeat' bands evoked by the regular rock'n'roll performers at the front stage of the Cavern. Secondly, in the self-definition of bands: in my interviews, the musicians often positioned their band in opposition to specific elements of Liverpool's popular music (this was more typical than identification *with* such elements). Thirdly, in the characterisation and categorisation of bands by others, particularly the music press, independent reviewers, and promotional material for local cultural events.

This constant referral back to the past in the present can be understood as a process of popular music canon formation based on place. Besides music journalism and self-referential representations of Liverpool's popular music within popular culture itself, a significant piece of canonising music history literature is Paul DuNoyer's *Liverpool: Wondrous Place* (DuNoyer 2002). The changing subtitle through subsequent editions – 'From Cavern to Cream' (2002), 'From the Cavern to the Coral' (2004), and, quite predictably, 'From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture' (2007), is itself indicative of the process of accumulative inclusion of cultural phenomena. The 'Foreword by Sir Paul McCartney' guarantees that a representative of the most unquestionable element of the canon authorises the presented history. It can be argued that DuNoyer's book expresses – and has of course in turn also formed – Liverpool's so-called mainstream popular music canon.<sup>71</sup> While DuNoyer's

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<sup>70</sup> Quote from the official website of SoundCity 2009. No longer available. Accessed on 31 October 2009 at <http://www.liverpoolsoundcity.co.uk/SpecialEvents.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Following up on Bohlman's (1988) classification of 'small group canon,' 'mediated canon,' and 'imagined canon,' Kärjä (2006) argues that 'it is possible to detect processes of canon formation on different levels' (Kärjä 2006: 4); he distinguishes between 'prescribed,' 'mainstream,' and 'alternative' canon formation. Mainstream canon formation is characterised by mediatedness, as well as processes of exclusion, i.e. the creation of 'Others' (Kärjä 2006: 11).

overview is clearly an informed and thorough one, as any rock music history, it is necessarily selective – shaped by already existing myths and narratives, which the book reinforces through retelling them. For example, while DuNoyer dwells in detail on the careers of bands who fit the already mentioned escapist ‘way-out’ narrative and the corresponding introspective mode in the music, as well as bands who ‘return towards the traditional Liverpool sound’ (referring to the La’s; Du Noyer 2004: 201), his account omits acts with a pronouncedly political attitude and aesthetics – hence outward looking as opposed to introspective – that nevertheless paid their own (even if ironic) homage to the city’s popular music heritage (The 25th of May with their aptly titled album *Lenin & McCarthy* (1992) are a good example).

Canon formation of course is ongoing, and the focus on popular culture provided by the city’s Capital of Culture status has enhanced this process by providing opportunities for highlighting elements from cultural history through live events, exhibitions, films, and publications. A remarkable example is the already mentioned pop music exhibition ‘The Beat Goes On,’ subtitled ‘From the Beatles to the Zutons.’ Even though the exhibition’s pronounced aims included transcending the commonly and narrowly defined canon, and it succeeded in displaying a wide assortment of genres, eras, even approaches, this collection itself has defined a canon of artists, works and places. This particular canon can be regarded more inclusive than any previous attempts; for example, it even features contemporary local indie acts such as Hot Club de Paris and Elle s’appelle. In other words, it reflects and incorporates the constantly changing character of popular culture, while also providing prominent space for those acts and venues already well inside the canon (the Beatles, Eric’s, Cream). The presentation of a definitive popular music history of Liverpool may not have been an explicit aim of the exhibition – in fact, through presenting a variety of viewpoints and interpretive frameworks, the curator made a refined attempt to suggest that such is not possible.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, its positioning in terms of time – the year of culture – and environment – a major museum – communicates a certain authoritative summarising effort.

Notably, the exhibition made extensive use of the Internet in two ways: as resource tool and as subject matter. Firstly, an online resource (‘The Beat Goes Online’ 2008<sup>73</sup>) was created as extension of the offline exhibition, the structure of which was slightly different from the offline display: the articles were organised along themes and perspectives (e.g. ‘Sites

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<sup>72</sup> The intention is made even more explicit in the subsequent book, also entitled *The Beat Goes On* (Leonard and Strachan 2010).

<sup>73</sup> Available: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml/exhibitions/thebeatgoeson/resource>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

and Scenes,' 'Sound and Technology'), while the offline display proceeded in roughly chronological order, while also dedicating areas to specific themes such as technology or instruments. Secondly, the exhibition also explicitly addressed the role of the Internet in relation to popular music, and it reflected on bands' and artists' online presence – for example, by displaying a screenshot of the MySpace profile of Hot Club de Paris. (Interestingly, the link with the Internet was only made in relation to contemporary artists, even though online platforms play a very significant role in connection with music that is not necessarily contemporary – the multiplicity of online Beatles fan and collector communities are a good example. This again reminds us that any collection, however inclusive, still inevitably remains selective.)

Finally, a third particularity of the local environment is the presence of university level students. The availability of tertiary education in popular music at the University of Liverpool, the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool Hope University, as well as Liverpool Community College has ensured a presence of popular music students as musicians – forming bands and performing in the city. A number of the musicians performing in bands I observed (Elle s'appelle, a.P.A.t.T.) were completing or had completed a university level popular music degree. Besides being present as musicians, students also fulfil further roles within the music-making environment – for instance, as promoters or managers. In addition, those in or with tertiary education in popular music can also provide a critical – 'professional' – audience. On a broader level, university students in general were present in the city as audience to rock bands, along with teenagers and young working people. Besides this, universities actively contributed to music making activity by providing not only education and guidance (with musicianship, songwriting, as well as criticism), but important opportunities and facilities for performing, recording, and promotion.

## **2 The local context of music making**

The following section briefly introduces the bands I observed during my fieldwork and the specificities of their local context. The first part of the section introduces the five bands that constitute my primary examples, which is followed by a less detailed description of a further seven groups that also informed the research, but with less emphasis. The latter part includes, firstly, a presentation of the most important places of music making, and secondly, a discussion of the most relevant events – in other words, temporal spaces – in which the bands participated. While the starting point of the research is the perspective of musicians, in



somewhat less depth I also consider particularities of the audience, as well as the significant part played by promoters, managers, and independent record labels that work in close association with the bands. Before moving on to the discussion of the online context, I explain what participation in this particular context means and involves.

## Introducing the participants

Elle s'appelle were the band selected for my pilot study. I was fortunate enough to be able to attend their very first gig, even though I only found out later that my first encounter with the band had in fact been their debut. During the summer of 2007, a few months after my arrival in Liverpool and in the first phase of my fieldwork, I attended several gigs a week, and especially many gigs at the Barfly Club (see below for more details on the venue). I volunteered to do some promotional work for the club (consisting of placing flyers and posters in nearby shops and cafés, most of which had their well-established locations for storing flyers of bands, venues, and various cultural events) in exchange for a small fee, and, more importantly, free entry to shows. On Friday 1 June 2007, my main reason to attend the show at the Barfly was to see the band 28 Costumes, recommended to me by two Hungarian acquaintances – one of them, a musician herself, had been friends with 28 Costumes and had done some promotional photography for them. On the night, Elle s'appelle performed alongside 28 Costumes, Indica Ritual, and goFASTER>>. The bands I saw and heard that night, as it turned out later, were not just a random collection of indie pop/new wave/(post)punk groups, but were interconnected in various ways, as the coming chapters will demonstrate. The three-piece group Elle s'appelle were memorable to me not only for their music but also for their stage appearance: a female keyboard player and singer in a bright red 'girly' dress – almost a caricature – on the left side of the stage, a male singer and bass player on the right and a drummer at the back. Their songs struck me as energetic but refreshingly simple and clear-sounding at the same time, resulting partly from the sparse arrangement and partly from the lack of superfluous elements in either melody, harmony, or rhythm, with clever strategies of counter-pointing and complementing instead. The band's performance was confident already on the first occasion.

Elle s'appelle had been formed a few months prior to that performance by the singer and bass player with the idea 'to create a standard pop punk 3 piece band but have a girl

playing keyboards instead of a boy playing guitars.’<sup>74</sup> They were approached by the organisers of the Barfly after they had made their first demo available online. The band continued to play with increasing frequency in Liverpool, often in the Barfly, as well as the recently opened bar and venue Korova, with which one of the band members had particular affiliations. They also released their first single during the autumn of the same year (2007), along with the accompanying video. This was followed by a successful and well-attended New Year’s Eve performance at the Korova alongside several other Liverpool bands, including the already mentioned goFASTER>> and Indica Ritual, as well as My Amiga and the Vagabonds – I encountered both bands at live performances several times during the time of my fieldwork. The Capital of Culture year began for Elle s’appelle with a UK-wide tour named ‘Boss-pop’ together with goFASTER>> and continued with performances at various festivals – including SoundCity in Liverpool, Camden Crawl in London, and the famous Glastonbury during the summer – as well as further recordings of songs and videos. Following a promising but unfortunately brief career, the band unexpectedly split in August 2008 due to differences in individual goals and aspirations.

Elle s’appelle’s music can be placed in the categories of powerpop and new wave – labels used by the band themselves to identify their music. In broad terms, their songs are characterised by clear-cut changes in rhythm and harmony along with alternating melodic phrases and an effective use of pauses. The unvarying arrangement is drums, bass, keyboard, and either two or three complementing, harmonising, counterpointing or call-and response vocals. In terms of instrumentation and sound, there is much emphasis on creating certain atmospheres – for example, according to *The Guardian*’s online reviewer Paul Lester, the song ‘She Sells Sea Shells’ (2007) ‘reminds you of that woozy feeling you get when you’re on a Waltzer, being spun with nauseating vigour by the tattooed ruffian who takes your money as you just make out your girlfriend over by the dodgems getting felt up by a swarthy traveller’ (Lester 2007). A sophisticated and well thought-out interaction takes place both between the instrumental lines and the vocal lines. The pitch range is typically wide – the dynamics between the lower and higher pitches and ascending and descending melodic lines in the vocals, bass and keyboard are a defining feature. With regard to rhythm, a lot of emphasis is placed on the uptempo, punk-influenced beats; syncopated rhythms are used very frequently. The lyrics themselves are particularly rhythmic, the singers make use of pointedly musical or rhythmic words as well as repetitions and parallels, and even non-verbal singing –

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<sup>74</sup> Online interview with a member of Elle s’appelle (23 November 2007)

reminiscent of nursery rhymes, a major lyrical influence. The singing voices are loud, at times ‘shouty,’ while the overall sound of the songs, whether performed or the recorded tracks, is clean as opposed to ‘noisy’ – a traditional stylistic element of indie music (as opposed to distorted rock or metal, or the abundance of effects used by progressive or psychedelic rock).

Elle s’appelle’s performances always followed the template set by the first one: the three members in the same ‘triangle’ layout that echoed the symmetries in their music. The members remained static throughout, except for a discreet movement to the beat, which is a frequent stylistic element in ‘powerpop,’ ‘pop punk’ or fast-paced indie performances in general. In terms of appearance, the female member’s dresses were a defining feature; she appeared to be wearing a different dress at every performance, yet always the same ‘little girl’ vintage style. The band members typically did not speak a lot in between songs, but occasionally they addressed the audience – especially friends and family members – in a few words, reflected on the context, exchanged banter or promoted their website and/or merchandise, which – records, T-shirts, bags – was usually sold at a stand at gigs.

As regards the audience, the live performances were always relatively well-attended, which in the case of the Barfly, the Korova or the Zanzibar in Liverpool meant around fifty-sixty people. Attendance, however, was of course dependent on the event – Elle s’appelle played to bigger audiences at festivals, including the Liverpool Music Week and SoundCity in Liverpool, and also at gigs outside the city – for instance, in London. In terms of age, the performances were primarily visited by those belonging to a 16-25 group, but part of the audience – including personal friends and relatives of the band members – was occasionally older. According to the male singer and bass player of the band, they did not identify a particular target audience; at the same time, they were aware that their music appealed not only to the typical teenager or youth indie audience, but, as he put it, to younger children and parents and older relatives alike.<sup>75</sup> Judging by attendance at the gigs, there seemed to be a balance in terms of gender.

Elle s’appelle had an extensive online presence and placed plenty of emphasis on Internet-based marketing and promotion throughout their career from the very beginning, i.e. before their live debut, until and even after the split. A management team aided the band, consisting of a manager based in London whose responsibility included negotiating with agents, labels, and so on; and from their single release onwards, they also had a ‘radio plugger’ and a press person working with the label Moshi Moshi who released their single.

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<sup>75</sup> Online interview with a member of Elle s’appelle (23 November 2007)

During the summer of 2008, not long before the break-up, they decided to part with their management and take all issues into their own hands.

28 Costumes were one of the very first indie rock bands I heard about following my arrival in Liverpool. The first time I observed the band live was their 1 June 2007 gig at the Barfly Loft, which, as mentioned, coincided with Elle s'appelle's debut performance. 28 Costumes were instantly appealing and memorable in terms of their appearance, music, and the overall energy of their performance. The intense stage presence and vocal performance of the lead singer, the conspicuous black and hat worn by the guitarist, along with the neurotic fervency of their relentlessly fast-paced songs and their witty, frequently ironic lyrics ensured a unique and remarkable identity for the band. On the several occasions when I attended their performances, I always observed a band that was entirely confident on stage and in command of their songs both in terms of musical skills and with regard to presentation. They communicated with the audience in what appeared to be a conscious, well thought-out and well-rehearsed manner. In other words, their professionalism was both evident and exceptional among the unsigned or independent-label bands I observed in Liverpool.

The well-rehearsed nature of the performances may be explained by the relatively long history of the band: the – at the time of the research – five-piece group (vocal, two or three guitars, bass, keyboard and drums) was formed in 2003, played their first show in May 2004 and had gone through a number of member changes, notably in the role of the bass player. The most recent 'addition' to the band had been the former lead vocalist of Elle s'appelle, who joined 28 Costumes as guitarist, keyboard player and backing vocalist after Elle s'appelle's split, as a logical extension of an already existing collaboration with 28 Costumes as producer of their latest record ('Eventually for one reason or another Elle S'Appelle decided to split and it was a natural step for Andrew to make 28 Costumes not his mistress, but his wife,' as the online biography of 28 Costumes explained the change<sup>76</sup>). The band was signed to the Liverpool-based independent label Spank Records from 2003, with whom they released four singles and the album *Fake Death Experience* (2004); they also released one single with Invicta Hi Fi, another independent label in Liverpool, and, most recently, singles and EPs through their own label Rekordmeister.

The 'Cossies,' as they were often referred to in Liverpool, had toured extensively both within and outside the UK – several times in Germany and Ireland. Besides this, they performed at the big international music conference and festival SXSW (South by Southwest)

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<sup>76</sup> Available: <http://www.myspace.com/28costumes>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

in Austin, Texas in 2007, and played Glastonbury for the first time in 2008. The band were well-known in Liverpool and boasted a steady following – all the gigs I attended in 2007-2009 were packed. Judging by attendance at their shows, their live audience consisted mainly of people belonging to the (relatively wide) 18-30 age group. Besides this, due to their prominent gigs at festivals and tours in Germany and Ireland, they had also acquired an enthusiastic fan base outside Liverpool. However, despite this local and to an extent ‘translocal’ recognition, coupled with the occasional praise from prominent music press sources,<sup>77</sup> they had not managed to ‘make it’ on a national level.

The four-piece guitar band Married to the Sea was formed in 2006 by musicians from two different previously existing bands (their press statement, available online, cites 2007 as the year of formation, but guitarist Sam Walkerdine stated 2006 in a personal interview<sup>78</sup>); all four members came from Liverpool and were male. I came across their name relatively early during the fieldwork and I saw their performance at SoundCity 2008, but an even memorable opportunity to see and hear them live was the second event in the so-called ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ event series (explored in detail in the following chapter), organised by Married to the Sea and involving nine other acts. I observed further performances following this event – the band play regularly at both smaller venues such as pubs and larger venues such as the Barfly, the indie club Le Bateau, or the more recently opened venue the Kazimier.

In terms of genre, the band defined themselves as indie; their artistic aims as stated on their press release<sup>79</sup> were the following: ‘the members set out to create rowdy pop that people could dance to.’ This in fact is a commonly cited goal of the indie music of recent years, whether meant half-ironically or seriously.<sup>80</sup> The songs of Married to the Sea can definitely be described as belonging to the alternative or indie rock tradition, with an arrangement of guitars, bass, drums, keyboard, and vocals. In terms of lyrical content, the songs focus on personal feelings, reflections, relationships, typically placed in a broader existential context. Plenty of emphasis is placed on vocal harmonising and the interaction between lead and main vocals. The guitars are used both as melodic and rhythm instruments in standard rock fashion, the beats are often fast-paced and rhythmically intricate. The songs follow standard verse-

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<sup>77</sup> Including *Q Magazine*, *NME*, and *The Independent* – the relevant quotes are cited on [www.myspace.com/28costumes](http://www.myspace.com/28costumes). Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>78</sup> Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview (11 March 2009)

<sup>79</sup> ‘Mini press pack.’ Available from: <http://www.myspace.com/marriedtothesealion>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>80</sup> The popular Scottish indie rock band Franz Ferdinand, for example, is widely quoted as having stated their initial aim as making ‘music that girls could dance to’ (quote available, for example, at: <http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/Franz-Ferdinand-Biography/327BC4D4EF5FA43848256E2C00080933>. Accessed: 06 November 2010)

chorus structures with gradual build-ups in terms of instrumentation. On the recorded tracks, besides providing additional melodic lines and harmony, the keyboard is also used to create an atmosphere (the same technique is employed by Elle s'appelle). The band had self-released two EPs by the time of writing.

Besides making, releasing and performing music, the members of Married to the Sea had also been active in cooperating with and supporting other local bands: initially through running a grassroots record label, later on through organising the mentioned '10 Bands 10 Minutes' event series, which has actively involved many local bands and drawn audiences of considerable size. At the time of the interview, the band had worked with a concert manager for a year, who assisted the band with getting gigs. He was employed by a major promotional company, which enabled him to secure supporting slots for Married to the Sea when booking shows for more popular bands.

During my fieldwork, I had encountered Puzzle's name several times before I had actually seen them perform – they seemed to have a ubiquitous presence around the venues I attended, and appeared to be connected to the bands I had already begun to observe. Their online 'gig-ography' (their own term) certainly testified to this, with an exceptionally large number of shows (53 entries for two and a half years in October 2009, with a number of confirmed upcoming shows in addition). The venues where they played most frequently are the Barfly and the Korova, but they also listed such indie/rock clubs as the Bumper or the Zanzibar, along with pubs and galleries. The self-labelled 'indie pop' band – which label is echoed by reviewers, emphasising the 'pop' aspect which distinguished them from pronouncedly indie 'rock' acts such as, for instance, Married to the Sea – was formed in 2007 and consists of a female lead vocalist and bass player, her brother on guitars, a female guitarist and a male drummer. Their songs are especially well-crafted and skilfully performed; the lyrical content is mostly introspective, personal, with some irony and plenty of sophistication – in harmony with the subdued atmosphere of the songs that is however achieved by a clever and exciting intricacy. The lead singer's pleasant voice and mature singing style, along with the delightfully melodic guitar parts – a decidedly clear sonic quality, with occasionally a restrained distortion – all in all ensures a sound that has been described as 'feel-good indie pop, but in a really amazing magical way.'<sup>81</sup>

Puzzle had so far self-released a sold-out album, a single on the independent label Cloudberry Records (based in Miami, Florida); a split 7-inch with the band Someone Still

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<sup>81</sup> *Shout and Twist.com*, quoted on <http://www.myspace.com/puzzlepuzzle>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

Loves You Boris Yeltsin (from Springfield, Missouri) on Polyvynil (based in Illinois); and, most recently, an EP on indie label Lightningheart Records (based in Wolverhampton). They had not worked with a manager, but a number of individuals assisted them with particular tasks, including: the person who created most of the artwork for their records; a Liverpool-based promoter who helped them get gigs, especially at the beginning of their career; and a fellow musician who had partly produced their records. Besides the numerous venues in Liverpool, they had also performed in other cities within the UK such as Leeds and Sheffield. Their shows in Liverpool were always well-attended, with usually many fellow musicians – friends – in the audience.

The first show of the group a.P.A.t.T. (or a.P.A.t.T. Syndication) that I attended was the launch party of their album *Black & White Mass* (2008), released on the Leicester-based label Pickled Egg Records. The show was held on 05 March 2008 at the indie venue Bumper, and was started off by the unlikely support acts of a peculiar Romanian folk band and a comedy-type act, which seemed even more out of place. Most of the bands I had seen live to that date were chosen either randomly – this characterised the first phase of my fieldwork –, or, more and more frequently as I progressed, through their associations with other bands I had seen and had begun to observe. This was not the case with a.P.A.t.T. – the show had been recommended to me by secondary supervisor as the performance of a band of a former student in our department, I therefore attended as a ‘plus one’<sup>82</sup> guest. I had not heard about the group before that show, which suggested that they were not closely attached to the network of bands I had already acquainted myself with up to that point. Indeed, their performance was quite different from anything that I had previously heard in Liverpool, and categorising their music, or closely associating them with other Liverpool bands in terms of either musical style or aesthetic approach, seemed difficult. a.P.A.t.T.’s music is characterised by exceptional music skills, multi-instrumentalism, and an extreme form of musical eclecticism, which is nevertheless shaped into coherent, exciting and manifold waves of sounds, rhythms, and melodies. Their performance makes evident their aim to cross stylistic

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<sup>82</sup> As Fonarow explains:

Plus one is the amorphous category for the person who is a guest of someone who is on the guest list. The plus one is the companion of someone with status in the community. Plus ones gain all the privileges but bear none of the responsibilities. They get into the venue for free. They get the same privileged access as the person on the guest list without any risk to their status. The plus one’s presence is not questioned and at times even ignored, which is useful for observation.

(Fonarow 2007: 16)

and aesthetic boundaries – which they arguably manage to achieve with a confident professionalism that is combined with a great deal of playfulness and self-irony.

a.P.A.t.T. was formed around 1998 by two musicians, initially as a studio recording project in order to create a 90-minute cassette tape – thus not a live band. However, the collective solidified into a band in the traditional sense over the following years with an unchanging core membership, while some musicians came and went. The band at the time of the research consisted of five core members, including the two founding members – four male and one female, all from the Northwest –, all of whom play multiple instruments and contribute with vocals, and all of whom appear under pseudonyms in the band. The band began performing live in 2001; the events they had performed at were often organised by the so-called Class A Audio promoter group. In addition, they had also played at the Zanzibar as part of the so-called Useless club – put on by Zombina at the Skeletones, the band of ‘Master Fader,’ one of a.P.A.t.T.’s members –, but then increasingly organised their own shows at various venues. Besides the album launch party, the performances I attended took place at the Mello Mello bar and gallery, St. Bride’s Church, the Kazimier, and St. Luke’s Church (commonly referred to in Liverpool as the ‘Bombed-out Church’ due to the fact that it was left empty with only its walls standing after the city had been bombed in 1941, as a conspicuous testimony to the tragedy). a.P.A.t.T.’s recognition in Liverpool is indicated by their inclusion in the promotional video of Liverpool’s European Capital of Culture bid. They also participated in cultural projects involving a multiplicity of organisations as well as art forms: for instance, as part of a Halloween event on 30 October 2008, they performed their own soundtrack written for the (originally silent) film *Nosferatu* (1922) live in the studio of BBC Radio Merseyside – the performance accompanied the public screening of the film on Clayton Square outside St. John’s Shopping Centre.

a.P.A.t.T.’s releases include several EPs, two albums and a number of appearances on compilations (including a split 7-inch with Stig Noise Sound System); their most recent EP at the time of writing is in download only format. What the band name stands for is a bit of a mystery – according to Master Fader, it

[...]stood for something originally, which has either been forgotten now or doesn’t need to be revealed, but nowadays we prefer to think of it as having no set meaning, or as having a changing meaning - whatever any one person might come up with at any given time (eg. A Panther Attacks Two Teenagers, or A Place at the Table).

(Jonathan Hering/Master Fader, online interview, 02 May 2009)



Further Liverpool bands observed over the course of the study included goFASTER>>, House that Jack Built, Arms At Last, Voo, Hot Club de Paris, Bells for René, and Indica Ritual. goFASTER>> was a five-member pop/new wave/punk band, according to the genre labels used by the band themselves as well as reviews in the music press.<sup>83</sup> Their career progression resembled that of Elle s'appelle: like the latter, goFASTER received plenty of praise from both the local and the national music press; the two bands played the same venues in Liverpool – often, even the same shows; furthermore, they embarked on a joint UK tour after rapidly becoming popular in Liverpool. Both bands were recognised by Liverpool Music Week already in their first year of becoming successful locally, which meant they were appointed prominent slots during the 2007 event (goFASTER>> supported the indie pop band Good Shoes at the Carling Academy<sup>84</sup>). goFASTER>> had released a single on the London-based indie record label This Is Fake DIY Records, as well as a single and an EP on the Oxford-based Alcopop Records – another indie label. Unlike Elle s'appelle's, however, their career continued.

House that Jack Built was a relatively newly formed band, which meant that I was able to observe them from the very beginning of their career, similarly to Elle s'appelle. In fact, I had heard about the band from Elle s'appelle's lead singer, who is also the brother of a member of House that Jack Built. The event where I first encountered them was 28 Costumes' single launch at Korova, where House that Jack Built joined Bicycle Thieves, another Liverpool rock band, to support the 'Cossies.' I attended several of their gigs following this – at the Barfly, the University Guild, and the Caledonia pub. Regarding musical style, they were not far from Elle s'appelle: characteristic melodies, a lot of emphasis on vocal lines, call and response strategies – House that Jack Built were, however, an all-male guitar band *with* a guitar,<sup>85</sup> which ensures that their sound is closer to the 'traditional' guitar-based indie rock – as opposed to (indie) pop – genre.

Arms At Last, as Elle s'appelle's lead singer described the band,<sup>86</sup> was a part-time project for all of its three members. I had observed the band a number of times at the Barfly playing lively pop punk, and had followed their online activity, but again, it was Elle

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<sup>83</sup> Sources quoted on [www.myspace.com/gofasterband](http://www.myspace.com/gofasterband). Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>84</sup> Then 'Carling' – the venue was renamed 'O2 Academy' in 2008.

<sup>85</sup> In reviews, Elle s'appelle were frequently referred to as 'a guitar band without a guitar' – for example: 'Elle s'appelle are in the most conventional sense of the word, a band. More specifically, a three piece guitar band from Liverpool without guitars, but with a girl and a keyboard.' Available: <http://www.moshimoshimusic.com/artists/elle-sappelle>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>86</sup> Face-to-face interview with a member of Elle s'appelle (04 March 2009)

s'appelle's lead singer who introduced me to them personally – there was a close friendship as well as creative collaborative relationship between the two bands.

My first encounter with American alternative-influenced Liverpool rock band Voo was a somewhat odd one: a performance by only one of the members supporting New York-based singer-songwriter Nina Nastasia at the Zanzibar. During the performance the guitarist and singer appeared a little intimidated by not having his two fellow band members with him – he in fact commented on this himself, making frequent references to the rest of the band who had been unable to make it that night. Approximately a month later I saw the whole band at the Bumper as part of Liverpool Music Week, and my impressions this time were indeed different: their performance was confident, well-rehearsed, and they managed to communicate an overt enjoyment that was sometimes missing from other indie rock performances. Speaking to the already mentioned bands and reading their online journals and news items, Voo was a very popular band among several of the already mentioned bands – they were frequently referred to both in conversation and in online journals, always fondly and with praise.

The three-piece indie/punk act Hot Club de Paris was the best-established of all the bands mentioned here, and their performances reflected this status. For instance, the members communicated less with the audience than most of the other bands mentioned, and their stage appearance appeared well-planned and professional (although the latter also applied to 28 Costumes and Elle s'appelle). Hot Club de Paris were cited as role models by several other Liverpool bands; they were viewed as a band that had been able to 'make it' on a certain level coming from Liverpool, while not losing their attachment to the city. Their records had been released by Moshi Moshi, the same label as Elle s'appelle's. Many of their shows were outside Liverpool, which also meant that I was unable to follow their offline activity as closely as some other Liverpool bands.

Bells For René played a stripped down, energetic and fast-paced form of indie rock with disco influences. Regarding appearance, they epitomised the stereotypical 2000s all-male indie band in its less experimental form: dressed in (tight) jeans and short-sleeved shirts, introspective and serious-looking in an attempt to establish a presence that is aimed to focus the audience's attention to the music (which is not to say it necessarily works this way). They had not yet become widely known in Liverpool, but regarding both the confidence of their performance and the appreciation on the part of the audience, there was an observable progress. Besides this, their shows were always fairly well-attended, even if this was partly

due to the types of the events where they appeared (including a university music social night and a Sound City festival appearance).

Lastly, Indica Ritual – an extremely fast-paced pop/punk act with a professional approach with regard to musicianship, resulting in songs that combine intricacy with bursting energy and fair amount of – successful – experimentation (their music has also been categorised as ‘math rock’<sup>87</sup>). I had encountered them through their frequent appearance with other observed bands, including Elle s’appelle and 28 Costumes – they headlined the already mentioned 1 June 2007 show at the Barfly where Elle s’appelle made their debut appearance. At the same time, through the events in which they participated in, as well as the online web of references, they were also part of the circle of a.P.A.t.T. This was also linked to their more experimental approach compared to more ‘straight’ guitar-based indie rock acts as Voo or Married to the Sea.

As the descriptions indicate, while there was still a male majority in the bands, women took a significantly greater part in music making than what Cohen observed in the 1980s in Liverpool: at that time, ‘there were few independent or successful women in Liverpool’s music scene’ (1991: 207). Women were then typically present as girlfriends (32-33) and helpers of rock bands (these two roles were often simultaneous), or even as perceived ‘intruders’ to the male sphere of rock (208-211). In contrast, Puzzle was female-fronted and the female – male proportion in the band was 50-50%, Elle s’appelle shared the front position between one male and one female musician, while a.P.A.t.T. and 28 Costumes also included female members. Women were also involved in other ways in bands’ work, such as artwork design (Puzzle) and assistance with promotion and selling merchandise at gigs. Women were active concert-goers – the gender proportion of the audience was generally balanced at indie gigs.<sup>88</sup> Importantly, the experience, attitudes, and practices of those women that were involved as active musicians did not appear to differ significantly from male musicians. More so than gender, other ‘hard’ social determinants such as age, economical conditions, education, race and social class seemed to determine the similarity in experience and practices: all musicians were young, typically in their twenties; all were white, educated (typically on tertiary level), and were either from Liverpool originally or permanently resided in the city. Identities, as the following chapters will show, were expressed along more ‘soft’

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<sup>87</sup> Britton (2009)

<sup>88</sup> For an ethnographic study of women as musicians, focusing primarily on instrumentalists, see also Bayton (1998).

determinants such as taste, locality, aesthetic and ethic values and attitudes; the similarities along the mentioned aspects were not typically questioned, rather remained hidden.

## Venues and music events

Since the beginning of my fieldwork practically coincided with my arrival in Liverpool, the process of getting familiar with the inner city was inextricably linked to the discovery of venues, various other places related to music such as record and book shops, music events, and bands. In this sense, the initial part of my fieldwork to an extent resembled the process of discovery of traditional social anthropology conducted away from ‘home,’ in an environment previously unfamiliar to the researcher: the exploration of the object of study and the wider geographical, social, and cultural context were simultaneous processes. These simultaneous processes of discovering music making activity and the city as an environment proved advantageous for the exploration of the relationship between music and place. This section introduces some of the most important local places for music in my study, as well as a number of significant music events taking place at these locations.

The first rock gigs I attended in Liverpool – alongside other types of musical performances such as classical and world music concerts – were connected in some way to the university: ‘battle of the bands’ at the Students’ Guild, recitals of popular music students at the University of Liverpool, as well as showcases of other institutions such as the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts. Many of these events were held at the Magnet and the Bumper on Hardman Street – the street connecting the university campus with the inner city, currently populated by ‘chip shops,’ restaurants, pubs, small stores as well as a number of smaller clubs and rock/indie venues.<sup>89</sup> These two venues were also important for the bands I later selected for observation, most of which were not directly connected to the university.

I also became acquainted with the Barfly (more recently renamed as the Masque), a bigger venue part of the Barfly Club chain in the UK (with venues in London, Brighton, Cardiff, and Leeds). The Barfly in Liverpool is in a fairly large, dark and uniquely designed building with a maze of corridors, a relatively small room downstairs (the ‘Bar’) – which nevertheless matches the size of many of the smaller venues in the city –, a bigger room on the same ground floor level with descending steps for the audience (the ‘Theatre’), and two adjoining rooms upstairs (the ‘Loft’) – one with the stage, the other with the bar. Two

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<sup>89</sup> The significance of the street in popular music history is underscored by the fact that the renowned Picket, a venue home to well-known acts such as the La’s, Shack or the Coral, was located there between 1983-2004; in 2006 the venue reopened in a new location.

downstairs entrances were in use with two separate ticket areas, depending on where the performance of the night took place. Frequently, two different events took place on at the same time with separate entrance fees, on which occasions both entrances were open. The Barfly featured local bands of various styles, but mainly indie pop, rock, punk, and singer-songwriter acts; electronica-based and more experimental acts were less typical. Besides local acts, it also regularly hosted performances of ‘bigger’ acts from all over the UK or sometimes the US, and, less typically, Europe or Australia – on these occasions, the supporting bands were often still local. It also hosted club nights such as the long-running and widely acclaimed Chibuku on Saturday nights.

Besides the Barfly/Masque, the Bumper, and Magnet, the most popular venues housing the observed bands and events were the Zanzibar – located on Seel Street, close to the Barfly –, the Korova, which successfully established itself as one of the core indie venues at the time of the fieldwork, the Carling (later O2) Academy – the biggest venue for rock gigs not counting the Echo Arena and the Philharmonic Hall (the latter also hosts popular music events besides classical concerts, comedy acts, and film screenings) –, the mentioned University of Liverpool Students’ Guild – with several rooms and stages, often hosting bigger UK acts as well as local and amateur bands – and, more recently, the Kazimier, a spacious ‘arty’ venue located next to the former Cream club on Wolstenholme Square, often hosting experimental and multi-media events or performance nights combining various art forms, and, increasingly, rock gigs. All mentioned venues are located within the city centre within walking distance from one another, and are also easily accessible in terms of public transport.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to performance venues, local spaces of music making also included rehearsal rooms and recording studios – Elevator provided rehearsal space for, among several others, Married to the Sea and House that Jack Built. The lead singer of Elle s’appelle mentioned the opening new Elevator building as one of the most exciting developments in Liverpool in relation to music making: ‘[i]t’s full of bands and artists and downstairs there’s a cafe where any number of these people are chatting over coffee at any one time. I think more things like this will pop up in that area of town.’<sup>91</sup> The mentioned café, Leaf, also functioned as performance space – the building thus integrates several functions for musicians, including rehearsal, recording, performance, and meeting space. In other words,

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<sup>90</sup> See Appendix 3 for the location of the most important venues, including ones not described here in detail.

<sup>91</sup> Online correspondence (05 March 2009)

Elevator already functioned as a hub of local activity related to music making, and it would potentially facilitate the development of a new local centre for cultural activity. Further significant local spaces included record shops – Probe Records was particularly important as an outlet for local indie music – as well as cafés and pubs, where musicians and other participants would meet up and interact, negotiate or celebrate an occasion (the pub named the Ship & Mitre on Dale Street was one important gathering place, including the upstairs room which could be hired for private parties). Finally, musicians’ and other participants’ homes at times also functioned as rehearsal rooms or locations for meetings and parties.

Regular nights were abundant in Liverpool, whether this meant – sometimes long-established – club nights, such as the already mentioned Chibuku or the indie night Liquidation, or regular live events put on by an independent label or promoter, possibly involving the same band(s) more than once but with varying support acts. Examples of the latter included Class A Audio gigs, involving the bands a.P.A.t.T. and Stig Noise Sound System with a variation of support acts, as well as events organised by the indie promoter group Samizdat, again involving the mentioned two bands, along with indie rock/punk bands Hot Club de Paris, Married to the Sea, Indica Ritual, and Voo on other occasions. Some regular nights featured live acts alongside DJ sets, such as EVOL, set up in 2003 by the internationally well-known electro band Ladytron and based in Korova at the time of writing – the night featured 28 Costumes or Elle s’appelle several times.

A different type of event series, directly organised by the bands, were the less regular ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ events. These were put on and promoted by Married to the Sea, and organised as tribute events to particular bands and/or albums from the second occasion onwards. Launch events for records just released or about to be released, whether singles, EPs or albums, were another frequent type of show. Elle s’appelle and 28 Costumes both held launch nights at Korova, and Puzzle and Married to the Sea at the Barfly. Many shows were organised by the promoter known as Meshuggy – my encounter with Voo was connected to such an event, and Puzzle identified him as the person who had arranged gigs for them at the beginning of their career.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, joining Meshuggy’s Facebook.com page proved invaluable in terms of learning about gigs; he appeared to be a key participant in local indie rock events, and was acknowledged as such by many bands and musicians. Some gigs formed part of cultural events organised by the city; examples include Elle s’appelle’s appearance at the weekend-long reopening event of the Bluecoat Gallery and Arts Centre, one of the major

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<sup>92</sup> Face-to-face interview (25 March 2009)

events of the Capital of Culture year, and a.P.A.t.T.'s already mentioned *Nosferatu* soundtrack contribution outside St. John's Shopping Centre.

Lastly, but very importantly, festivals taking place in the city provided invaluable opportunities for local bands to perform alongside better-known acts and in front of large audiences, which included influential industry representatives. The multiple-venue indoor festivals Liverpool Music Week (first held in 2003) and SoundCity (first held in 2008) functioned as a showcase for local talent and had been defining events within the city's cultural life. Liverpool Music Week started off as a small-scale and grassroots organisation, involving local bands. Moreover, despite its expansion into one of the UK's biggest indoor music festivals, providing an opportunity for local unsigned bands continued to remain one of its pronounced goals, with local bands still forming the majority of performers (even if not the majority of headlining acts). SoundCity combines live shows and other music-related cultural events – film screenings, exhibitions – with an international music industry conference, similar to the longer established SXSW in Texas. Both festivals take place across the mentioned core venues in the city centre, and a number of further venues such as the (New) Picket (not far from the Elevator rehearsal rooms), the Caledonia (close to the University), 3345 Parr Street, and Django's Riff (in the city centre).

### Participation in local music making

The notion of participation in such events and the significance of observing this requires some initial clarification. As a general observation, the events mentioned are not to be understood solely within a band – audience dichotomy, i.e. as a communication process taking place primarily between the band and an audience. On the contrary, a performance involves various modes of communication and therefore various types of social relationships. For example, live shows provided opportunities for participating bands (not exclusively the ones performing) to socialise with each other: future collaborations were decided upon and arranged, negotiations between bands and promoters took place – events in general offered valuable opportunities for networking. Through providing mutual feedback, musicians strengthened creative ties among one another, as well as expressing tastes and affiliations. In other words, they actively performed identities as musicians through the display of what Thornton (1996) terms subcultural capital. Feedback to bands was also provided by the audience as a collective throughout performances, as well as individually. The latter would

typically follow performances – for instance, during breaks when the next band would set up. In this situation, the roles of musician and music fan are interchangeable according to who gives opinion about whose performance. This is only one example to illustrate that participation in music making is a complex notion, and it is the task of the following chapters to explore it in its complexity.

### **3 The virtual context of music making**

One of the basic premises of the present thesis is that the music making activity of the selected bands takes place within a context that is simultaneously local and online. The final section describes in detail the two main online sites Liverpool indie bands regularly used, namely MySpace.com and Facebook.com, and subsequently identifies further relevant online spaces and locates their significance. This section again concludes with general observations regarding the ways participation is to be understood within this specific context.

#### The online spaces occupied by Liverpool's indie rock bands

MySpace.com is an individual profile-based social networking site,<sup>93</sup> initiated in the year 2003, and gaining wider popularity by 2004.<sup>94</sup> In 2005, the company News Corporation, run by Rupert Murdoch, famously purchased Intermix Media, who had run MySpace up until then. The site continuously expanded following this, and, as boyd and Ellison (2007) also observe, bands, artists and their fans have certainly played a hugely significant part in this expansion (boyd and Ellison 2007 [online]: 'SNSs Hit the Mainstream'). Even though initially MySpace was not designed as a music sharing and promoting site, since it did include a music uploading and sharing feature as part of the profile page, it was very soon 'picked up' by bands, artists, and their respective management organisations. Consequently, the site was in turn tailored to the needs of bands and artists, creatively incorporating their ways of usage.

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<sup>93</sup> danah. m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison define 'social network sites' as 'web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.' (boyd and Ellison 2007 [online]: 'Introduction'). It is important to add to this that it is not necessary individuals that are represented, but also groups, collectives, organisations, businesses, even abstract entities such as political/social causes. As opposed to boyd and Ellison, I do not differentiate between the terms 'social network site' and 'social networking site' in the thesis.

<sup>94</sup> For a history of social network sites, also see boyd and Ellison (2007).



Hence, for example, the sub-site named ‘MySpace Music,’<sup>95</sup> where bands’ and artists’ websites now belong structurally.

During the initial years of MySpace, one of its main attractions and defining features was the availability of the profiles of hugely popular bands and artists alongside other individual profiles, which meant that one could befriend, for instance, Paul McCartney just as easily as the local high school rock band. As I myself observed in an online community of Beatles fans, the musicians in McCartney’s band would frequently respond to fans and take an active part in online networking. On such a broad scale, this type of fan – artist communication was an unprecedented experience for many music fans worldwide. Equally importantly, there is no structural hierarchy among the profiles: when displaying connections, one’s ‘friends’ appear alongside one another, without any differentiation or preference.<sup>96</sup> In line with the argument emphasising the democratising effects of the Internet, this may project a sense of equal opportunities and equal access for bands eager to make their music known. Benetello defines the democratisation claim with regards to the relationship of artists to the Internet in terms of three main claims: that there is a ‘room for everyone;’ there is also a welcome absence of mediators and gatekeepers such as record labels (for example, in cases where artists upload their self-recorded tracks to their own profile pages) – this is described by the term ‘disintermediation;’ thirdly, that thanks to the Internet, ‘everyone is an artist (almost)’ (2002: 713-714). Along the same lines, McCleese somewhat one-sidedly argues that ‘[i]n an era of Internet immediacy, critical buzz can lead to popular success more quickly than ever before, as indie chart-toppers such as the Shins and Arcade Fire can attest’ (2010: 436). These claims have also been made specifically in relation to MySpace. Along with the process of population of MySpace by bands, success narratives began emerging in the media, for example in connection with the UK band Arctic Monkeys, who allegedly owed their rapid rise to fame to their own and their fans’ extensive but bottom-up promotional and networking activities via MySpace.<sup>97</sup> However, one needs to take a critical stance towards such unbalanced claims.

In terms of structure and design, MySpace provides a unified layout for its individual pages. This standardisation, on the one hand, limits individual creativity in website design. On the other hand, it ensures that both editing and browsing among profiles is fairly easy and

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<sup>95</sup> Available: <http://music.myspace.com>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>96</sup> In general – however, as the detailed analysis will show, the way of displaying connections allows one to select a number of ‘top friends’ over the rest of the friends.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Cieslak (2006) on the role of MySpace and other social networking sites in initiating the career of bands and artists. This success narrative has also been widely questioned since.

clear, therefore accessible. Besides this, the added content as well as the possibility of using individual templates (for example, for background) and of uploading personal files (images, videos) offers plenty of space for personalisation. Specialised profile templates are available for bands and artists, which slightly differ from individual profile layouts along a number of features. MySpace allows bands and artists to upload and share their music, along with videos and photos; it enables networking through ‘adding’ other profiles as ‘friends’ and facilitates communication through various interactive features, including a blog, bulletins, comments, and private messages. In order to aid bands and artists in creating their music profiles, MySpace ran an official profile with advice for bands, as well as updates regarding website developments.<sup>98</sup> The clear objective of this site, implied by the URL address (‘aplaceformusic’), is encouraging bands’ participation.

Facebook.com is another hugely popular profile-based collective and interactive portal, self-defined on its opening page as ‘a **social utility** that **connects you** with the people around you.’ Originally a closed network used within Harvard University, then extended to include high school and corporate networks, it became available for the general population in 2006 and has expanded rapidly since then. High school, university, corporate or location-based networks are still an important structuring element of Facebook, however, being part of a network is no longer a requirement of having a personal profile on the site. Facebook was designed for individual users and institution- or location-based networks, but by the time of the fieldwork also included groups (based on interest, affiliation etc.), ‘causes’ (social or political, often mocking), and businesses, with opportunities for paid advertising. The profiles here also had a set structure, with no space for personalisation in terms of the appearance of the profile (e.g. no personal backgrounds). Instead, it was through organising and adding content that users individualised their pages. Besides the creation and displaying of connections and the ability to communicate with the individuals in one’s network, Facebook, similarly to MySpace, also enables the uploading and sharing of individual content (e.g. photos). It also provides access to an already huge and rapidly growing number of external applications such as games and quizzes. These can also be used for personalisation by being added to one’s profile. The wide use of external applications is a unique strategy of Facebook, yet at the same time it is indicative a process of ever-increasing interconnectivity between social networking sites as well as other online content.

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<sup>98</sup> <http://www.myspace.com/aplaceformusic>. No longer available. Accessed on: 25 October 2009

Since the year 2007 and in particular 2008, Facebook had increasingly been used by bands and music fans in a similar manner to MySpace. Following up on the patterns of usage, more and more music-, fan- and artist-related features had been added to the portal. Some of the aforementioned external applications were related to music: for example, the feature 'iLike' allowed users to indicate their preferences for artists, albums, live events and so on, while other applications enabled the ranking of bands or favourite albums, and there were also many interactive music quizzes in use. Bands were primarily present either in the form of a 'group' site which users can become 'members' of or, more recently, in the form of a specific music page. Users could join the latter by becoming 'fans' – the terminology is important here as it mirrors the traditional perceived dichotomy of artist and fan, and discursively sets such sites apart from other groups (the 'fan' status was nevertheless not restricted to music sites on Facebook: one could also become a fan of a sports team, a brand, a cultural product and almost any kind of 'cause' or initiative). On the one hand, friend relationships on Facebook are indistinguishable with regard to content or strength (c.f. Lewis et al. 2008: 332). At the same time, there is considerable variety of relationships and memberships outside 'friend' connections within Facebook, and this variety is in part connected to music-themed pages and profiles.

Without exception, the bands I observed in Liverpool all used MySpace and ran their own profiles on the website, and most of them used Facebook at the same time. However, they always referred the audience to the MySpace profile so that they could listen to the band's music, watch a video or get in contact with the band members. Besides these two social networking sites, online activity took place on various further platforms. The use of these, as the forthcoming chapters will show, varied from band to band, depending on the individual approaches and preferences with regard to the online activity of the bands or their strategies for promotion and communication in general, as well as other factors such as style and career stage. The websites belonged to the following categories:

- (1) social networking sites: Bebo.com, Twitter.com, Ning.com;
- (2) music streaming sites: Last.fm (simultaneously an online personalised radio station and a social networking site), the music streaming service Spotify (available from Spotify.com);
- (3) bands' own websites (the corresponding URL is usually 'band name.com');
- (4) websites of record labels, promoters and other management, magazines, newspapers, fanzines, record retail (some of these were combined);

(5) blogs (produced by, for example, music fans or industry representatives).

Besides bands, several of the mentioned venues also actively participated online through their own websites or MySpace and Facebook profiles. Clubs such as the Barfly and the Kazimier used social networking sites – the former predominantly MySpace, the latter predominantly Facebook – to promote events they were hosting. Besides the targeted promotional activity, they were also linked to various bands and other participants, thus forming part of dense online networks of activity. This type of online activity, however, was not typical of all venues – the Zanzibar, definitely a core venue, ran a minimal website that was not very frequently updated and not always reliable in terms of listings. Nevertheless, the promoters for some of the events taking place there – e.g. the ‘Band In a Box’ nights – had their own MySpace pages and thus their own channels of promotion and networking. The events in general, including the two major festivals, had even more significant online presence than the venues, and were often represented as separate entities, with their corresponding MySpace profiles and Facebook groups.

### Participation online

Online participation in relation to music making involves a number of activities, and a number of different roles or modes of participation. One of the most important roles, and the primary focus of the present research, is that of a band or musician. The main activities associated with this role include, firstly, self-presentation and promotion. Conceptually it is difficult to separate these two modalities, but under promotion I understand the information (e.g. written text or images) provided regarding, for example, live shows or releases. Self-presentation includes the display of biographies, excerpts from reviews, images such as photographs of the band, images and video recordings from live shows, and the online display of flyers of past events. Secondly, product-based activity and presence on the part of bands involves the uploading and sharing recorded tracks (e.g. on Last.fm, Spotify or MySpace), as well as the display of music videos, which are products in themselves but at the same time also function as promotional material, e.g. to sell a single. Thirdly, musicians also engage in audience-oriented communicative activity: this takes place in the form of blogs, comments and responses, and online chatting to fans and friends on discussion boards or equivalent channels of computer-mediated communication. Fourthly, closely related to this is networking, i.e. collaboration-oriented communicative activity: the mentioned means of

online interaction are also used in order to communicate with fellow musicians and bands, on occasion promoters or (informal) management and other 'helpers' surrounding the band.

## Chapter 4 Online presence and (self-)presentation of indie rock

The promotional booklet for Liverpool Music Week 2007 contained a full list of the – approximately 270 – participating bands and artists, each accompanied by the address of their MySpace profile pages for reference. This is a good indication of the importance of the social networking site, and the Internet in general, in the promotion of bands and music events. But in what ways exactly is a profile on MySpace meaningful for musicians, fans, event organisers, the representatives of venues or record labels? How can a band use online means to create a distinct band identity, and to indicate connections to a particular social-creative environment at the same time? How is a band's or event's online presence to be understood, and how does this presence relate to the temporal, spatial, and social structure of bands' careers?

In an attempt to answer the questions above, this chapter aims to determine the means – in a technological sense – and the manner – in a qualitative sense – through which the observed Liverpool bands and events are represented on the Internet. It proposes to identify and understand the relevant aspects of online self-presentation and self-positioning within a particular temporal-spatial context. This understanding then can also help to establish whether and how the online presence of bands and music events can be related, more generally, to the notion of community, and, more specifically, to the notion of the scene and the particular indie rock music scene in Liverpool. The analysis of bands' online activity in conjunction with the offline context of music making can bring us closer towards an empirically based definition of the music scene.

In addition to a focus on the structure and content of music profiles, a reflection on the perceptions of online participants is also of key importance in addressing the issues of online presence and self-presentation.<sup>99</sup> In other words, a further objective is to reveal how the bands and artists view their own and other participants' online presence in terms of content, function, and significance. In broader terms, the analysis is an attempt to integrate structure and experience – two perspectives that, on a phenomenological as well as empirical level, are never separate in the first place. Experience is always to an extent determined by socio–

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<sup>99</sup> One of the major flaws of the subculture tradition has been the emphasis on structural aspects without a demonstration of how particular characteristics make sense to, and are made sense of by, the people involved. The ethnographic work of Willis (1977) relating to working-class adolescents' attitudes towards education and finding a job is an exception.

political position and ideology, while the social is constructed through a dynamic between the individual and the collective.

Through the example of the band Elle s'appelle's MySpace profile, the first part of the chapter (sections 1-3) presents ways in which a band can establish a coherent, elaborate, and potentially marketable identity through online means, inextricably linked with offline ones. The example also serves to shed light on how the temporal structure of the online presence of a band can be conceptualised, and how this structure relates to the temporality of the larger music-making environment, including the audience as well as the music industries. Section 4 examines the online presence of a series of music events, organised by one of the observed bands and involving several others. The section presents an analysis of the online representation of music events, and explores the role of the Internet in the organisation, promotion, and remembering of the particular event series. Lastly, it uncovers the aesthetic concepts behind the organisation of the events as well as the represented themes and values, and relates these to the self-presentation of the participating bands.

## **1 The online presence of Elle s'appelle**

The expression *online presence* is used to indicate the group of Internet sites occupied by a band, individual, organisation, event, and so forth. Broadly speaking, this includes not only the websites created and maintained by the given band (individual, etc.), but also any other related online content. Elle s'appelle's online presence was dispersed across several websites. However, thinking in terms of the spatial metaphor of the centre and the periphery, it was possible to identify one central site. Borrowing a term from computer jargon, we could also refer to this as the 'default' site for the band. It was central in the sense of being a major node within the hyperlink network around the band, displaying links that led to more 'peripheral' sites; it also presented the largest amount of information on the band, which was also the most up-to-date; finally, it was the website that the band members themselves referred to most often – for example, during announcements at performances.<sup>100</sup>

In the case of Elle s'appelle, initially this 'default' site, the main referential point, was undoubtedly their MySpace.com profile page.<sup>101</sup> However, this statement needs further specification. One crucial aspect of the distribution of online presence is the temporal

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<sup>100</sup> In a similar vein, Hine (2000) observes that '[d]ifferent levels of connection and different numbers of visitors produce a hierarchy of central and marginal sites. The result is a highly differentiated form of space' (Hine 2000: 108).

<sup>101</sup> Available: [www.myspace.com/ellesappelleband](http://www.myspace.com/ellesappelleband). Accessed: 06 November 2010

element, that is, the fact that the centre(s) and peripheries may shift with time. Certain websites may become less frequented and/or less up-to date and gradually – or even suddenly – lose their central position, while others may become more popular and shift towards the centre. The MySpace.com profile functioned as the central online site for Elle s'appelle when the band started in early 2007, and maintained this role during the period when they played their first important gigs, released their first single, played Liverpool Music Week for the first time, and became gradually more popular, even if still mainly within Liverpool. Yet by the start of the year 2008, when they embarked on a UK-wide tour with fellow Liverpool band goFASTER>>, the online focus had begun to partly shift to their profile on Facebook.com. The MySpace site did not lose its importance, as both sites were updated and frequented by the musicians and fans alike regularly, and all key content – news items, blog entries – were posted to both sites, even if at times only through the use of cross-referential hyperlinks.

After the break-up of the band in August 2008, the founding member (singer and bass player) maintained and occasionally updated the MySpace profile due to continuing demand for their music (the number of plays of their tracks per day remained, in his words, 'enormous' following the break-up).<sup>102</sup> The Facebook page also continued to exist at the time of writing, with a number of updates after the break-up posted by a different member of the band (singer and keyboard player). Looking at the distribution of blog posts, updates and comments – the source site can usually be identified even if the same content is simultaneously present on the Facebook and the MySpace band profile –, it appears that MySpace was kept alive mainly by the founding member of the band (hence its central position from the very start), while the Facebook page was maintained by the keyboard player. In other words, the shifting and distribution of centrality in the present case can be an indicator of the roles and division of labour within the band itself.

As noted in Chapter 3, MySpace Music profiles follow a more or less fixed structure provided by the portal. The profile of Elle s'appelle followed this template, without too much personalisation, as regards either the order or layout of the sections. The page began with the band name, followed by the generic labels ('Pop / Powerpop / New Wave'), the motto ('Hyperactive Nursery Rhymes'), the location ('Liverpool, United Kingdom'), a profile views counter displaying the number of visits to the page, as well as further set indicators, basic pieces of information, and a contact box with the following functions: 'msg' (send message),

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<sup>102</sup> Based on both online evidence and face-to-face interview with the singer and bass player of Elle s'appelle (04 March 2009). The musician compared the number of plays per day to that of fellow Liverpool bands 28 Costumes and Hot Club de Paris, whose tracks were being played with significantly less frequency.



‘add’ (to friends), ‘chat’ (instant messaging), ‘invite’ (to a group), ‘share’ (with a friend), ‘save’ (to favourites), ‘block,’ and ‘rate.’ The ‘General Info’ table displayed information entered by the individual or group according to different categories (only the categories filled out by the owner appear on the profile). The profile of Elle s’appelle displayed

- the ‘member since’ date;
- the band members (only first names and instruments), as well as separate email contacts (see below for detail);
- influences: the list of artists that influenced the band’s music;
- the ‘sounds like’ list: a further list of bands and artists, the ‘sounds’ of which the band judges to be similar to theirs – this is intended to orientate the user browsing the profile with regard to musical style; finally,
- the ‘type of label.’

The displayed label was ‘None’ throughout the band’s career, regardless of the fact that they released a single under an independent label – in the particular context, the implication was that the band was not signed to any label in the traditional sense and did not intend to be associated with one.

A second notable fact is that the ‘member since’ date (17/05/2007) preceded the date of the first show at the Barfly club (01/06/2007) by two weeks, which means that the band had made their online ‘debut’ first. As the singer and bass player informed me, they were contacted online and invited to play at the Barfly with fellow Liverpool bands goFASTER>>, 28 Costumes and Indica Ritual after they had made their demo audio material available on MySpace. Besides this, the founding member of Elle s’appelle himself became acquainted with the other two members partly through their individual MySpace profiles. Friends had already recommended the prospective members as musicians, but following up on the recommendation, he visited their websites and decided to contact them.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, while offline relationships proved to be important in the formation and initiation of the band, MySpace as a source of information also played a crucial role.

A comparison of ‘snapshots’ of the profile at different points in time does not indicate changes in the content discussed so far, with the only exception of the ‘Band members’ section. Here, the band kept updating the contact details following changes in their management: for example, on 14 February 2008, at the time of their UK ‘Bossipop!’ tour, they displayed separate email addresses ‘for bookings or general enquiries,’ ‘for press queries,’

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<sup>103</sup> Online interview with a member of Elle s’appelle (23 November 2007)

‘for radio queries,’ and a collective email address for the band. The rest of the elements remained static, communicating a stable band identity.

The right side column of the profile page includes the ‘music player,’ which allows artists to upload their own songs. MySpace users can not only listen to these tracks by streaming,<sup>104</sup> but also add any track to the music player on their own profiles with a single click – in other words, they can use the tracks uploaded by artists featured on MySpace to personalise their own profiles. This element of self-presentation then at the same time fulfils promotional purposes for the respective band or artist. In addition, the music profile owner can also opt for making their tracks available for download via MySpace, although Elle s’appelle’s profile did not enable this. Elle s’appelle’s music player usually featured five to six recorded tracks, including the two songs released as a single in November 2007 through the independent label Moshi Moshi Records.

One of the signature features of a MySpace music profile is undoubtedly the available audio tracks. This facility forms part of a wider trend of the ever-increasing significance of digital and Internet technology, in particular the online channels of music consumption, production and dissemination. This includes the easy and often free availability of music online in conjunction with online networking technology, whether for downloading or streaming. The technical facilities for distributing one’s own music online and soliciting feedback have ensured the exponentially growing popularity of MySpace and similar musician-friendly social networking sites among bands, artists, as well as, notably, promoters and record labels looking for artists. On the other hand, as one of my informants implicitly suggested, the plethora of ‘unknown’ but aspiring acts has also made the pursuit of a successful career more difficult for bands, precisely as a result of the over-saturation resulting from the popularity of this form of online presence.<sup>105</sup>

The example of importing tracks to profile pages already indicated that certain online elements can simultaneously fulfil functions of self-presentation and promotion, and we can find further examples of the convergence of communicative functions in features of the online profile. The music player on Elle s’appelle’s page is followed by the ‘upcoming shows’ section. During the time of the single release and the Bosspop! tour (Autumn 2007 – Spring

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<sup>104</sup> ‘Streaming’ refers to playing online, without downloading the audio track.

<sup>105</sup> After the break-up of Elle s’appelle, the singer and bass player suggested that the band probably would have ‘made it’ before the time of the Internet – in his opinion, the abundance of bands online has made it more difficult for any individual band with a unique such as Elle s’appelle to stand out. While he was not certain of this, he suspected that the Internet has had a negative effect on the live music scene due to the fact that now ‘everything is available online’ (Face-to-face interview, 4 March 2009).

2008), the section listed at least twenty different forthcoming events on average (as mentioned in Chapter 3, the tour was a series of joint gigs with the band goFASTER>> organised by the Barfly club, beginning in February 2008). This abundance of gigs in itself strongly suggests that the mentioned period was a hugely eventful one for the band – the section in this sense simultaneously fulfils informational and promotional purposes by ‘advertising’ that the band are busy.

The list of shows is followed by the ‘latest blog entries’ section. During their active existence, the band used the blog frequently to report news and events, to express thanks to promoters or other bands, and to make announcements to the audience. The blog thus functioned as an important forum of communication towards people around the band. On the Facebook page, the same role was fulfilled by the so-called ‘updates,’ i.e. news entries automatically received by users who join the page as ‘fans’ of the band, which are also displayed on the site similarly to the blog entries on MySpace. This similarity can be viewed as an example for structurally slightly different forms of online communication serving the same function.

Below the blog entries, we find the ‘about’ section – a band biography, the ‘friend space’ with the ‘top friends,’ and the friends’ comments section. Within the ‘biography’ section, the band displayed videos: first, they posted the video for the single ‘Little Flame’ straight after its completion, later a preview from Elle s’appelle at ‘Treehouse Sessions’ from April 2008. The videos appear as an element of self-presentation and promotion similarly to the tracks in the music player; moreover, the ‘Little Flame’ video also makes reference to the event of releasing the new single (shortly after the release a note was added, informing the viewer that the Little Flame single had been sold out). For the period of the Liverpool Music Week 2007 festival (29 November – 9 December), the festival’s logo was also featured in this section. Lastly, quotes praising the band’s music were also cited here, serving the function of promotion as well as indicating that the band was the focus of external – music press – attention.

In summary, Elle s’appelle used the available MySpace music template without too much personalisation, adding all ‘required’ information and customary content<sup>106</sup> such as music videos on the main site, as well as images from band photo shoots and live performances in the photo album. They nevertheless also employed subtle subversions such as citing authors and film directors under ‘influences,’ a space where bands and artists usually

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<sup>106</sup> This observation is made on the basis of the viewing of several hundred MySpace music profiles during (as well as before and after) the period of research.

list their musical influences. This can be described as a dual composition of the band's representation of identity: on the one hand, their profile is a symbolically bounded virtual space (signified by a URL i.e. web address) among extended online 'population' of bands and artists, each with their own bounded spaces. On the other hand, they express their individual identity through their unique choices and responses to, and subtle subversions of, the available structure and the perceived MySpace norm (the 'usual' answers).

Without accepting its deterministic binarism (along the lines of feminine – masculine), we can draw a parallel between this dual representation and Simmel's theory of fashion: according to the theory, the phenomenon of fashion arises from the dual desire of identification with others – the 'psychological tendency towards imitation' (Simmel 1957: 542) –, as well as the desire of being separate from them – 'the need of differentiation, the tendency towards dissimilarity' (543). The duality of identification *with* and identification *against* norms is inherent in the notion of identity.

## **2 Self-(re-)presentation and branding online**

As the described profile elements indicated, one of the major functions and purposes of publicly displaying a profile is self-presentation. Self-presentation in its turn is a crucial element of communication between a band and their audience – whether audience refers to fans, members of other bands, promoters, critics or record label representatives. Liu (2007) analyses individual profiles on MySpace with a similar focus: he identifies patterns in the displayed lists of interests, understanding them as taste performances corresponding to determinable taste clusters. However, self-presentation and the demonstration of taste affiliations have particular significance within the world of popular music. I proceed to explore Elle s'appelle's use of their MySpace profile to present themselves to their – actual and implied – audience, in other words, the context they establish for the reception of their music.

In the 'about' or biography section, a short explanation of the band name was provided: 'Elle s'appelle is GCSE French for "She is called".' This brief sentence fails to tell the viewer anything about the origin of the name, yet it provides an element of self-presentation by indicating a playful approach. Playfulness and imagery associated with children were dominant motifs within the profile, as the following examples indicate: the motto 'Hyperactive nursery rhymes' was prominently displayed on the top of the page, where the phrases 'hyperactive' and 'nursery rhymes' both connote children and the activity of

playing. The ‘influences’ section – a space bands usually use to list musical influences, indicating tastes and artistic-stylistic directions – cited such references as Hans Christian Andersen, Roald Dahl, the Brothers Grimm, Hayao Miyazaki, and Tim Burton, who are all associated with either children’s literature or fantasy and animation films. This corresponds to the statement of the singer/bass player, according to which the band members ‘share more influences outside music [than musical influences], like children’s literature.’<sup>107</sup> One of the promotional photos – used by the band for a few months as their MySpace profile image – featured the band members in a cosy but surreal room with grass on the floor and some bushes under the window, sitting under a lit standard lamp on a picnic blanket, with the singer/bass player on a pile of books reading to the other two members, who are intensely listening. Visually, the flowery, bedroom-like pink and brown wallpaper used as a background on the page also evoked childhood associations – an over-emphasised, and therefore ironic, nostalgic intimacy.

This verbal and visual imagery plays a role in establishing the context for the band’s music, certain elements of which can also be associated with childlike playfulness and simplicity. The call-and-response vocals, the intricate counter-melodic dynamics, and the motions of meeting and separation in the vocal melody lines create a dynamic of mutual counter-pointing and reinforcement, where all elements indicate playfulness, as well as bearing similarity with the melodic construction of children’s songs. Furthermore, the precise, clear-cut changes in the song structures, along with the bare instrumentation provided by the drums, bass, keyboard and two vocals arrangement entail simplicity in the transparent sense of the word. Besides a primary emphasis on memorable melodies, harmonies provided by the male and female vocal are a distinctive element in the band’s musical world. Due to their characteristic call-and-response structured melodic lines, the songs are not only memorable, but also easy to sing along, as the audience’s participation during performances proved (a note added to the ‘about’ section on the profile towards the end of the year 2008 reads: ‘As a friend of mine said “It’s as if they just picked out a melody from my head and started playing it”’<sup>108</sup>).

As the band explained in interviews and promotional material, the lyrics to the single ‘Little Flame’ (2007) were influenced by a short story. The lead-in description for the single on the label’s website *Moshimoshimusic.com* quotes this story: ‘Once there was a little boy who was warned not to play with fire. Yet, he was fascinated by fires, and couldn’t

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<sup>107</sup> Online interview with a member of Elle s’appelle (23 November 2007)

<sup>108</sup> Available: [www.myspace.com/ellesappelleband](http://www.myspace.com/ellesappelleband). Accessed: 06 November 2010

resist.....'<sup>109</sup> This extract again refers to the playfulness and experimentation associated with children, with its thrilling duality of fascination and danger. The lyrics include phrases referring to this duality, such as 'I'm not ever supposed to, ever supposed to but I will anyway' and 'I will hide in the garden, hide in the garden so that they think I'm playing'<sup>110</sup> – the speaking voice is the 'little boy' of the short story. The promotional video for the song features a Nintendo gameboy, which the band members use, while also appearing as the characters inside the game. The musicians are also shown arranging colourful sweets, buttons, coins, crayons, and candles into patterns analogous to the gameboy's screen. The single cover evokes motifs familiar from the video: buttons and a girl standing with umbrella. This image was also used as a pattern on band merchandise T-shirts and bags; in other words, it was employed as a key visual motif of the Elle s'appelle brand.

The conspicuous 'girlish' dresses worn by the female member of the band during live performances provided a defining visual element, frequently commented upon in interviews. During one particular interview on BBC Radio1,<sup>111</sup> the interviewer asked the musician where she got all the dresses from, as she appeared to wear a different one at every single performance, to which the response was that she either bought them in vintage stores or had them made by an auntie. Such comments strengthen the associations with nostalgia (vintage products) and familiar intimacy (the auntie). Along with all of the other mentioned elements, they also contribute to the establishment of a unique identity, an easily identifiable brand for the group. As the examples show, the possibilities provided by the Internet – MySpace and, to a lesser extent, Facebook – were definitely essential for Elle s'appelle in this process.

While the identified visual references to childhood and nostalgia fit into a coherent image unique to the band, at the same time they can also be identified as a genre specificity. In her comprehensive discussion of indie aesthetics, Fonarow describes the concept of indie as a musical style in the following way: '[p]ermeating the indie tradition is an espousal of simplicity and austerity, a hypervaluation of childhood and childlike imagery, a nostalgic sensibility, a technophobia, and a fetishization of the guitar' (2007: 39). In terms of appearance, she observes that '[i]ndie's style of dress embod[ies] its themes of childhood and nostalgia,' including light-coloured undersized clothing and 'the adoption of charity shop items' (44-45). While creating and representing a consistent aural and visual imagery that

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<sup>109</sup> Now the full story (without reference) available on the artist profile on the label's website: <http://www.moshimoshimusic.com/artists/elle-sappelle>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>110</sup> Lyrics available: [http://www.treehousesessions.net/index.php?band=\\_Elle\\_s\\_appelle](http://www.treehousesessions.net/index.php?band=_Elle_s_appelle). 06 November 2010

<sup>111</sup> BBC Radio1, 03 December 2007

functioned as a band identity, Elle s'appelle thus also located themselves within a broader context through – wittingly or unwittingly – alluding to the stylistic traditions of a particular musical genre (which they can be identified with, despite the fact that their self-selected genre labels on MySpace did not include the broad label 'indie').

Recurrences of certain elements could also be observed within the local music-making environment. For example, the influence of literature was also an important in the self-presentation of the band House that Jack Built: their motto on MySpace reads 'one million books!,' and they describe themselves the following way in the 'About' section:

[...] the name is, typically, taken from an old English fable written by an author whose identity is oft discussed over good coffee (something the band enjoy every bit as much as an anonymous work of literature). Despite having somewhat lofty lyrical influences House that Jack Built's musicality is rooted firmly in pop, taking influences from contemporary melody makers like the Young Knives, Field Music and Futureheads. Floundering in the below average bracket of basic arithmetic skill, math rock was always out of the question. Instead, a large part of the band's artistic influences comes from words and ideas leather bound in the annals of English literature (where does that leave us... Lit rock?!)

(House that Jack Built MySpace profile<sup>112</sup>)

This similarity in self-definition and declared influences between House that Jack Built and Elle s'appelle can be viewed as an articulated bond between the two bands – that is, a symbolically and aesthetically based cohesive element of local music making.

In sum, there is an internal coherence regarding elements of Elle s'appelle's music (including lyrical content, rhythm, melody, structure, and arrangement), performance style, recurring motifs on the MySpace profile (written or visual), the band's self-description (whether in official radio appearances or the research interview), and finally, elements of the physical products (record sleeve, merchandise). There is also an external coherence, one aspect of which is genre, i.e. the aesthetics of indie; the other is locality in the form of an aesthetic connection to another local band 'close' to Elle s'appelle in a geographical sense and in terms of friendship. The elements of self-presentation that the band display through their online spaces connect to other elements belonging to 'Elle s'appelle,' and can be understood as part of their construction of a brand – an identifiable and promotable band identity.<sup>113</sup> A

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<sup>112</sup> Available: [www.myspace.com/housethatjackbuiltband](http://www.myspace.com/housethatjackbuiltband). Accessed 06 November 2010

<sup>113</sup> In their 'discursive-psychological discourse analysis' of the online community around the band New Model Army based on the analysis of band and fan postings on the band's website, O'Reilly and Doherty describe the online construction of music brands. Brands in popular music – including not only 'performer or talent brands,' to which category a band as brand would belong, but also various other types such as record

band identity, however, involves more than a sellable brand: based on its external references, it can function as a symbolic cohesive power for the musicians involved, as well as other local bands, and, importantly, the audience.

### 3 Temporal (self-)positioning

While, as the above indicates, it is possible to identify coherent and stable cultural representations created and maintained through online as well as offline means, a band's online presence is by no means static. On the contrary, temporal structure is a key aspect of online content and interaction. When analysing the temporal aspects of the Internet, Hine describes webpages as actively performing time, instead of 'floating free in time,' as Castells' (1996) metaphor of the temporal collage would suggest (2000: 100). Her focus is on the perception and understanding of time (as well as of space) on the part of the users of online media: '[t]he idea of the temporal collage overlooks the interpretive work which participants do to make sense of conflicting temporal orders, and the cultural competences which they draw on to do so' (103). In her analysis of one particular online media event (the so-called Lousie Woodward murder case), she identifies the temporal markers that orientate participants and the instances that provide the temporal progression of the online event. The following example, relating to Elle s'appelle, demonstrates the specificities through which time is perceived and performed online in relation to the offline world in a music making environment. As in Hine's analysis, the focus is on participants and their creation of meanings; however, the present analysis also takes account of the broader context of the music industries, within which music making operates.

In the context of MySpace (or Facebook, and so forth), one important point of reference in terms of temporal self-positioning is the state of being online. In terms of bands and individuals alike, this in part refers to being registered – i.e. being a member of MySpace, part of the online population of the website –, and in part refers to the user being actually logged in and browsing MySpace. Both are indicated on member profiles: the first aspect by the 'member since' date, the second by the online indicator icon, as well as the date of last sign in. The indication of being present online signifies attention – the profile owner in question is viewing or listening to online content, editing their website, and/or communicating with other users –, as well as availability, i.e. the opportunity for interaction. Besides the

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labels, producers, events etc. –, in their definition, 'can be conceptualized in symbolic terms as a web of cultural texts [...], the aggregate of their power constructing the brand identity' (O'Reilly and Doherty 2006: 140).



mentioned indicators on MySpace, the dates of news entries, blog posts, and comments also signify the degree of ‘up-to-date-ness,’ eventfulness, and attention on the part of both the profile owner (news items, blog posts) and the audience (comments).

An integral part of what will be understood as a music scene is precisely this dynamic structure: the ‘happening’ aspect of music making. The audience follows, and in part contributes to the creation of this temporal dynamic. Participant observation (including my own experiences as musician and music fan) indicated that an integral component of fandom is keeping up-to-date with shows, releases, new online content such as photos and videos, and events such as collaborations or changes in band membership. Such temporal instances are either marked online or taking place there, and therefore can be followed by online participants. Decisions with regard to a band’s career, such as recording, releases, and touring, also rely partly on this recognised internal temporality. For example, records are ideally released when a band receives a lot of attention from the audience; the release of a record instigates feedback from the audience; this will often be followed by playing shows locally, or if the band has the opportunity, touring. Directly or indirectly, all levels of the music industries – the recording industry, the live music industry – are therefore informed by the internal dynamics of a band and the band’s following. (Of course the process is not one-way: temporal, economic, and other factors external to the band, e.g. a record company’s or venue’s policy and resources, will influence their own internal dynamics.)

A key unit within the temporal structuring of a band’s online presence, both on analytical and empirical levels, is what we can term the *event*. One example of an event relating to Elle s’appelle is the release of their single *Little Flame* (19 November 2007). Offline, the event was marked by a release party and gig at the Korova on 5 November (originally, the single release was scheduled for an earlier date, hence the difference between the actual release and the launch party). The record subsequently appeared in record shops all over the country; the list of shops selling the single was displayed on MySpace, as well as the website of the label, Moshi Moshi. The online launch involved Moshi Moshi releasing the tracks as downloads; a corresponding blog post by Elle s’appelle on MySpace along with other references to the single on the band profile; announcements via email to members of their Facebook group; and the publishing of reviews on websites external to the band such as that of the indie webzine *This Is Fake DIY*. The following is an excerpt from *This Is Fake DIY*’s review of the single (cited with a link in Elle s’appelle’s Facebook and MySpace blog):

**Elle s'appelle** have a certain kind of magic. It's running through a whole gang of new bands, sure, but these guys have it in absolute spades. Spades that they've taken down the sea side to build a whole castle of glittery, ocean going delights [...] It's pretty clear that, while Liverpool has more than its share of amazing bands right now, there's two or three that look set to bring the good times back to the Capital of Culture. **Elle s'appelle** could well be at the front of the pack; 2008 awaits with baited [sic] breath.  
(‘Elle s'appelle – Little Flame.’ *This Is Fake DIY*<sup>114</sup>)

Besides alluding to Elle s'appelle's association with the world of childhood and fairy tales, the review also links the band to Liverpool as a place, referring to the excitement surrounding the city's European Capital of Culture status in 2008, and to the city as a place for 'amazing bands' in general. Radio airplay and live appearances also marked the release, and Elle s'appelle cited the ones that were available online through notifications in their blog, via Facebook mail and MySpace messages (e.g. by linking to BBC Radio2 and BBC Radio Merseyside<sup>115</sup>). Lastly, the event was referred to, discussed, and evaluated by friends and fans of the band through comments, both on the front page of the MySpace profile and adjoining the relevant blog post (e.g.: 'Awesome, Probe Records will sort me out :) / Can't wait / Love u guys :D'<sup>116</sup>).

The launch event was held at the Korova, a venue that played central role in featuring local indie rock, including unsigned bands, and was thus associated with not only Elle s'appelle, but also the bands with whom they frequently performed together, such as Indica Ritual and 28 Costumes. The place has deliberately established a strong image of 'trendiness' conspicuously corresponding to the indie aesthetic, represented architecturally (bar with booths upstairs, stage downstairs – literally underground) and visually (e.g. black and white rock and punk photographs on the wall, Goth-/emo-influenced logo – in line with the popular cultural history of the venue name, originally appearing in the cult novel and film *A Clockwork Orange*<sup>117</sup>), and carefully marketed through, for instance, its own DIY-style magazine *The Korovian*. The event was organised by the locally well-known promoter Meshuggy, whose online presence, promotional and networking activity in relation to Liverpool-based venues and both resident and visiting acts was remarkable.

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<sup>114</sup> 'Elle s'appelle – Little Flame.' *This Is Fake DIY*. [now unavailable] <http://www.thisisfakediy.co.uk/articles/7810/Elle-sappelle---Little-Flame.html>. Accessed: 06 December 2007

<sup>115</sup> BBC Radio 2 available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2> and BBC Radio Merseyside available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/merseyside>. Both accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>116</sup> 03 October 2007. Available: <http://blogs.myspace.com/ellesappelleband>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>117</sup> Burgess (1965) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971)

The performance of Elle s'appelle on 5 November 2007 was preceded by two support acts: a solo singer-songwriter performance and the indie rock band This Ain't Vegas from Sunderland. Merchandise (mainly T-shirts) was being sold throughout the event (this was very common practice at gigs I attended in Liverpool, and typical for the observed bands, not exclusive to launch events). The record itself was of course unavailable as it was to be released two weeks later. Elle s'appelle's set in particular was well-attended: by the time they had appeared on stage, the (relatively small) room had filled with the crowd so that only the people standing in the front were able to see the band properly – a few audience members in fact decided to follow the show on the TV screen placed on the wall at the back of the room. As the MySpace page proves, some audience members followed up the show by going online and congratulating the band, at the same time publicly reinforcing their own participation in the online-and-offline event. In addition, a number of fans/friends also posted messages of apology for not having attended the gig. Discursive acts such as this on the one hand serve to articulate the comment posters' own fandom and support of the band. On the other hand, they reinforce the importance of the event itself. This latter effect is potentially beneficial for the band as it advertises their significance and the eventfulness of the scene to viewers of the page.

An event is also defined temporally in terms of preceding events and follow-up events, and this is discursively traceable in the topics of the blog posts, news mails and comments. In the case of the event discussed above, the online release of the 'Little Flame' video clip can be considered a preceding event, along with all the related – praising – commentary from the audience on Elle s'appelle's MySpace profile. The immediate consecutive event is the single becoming sold out, which development was simultaneously indicated by the band on their MySpace profile.

It is evident from the analysis that online content and interaction relating to a band is inextricably linked to the offline course of events. Furthermore, the dynamics of the local music making environment – what can be referred to as a scene – is intertwined with the internal temporality of a band as it is enacted through in part online, in part offline means. In other words, offline-and-online events such as the release of an album play a crucial role in the temporal structuring of the scene around a band, as well as functioning as a represented building block in the band's career. As a further point, online interaction on bands' websites<sup>118</sup> proves that the audience plays a very important part in the construction of events

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<sup>118</sup> Analysed in detail in Chapter 5

and their online representation. On the basis of this, it is more adequate to speak of the collective history of the scene around a band instead of, or as well as, the career of the band. Participation and online representation becomes even more complex with music events involving several bands, and the next example addresses this issue.

#### **4 The online presence of ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’**

The ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ event series was organised by Liverpool-based rock band Married to the Sea, and launched in 2007. The reasons for choosing this particular event as an example alongside indie rock bands were, firstly, the fact that it has mainly involved Liverpool-based bands not signed to any label, and secondly, that its organisation was an entirely ‘grassroots’ enterprise, based on the initiative of one band and the creative participation of several others. The first event of the series was held on Friday 29 June 2007 at the Everyman Bistro in Liverpool. According to Married to the Sea, ‘10 bands 10 minutes’ is a popular type of performance in Japan. The band had heard about the concept before they had come up with the idea for the first event, but the immediate prompt was their tour van breaking down, and the pressing necessity to raise money to be able to fix the problem:

Apparently, ‘10 bands 10 minutes’ is quite a big thing in Japan. Someone told us about it, and we just thought it was quite a good idea, because unless you really really love a band, if you go and see them and they play for half an hour or forty minutes, you get bored. With the first one, [...] we used to have a van and it broke, and we just didn’t have enough money to pay for it, so we thought let’s put on a gig that lots of people would come to see so that we would raise money for our van, [and] that idea had been around for a while, so we did it.

(Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009)

The first event had no particular theme: each band was asked to perform a number of their own songs. The second and third events both took place at the Barfly club in Liverpool on Saturday nights (2 August 2008 and 24 January 2009), and were both organised as a tribute to a particular album (a format that was to be continued for future events according to more than one interviewed participants). The chosen album was Green Day’s *Dookie* (1994) in the first instance, and Weezer’s self-titled (1994) in the second. On both occasions, each participating band covered one song off the album and performed two or three of their own songs, not exceeding the ten-minute time limit. As participating band 28 Costumes explained on their MySpace blog before the Weezer tribute event:

basically, there are going to be 10 bands playing and each of those 10 bands are going to play a song from the first Weezer album! So, 10 bands, each has 10 minutes to get up, play their Weezer song and 2 of their own and then get the fuck off dead quick and let the next band up!

(28 Costumes, MySpace blog, 07 January 2009)<sup>119</sup>

While the initiative to invite ten bands for one performance had practical economic justifications, as the anecdote related by Married to the Sea implies, the idea to turn the events into tribute nights is at the same time a unique decision, as are the choices regarding the albums/artists to cover.

### The expression of collective musical taste

The theme of the events and the choice of artists and albums to be covered are revealing with regard to the role of shared musical taste and its articulation. In the following, I explore these underlying taste choices and compare them to genre affiliations expressed by the participating bands online. This can help us to establish whether it is possible to speak of a taste-based community in relation to those participating in the events.

The guitarist of Married to the Sea made the following observation in relation to Green Day's *Dookie*: 'that album in particular, I think it was quite a universal one, everyone liked it when they were however old, fourteen or whatever, so it was good in a nostalgic way.'<sup>120</sup> In other words, the choice of this album reflects the idea of a shared musical past amongst the participating bands, expressed through the feeling of nostalgia – not only for a particular era in the history of popular music, but also for a particular period in the individual life course and musical career of the musicians. That particular period, the teenage years, can be considered defining in terms of the forming of musical taste, hence the significance of referring to the sharing of this experience among the group of bands participating in the tribute events.

Similarly, the band Weezer was also named in an interview by a member of Elle s'appelle as an important influence.<sup>121</sup> Weezer, furthermore, is listed in the 'Sounds like' section of the MySpace profile of House that Jack Built, another participant in 10 Bands 10

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<sup>119</sup> Available: <http://blogs.myspace.com/28costumes>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>120</sup> Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview (11 March 2009)

<sup>121</sup> 'My main musical influences are Pixies, Talking Heads, the Clash and Weezer (very early...)' Online interview with a member of Elle s'appelle (23 November 2007)

Minutes.<sup>122</sup> The choice of the albums *Dookie* and *Weezer* in this sense signifies a perceived symbolic bond of taste among the participating bands. Sam Walkerdine's quoted observation therefore hints towards a feeling of community, the basis of which is a common past linked through shared musical taste and similar musical pathways – and the conviction that a collective tribute to particular albums will evoke the same associations for the participating musicians.

The participating bands' aesthetic approach to the popular music text central to the event can be considered as an expression of collective musical taste. During the *Dookie* tribute night, none of the renditions of Green Day's songs differed radically from the original versions. However, rather than precisely copying Green Day, the performed covers were typically tailored to the individual style of each band – since the bands performed a number of their own songs alongside one cover, the covers were in all cases integrated into the set. The stylistic differences were thus in line with the stylistic differences among the bands: for instance, one performance was pointedly uptempo punk; a number of the performing bands made use of American pop punk-style vocal harmonies as a central feature; one performance was influenced by metal styles (heavily distorted guitars, screamy vocals, aggressive masculine stage presence). Apart from these particularities, all performances involved all-male guitar bands<sup>123</sup> belonging to the alternative or indie rock and punk tradition. We can identify this as a stylistic consensus.

Without exploring the concept of taste in detail here, the following can be accepted as a premise: the notion of taste in music is closely connected to genre and style, in the sense that musical taste can be expressed through generic and stylistic categories, and taste communities are in part – but not solely – based on affiliations and identification with particular genres and styles.<sup>124</sup> With three exceptions, the participating bands all had a profile site on MySpace, and, judging by the online content, offline observations (bands' frequent references to their MySpace profiles during performances), and interviews, they actively and frequently used the website. Looking at the stylistic labels on the MySpace profiles of participating bands (Table 3.1 in Appendix 4), a significant number of the participating bands (9 out of 22) list

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<sup>122</sup> Available: <http://www.myspace.com/housethatjackbuiltband>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>123</sup> At this event – on the other two occasions, some of the bands had women as members.

<sup>124</sup> A typical area of research within the sociology of music – and youth sociology – has traditionally been the exploration of taste and taste communities (both heavily sociological terms, relying on, among others, the theories of Veblen (1899) and Bourdieu (1984)) through genre labels. It is important to remember, however, that genre labels are themselves always cultural and discursive constructs. Studies of musical taste that rely on pre-defined genre labels may easily result in tautological conclusions.

themselves under the ‘Indie’ category.<sup>125</sup> This identification was also reinforced in face-to-face interviews, for example by the band Puzzle, who at the same time – perhaps with a tinge of nostalgia – reflected on the irony of the multitude of stylistic labels appearing in the music press that have sprung from the ‘traditional’ indie label:

I would just say we’re an indie band in a kind of traditional style almost, as in the music, the venues, the people that we play to, the attitude, the style, it’s just what has been classed as indie bands for years and years and years. And then everything exploded and now there’s fifty-five different genres – we’re just an indie band.

(James Mounsey, face-to-face interview, 25 March 2009)

Interestingly, the criteria along which the musician defines the indie tradition – the music, the venues, the audience, the attitude, and the style – almost exactly correspond to the aspects along which Fonarow delineates indie (2006: 25-78).<sup>126</sup> James, however, does not refer to the music industry relationship originally implied by the term ‘indie,’ i.e. being signed to independent as opposed to major record labels.

The second most frequent label is ‘Pop’ (7 instances), a term that is semantically even more loaded, and therefore potentially confusing. The label is used by the bands in particular combinations: alongside ‘Indie’ (on two occasions); ‘Powerpop / New Wave;’ ‘New Wave / Indie;’ ‘Alternative / Indie;’ and ‘Acoustic / Tropical.’ In these semantic contexts, it is not to be understood as *pop music* in the ‘traditional’ sense of music produced for commercial purposes, or as a stylistic equivalent to this, in opposition to *rock*.<sup>127</sup> Nor is it used in a broad sense as *popular music* – a category that, in contrast, would incorporate rock rather than stand in opposition to it. It is difficult, if not impossible, to provide a clear definition. Nevertheless, based on the uses encountered during the course of the research, ‘pop’ in terms of musical style, especially as ‘indie pop,’ connotes a focus on melody, as well as a produced as opposed to raw sound (e.g. ‘pop punk’ versus ‘punk’); in terms of attitude, the lack of an explicit oppositional stance. This does not mean that the term would connote mainstream status, on the contrary: pop in certain uses is close to ‘alternative.’<sup>128</sup> It is also used more specifically to

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<sup>125</sup> The aesthetics and ethics of the contemporary indie genre and style, concentrating on participants and spaces of the indie scene(s) in the UK, is explored in detail by Fonarow (2006). A defining analysis of the indie tradition regarding institutional politics and aesthetics is Hesmondhalgh (1999).

<sup>126</sup> C.f. Chapter 1

<sup>127</sup> Frith makes the distinction in sociological terms, uncovering the value judgements implicated in the usage of genre labels: in his understanding, the term rock, ‘in contrast to pop, carries intimations of sincerity, authenticity, art — non-commercial concerns’ (1983: 10-11).

<sup>128</sup> In her analysis of US ‘alternative’ music culture – an important influence for Liverpool indie bands – Kruse makes the following observation:

denote speeded-up reinterpretations of New Wave or Post-punk, as in the combination ‘Powerpop,’ referring again to styles that have emerged from under the alternative or indie umbrella.

‘Rock’ is almost as frequent as a label in itself (5 instances) – ‘rock’ as opposed to ‘indie’ here may refer to an identification with the classic rock tradition, including the traditional guitar-band line-up. ‘Punk’ is another relatively frequently used label, appearing not only by itself but also in the combinations ‘Pop punk’ and ‘Post punk;’ as is the label ‘Alternative.’ Both *Dookie* and *Weezer* are canonical works and hence important referential points within the American punk/alternative tradition, which is a further reason to presume a shared musical taste and style behind the choice of the mentioned two albums. Finally, in some cases the use of certain stylistic labels online can be understood as an ironic or playful gesture on the part of the band (e.g. ‘Punk / Punk / Punk’ by Hot Club de Paris; ‘Melodramatic Popular Song’ and ‘Zouk’ by The Sporting Life).

According to my informants, the fourth ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ event was also planned as a tribute night, but members of two different bands gave me contradictory information with regard to which artist or album would be covered – which is indicative of a negotiation process within the organisation of the event. A member of 28 Costumes said it would probably be a Pixies tribute<sup>129</sup> – which choice would have fitted the alternative tradition. The interviewed member of Married to the Sea, on the other hand, thought the event would most probably be a tribute to Bruce Springsteen.<sup>130</sup> The latter artist is the most markedly separate from the other three bands, which are in some way all linked to the American punk/alternative tradition; at the same time, Springsteen is a central figure within the (classic) rock tradition which many of the bands also appear to identify with, and undoubtedly a canonical artist in popular music.<sup>131</sup> A further example of a similar event is a Fugazi night organised by

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Within alternative music culture the pop/rock distinction is clearly important. When asked to label the music they play, the musicians I interviewed tended to employ the word “pop” as a particularly meaningful term, though one which inevitably required modifications with adjectives ...

(Kruse 1993: 36)

For example, ‘guitar pop’ was a frequent modification. ‘For most people,’ Kruse writes, “pop music” refers to Top 40 material, but within alternative music culture, “pop” is used to refer to music that tends to, in the words of Ruth Finnegan, “reject ... the wilder extremes of, say, heavy metal or punk” (1989, p. 104)’ (ibid.).

<sup>129</sup> Face-to-face interview with a member of 28 Costumes, previously a member of Elle s’appelle (04 March 2009)

<sup>130</sup> Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview (11 March 2009). In fact, it turned out to be both: the Bruce Springsteen tribute event was held on 15 January 2010 at The Masque (former Barfly), while the Pixies tribute is scheduled for 15 January 2011 at the same venue.

<sup>131</sup> Not to mention the fact that ‘It’s Boss Time’ made a great slogan with its word play – a linguistic allusion to Liverpool (the word ‘boss’ is frequently used in the meaning of ‘great’ in local slang).



Liverpool-based Samizdat Promotions at FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) cinema and arts centre on 21 October 2009. The night included the screening of *Instrument* (1998), Jem Cohen's documentary on the Washington DC punk-rock band Fugazi, which was followed by live sets from Hot Club de Paris, Indica Ritual, and Married to the Sea, featuring covers of Fugazi songs.

The above demonstrates that musical taste is expressed through, firstly, the theme of the event, i.e. the chosen albums; secondly, the style of the actual live performances; and thirdly, participating bands' own self-presentation in the form of self-labelling on their online profiles. Taste here is to be understood as collective as opposed to individual: it forms part of the self-definition of bands, as well as a collectivity of bands – those participating in the event. The correspondences among these three modes of expression imply that shared musical taste and affiliations is indeed a significant element within the network of bands. This is not to suggest that the participating bands' styles are uniform or could be grouped under a common style – the variety of labels used (36 for 22 bands) suggests there is no clear consensus; variety and playfulness seems more important than the expression of taste- and style-based identity. Nevertheless, it is possible to name the list of traditions within popular music history – punk, alternative rock, indie rock – with which the bands identify, both in terms of performative style and (online) self-presentation.

### The online representation of music events

Looking at the online context of the '10 Bands 10 Minutes' events in more detail reveals that each event attracted more and more online publicity. While the events did not have a dedicated website, the Weezer tribute, for example, was advertised through a blog post on the online cultural and touristic magazine *Liverpool.com*: 'Liverpool's finest – including Hot Club de Paris – will pay tribute to American indie heroes Weezer tomorrow night (Sat, 24). [...] Liverpool.com favourites Voo, Married To The Sea and 28 Costumes are all taking part.'<sup>132</sup> Besides this, the gigs were advertised on MySpace by the participating bands as well as hosting venue the Barfly, both in the form of written messages and images, i.e. virtual posters. Event notifications were also posted on the virtual radio and music-related socialising site Last.fm.

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<sup>132</sup> Available: <http://www.liverpool.com/blogs/10-bands-10-minutes.html>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

MySpace, Facebook, and Last.fm all enable the creation of virtual ‘events,’ i.e. online advertisements for occasions, in some form. MySpace allows event invitations to be sent to all friends of a band (including users such as promoters or venues). Besides this, bands also made use of a feature called ‘My Bulletin Space’ for sending out notifications of upcoming events directly to individual users. This application automatically lists all recent bulletin entries (up to ten days previously) submitted by any individual’s ‘friends’ with the identity of the poster, the date, and the time indicated.<sup>133</sup> On each individual Facebook profile, there is an ‘events’ section. Events, appearing as separate pages, can be created by any user, who will subsequently send out invitations to other users (profile owners), who in their turn can indicate whether or not they are attending the event (‘RSVP’). The event page, with the crucial practical information (time, place, etc.), often photos and videos, the list of people planning to attend (represented by their names and profile pictures), along with those who are not or have not decided, can be viewed as a virtual representation of the event itself, with clearly visible participants (the list of course may not be identical to the actual participants eventually turning up). The act of visible online participation is a *performative act*; for example, it can be an expression of involvement and support.

Once the bands I observed had created a band profile on Facebook, using the event feature was a very common method of promotion. Last.fm was another popular website that bands and venues used to create events, although not as ubiquitous as Facebook and MySpace. As with Facebook, users were able to indicate their participation, which would be visible to other users. In addition to this, the music focus of Last.fm entailed the unique feature of a multitude of links to audio, video, and photo material of the participating bands, as well as recommendations of ‘related events.’<sup>134</sup> On the other hand, the information and representation was limited to the display of bands that are registered on the site – hence only five of the ten participating bands were listed on the Last.fm event page of the *Dookie* tribute night (see Figure 3 4.1).

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<sup>133</sup> Again, it needs to be stressed that this is what MySpace looked like at the time of the research. The features are constantly updated and the way events appear at the time of writing is already somewhat, even if not substantially, different; the feature has moved towards becoming more similar to Facebook and Last.fm, in line with a larger tendency towards structural uniformity among social networking sites.

<sup>134</sup> One of the defining features of Last.fm is the linking of ‘related’ material – recommending recordings on an ‘if you enjoyed this, you are also going to like ...’ basis. The source for comparison is primarily listeners’ own usage, i.e. listening habits, and the user-based ‘tagging,’ i.e. labelling music in terms of genre and style.

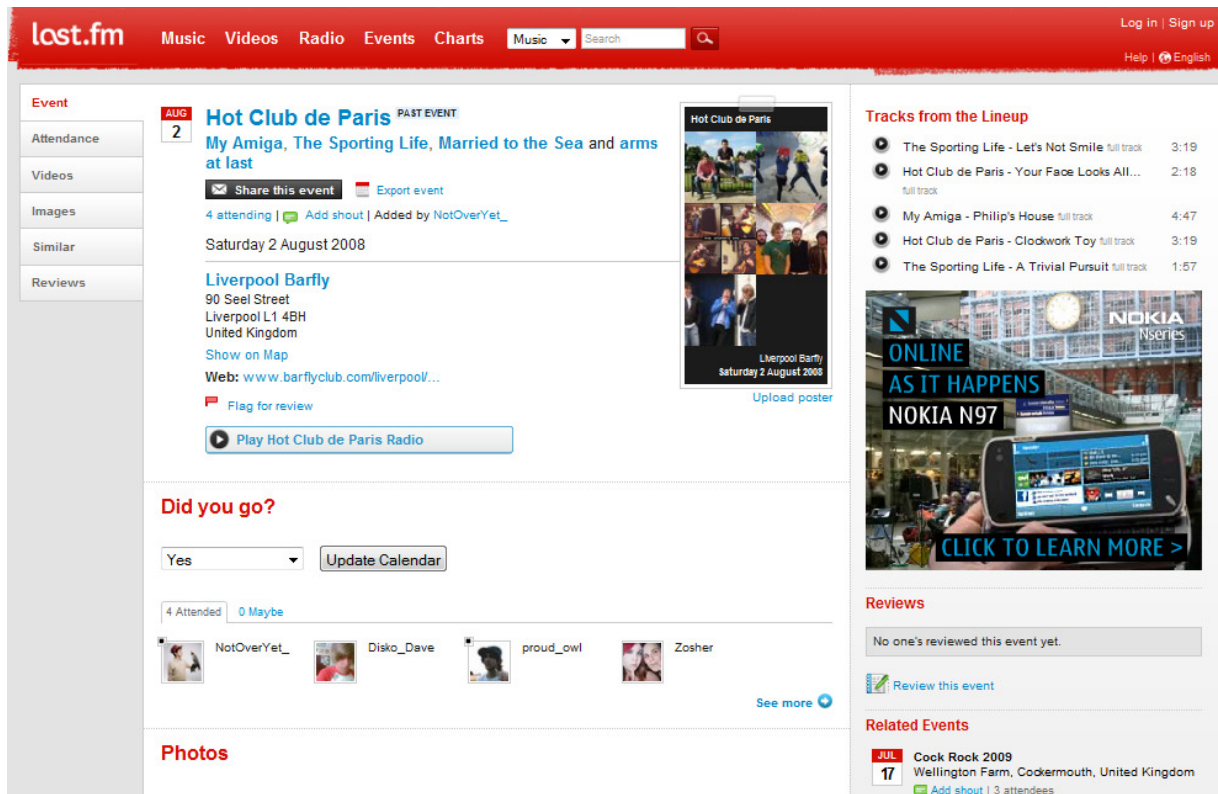


Figure 4.1 The second '10 Bands 10 Minutes' event (02 August 2008) on Last.fm

In sum, one of the main features of the specifically created event pages on social networking sites is their interactivity – their structure serves as an invitation for visible participation and commentary. The pages simultaneously function as information resources and collective spaces, integrating bands, venues, and the potential or actual audience. Furthermore, they also serve as temporal markers in the life-course of not only a band, but also the music scene. More often than not, event pages are available online long after the event, therefore they also create a visible timeline – history – for the bands and the communities around them. In other words, they provide an unprecedented, unique virtual space for the interaction among musicians and members of the audience. Even considering that not everyone attending shows and/or following particular bands is active online, these spaces have acquired key importance in the 'life' of the locally based scene involving the observed bands. Perhaps most importantly, the pages have a representational and conservative function, making the scene – the music, the participants, the collective discourse – visible and preservable online.

## Visual imagery in online promotion

The discussion thus far has already indicated that images, in the form of profile pictures representing the profile owner on social networking sites ('Facebook' even refers to this in its name), band photo albums, advertising posters, personalised backgrounds, album artwork displayed online, and so forth, have a central role in online self-presentation. We have seen, for example, the central role of particular visual motifs in the establishing of Elle s'appelle's identity as a band and music brand. Given this, the lack of attention paid to the role of visual imagery in either ethnographic or communication media-centred accounts of the online world is surprising.<sup>135</sup> In the following, I will examine the specific role of visual imagery in the promotion of the '10 Bands 10 Minutes' events.

The role of advertising posters in the promotional process, especially in the case of the latter two events – the tribute nights –, is not to be underestimated. All three poster designs were created by the drummer of Married to the Sea, who, besides posters, also designed the band's record sleeves. For both tribute events, the concept was to create an alternative version of the original album cover. The *Weezer* poster retains the blue background of the original 'Blue Album,' while the *Dookie* poster is a remarkably elaborate re-drawing of the original cover, with an abundance of images and references related to the city of Liverpool, such as iconic buildings in the background (the two cathedrals, the Liver Building, the Radio City tower), the words 'Boss Year' instead of the original 'Bad Year' on the balloon, as a reference to local slang, and a multitude of musicians with the standard guitar band line-up (Figure 4.2)<sup>136</sup>. Quite untypically for the shows of unsigned local bands,<sup>137</sup> this poster was being sold at the event (as well as subsequent events featuring Married to the Sea), and therefore served not only promotional purposes, but also as an item of memorabilia.

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<sup>135</sup> For example, Baym's (2010) otherwise comprehensive overview of online communication media as they are embedded in social practices, while providing a thorough and insightful account of online language use, centres on the written text, and does not give equal attention to other forms of representation. There are several content or discourse analyses of online interaction focusing on the written text (e.g. Nip 2004; O'Reilly and Doherty 2006), as well as studies of music scenes based on the analysis written online text (e.g. Hodgkinson 2004), yet there is a lack of systematic focus on other channels of online communication. Donath and boyd (2004) allude to the display of photographs on social networking sites in relation to self-presentation, but do not proceed to analyse this; nor does Liu (2007) explore the role of images in his otherwise insightful analysis as social networking profiles as taste performances. A counter-example is Boellstorff's (2008) account of the virtual world *Second Life*, which engages in detail with visual representation – however, this is increasingly justified in the case of a virtual world with elaborate graphics imitating the visual layout of computer games.

<sup>136</sup> The multitude of musicians is reminiscent of Max Scheler's iconic group photo from 1964 of – supposedly over 200 – Liverpool bands gathered outside St. George's Hall (photo published in Clough and Fallows 2010: 173)

<sup>137</sup> Besides CDs or vinyls, it is usually merchandise such as pins, T-shirts or bags that are available for members of the audience to purchase.

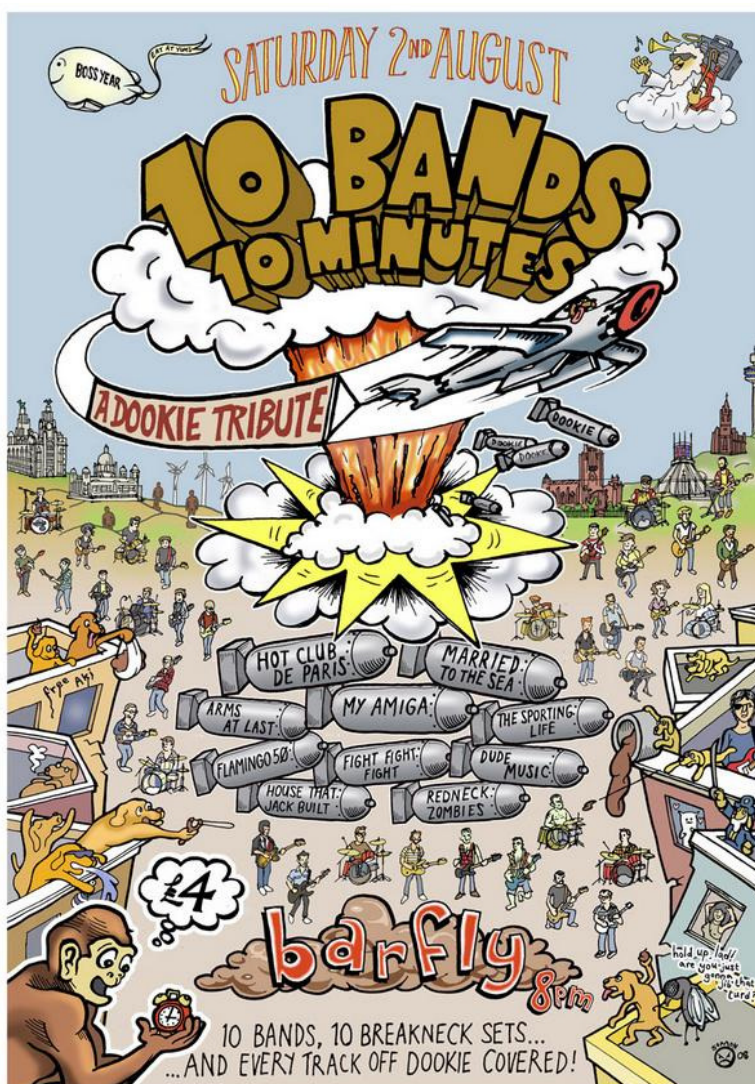


Figure 4.2 Event poster<sup>138</sup>

Alongside traditional tangible event posters, online posters have also become an important element of Internet-based promotion. In the case of the *Dookie* tribute concert, all participating bands made the poster their default MySpace profile picture during the weeks preceding the event, and six months after the event it still featured on some of the participating bands' profiles.<sup>139</sup> In this particular case, the exceptionally successful design of the poster evidently contributed to its widespread online display. Nonetheless, the example is indicative of the significance of visual imagery not only in online promotion, but also in the online (self-)representation of bands and music events. It is worth quoting the interviewed

<sup>138</sup> Published by the permission of Married to the Sea

<sup>139</sup> By 'default' I refer to the image displayed on the main profile site – the rest of the uploaded images can be reached via a link from the main site. As mentioned before, it is also the default image that appears alongside posts by users anywhere across MySpace, as a visual identification of the user.

member of Married to the Sea on the role of artwork in the presentation of their music and their performances:

[Artwork] is really important. Our drummer did our CD cover, [...] and he's done all our posters; he did the three posters for the 10 Bands 10 Minutes events. Unless a promoter from outside who's put it on has done a poster themselves, it's usually him. And I think it plays a huge part [...], especially as in fact gig posters are getting really popular, just generally, and people respond to posters – you can almost tell what a night would be like by the way it looks. [...] I think musical and artistic sensibilities are linked quite closely anyway.

(Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009)

One of the assumptions underlying this observation is that of a shared visual aesthetics amongst certain bands, venues and types of events that a particular musical audience can identify (and identify with).

The display of the Dookie poster on the part of the participating bands served as a clear visual indication of a bond between the bands – an aesthetic as well as local bond. The aesthetic bond is based on musical style, symbolised by the reference to Green Day as a canonical work, a collective referential point for the group of bands, alongside such elements as the multitude of (guitar band) musicians in the poster image. On the other hand, the playful visual and textual references to Liverpool – populated by musicians – present it as a place for music making. Importantly, such local references were only accentuated in the poster, and were not emphasised in, for instance, the promotional messages. Since, however, the poster was ubiquitous both online and offline, it acquired primary significance in the expression of a collective local identity. The represented symbolic tie, moreover, was potentially strengthened by the poster's status iconic as memorabilia, i.e. a visual reminder of the event for all participants (and perhaps even some non-participants) – it became part of the collective memory of the scene. The opportunity to display images on the Internet and their resulting instant accessibility has further enhanced this significance of visual design and artwork. The same images are still used in the traditional tangible sense as flyers, posters, or featured in venues' programme leaflets, but in addition to this, online facilities for promotion and self-representation enable them to be used, re-used and continuously recycled in the virtual world.

## Online visual imagery and genre aesthetics

The importance of artwork was also emphasised by the guitarist of Married to the Sea in relation to their upcoming split 7-inch release, shared with another band from Liverpool, who were also taking part in the ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ events:

We’re doing a split 7-inch with a band called My Amiga, who I think are really good. I’ve noticed that quite a lot of people, quite a lot of local bands seem to release 7-inches. It’s quite a nice format, but I don’t have a record player – but it looks nice, you get a nice big artwork, I think people are more likely to buy it just in a collector sense.

(Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009)

The above quotation alludes to a certain type of record collector aesthetics. In his exploration of the role of the Internet in the practice of record collecting or ‘crate-digging’ among DJs, Vályi (2004) demonstrates that online information sources and exchange have become an essential part of the practice, at least within the observed Central and Eastern European translocal scene. The example of the ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ event shows how this collector aesthetics has shifted to the online context through the ubiquitous display of carefully designed record sleeve imagery and its recycling as profile images, backgrounds for MySpace profiles, and virtual posters included in comments or messages.

In accordance with the observation of Sam from Married to the Sea, the (split) 7-inch proved to be a frequent form of releasing recordings amongst the bands I observed. Puzzle, another participant in the event series, also released a split 7-inch record under American label Polyvynil on 8 September 2008 with the band *Someone Still Loves You Boris Yeltsin* from Springfield, Missouri, who they had met when the American band played two gigs in Liverpool (and subsequently did a show with them in Leeds). Remarkably, Puzzle expressed their disappointment with the American label, while at the same time stressing their enthusiasm for the ‘DIY’ method, which allowed them to keep the whole process of the work involved in releasing a record in their own hands:

In a sense, when you are very DIY, you don’t have to rely on other people, so once something is in your hands, you can do all that you possibly do with recording and the artwork and everything. But once you’ve sent it to some magical place in America, it’s entirely in their hands and you have to rely on them to do a good job. And then possibly be slightly disappointed if the job is not as good as it could have been.

(James Mounsey, face-to-face interview, 25 March 2009)

The 7-inch format is discussed in the scholarly literature on indie, for example, in Strachan's (2007) analysis of 'micro-independent labels' in the UK and Kruse's study on independent music and local identity (2010: 626-627). In the context of DIY production, Strachan quotes a label owner, whose enthusiasm for this format had influenced his decision to launch a record label: 'I think a chief reason [for starting the label] was that I've always been a huge fan of the seven-inch single' (personal communication cited in Strachan 2007: 254). At the same time, Strachan's interviews confirm the significance ascribed to the record as a tangible work of art in the discourse of micro-independent production. The artwork, or 'packaging,' is an important focus within this production process, and the importance of design is inextricably linked to what participants in the production define as indie aesthetics and values. Hesmondhalgh similarly draws attention to the fact that '[i]n terms of presentation, indie often prided itself on its care over cover design' (1999: 38). At the same time, indie has opposed placing the focus on the 'image' in the sense that the pop mainstream does (ibid.). The importance of having the whole process 'in their own hands,' along with the satisfaction arising from this, seems to be a very important element of the DIY philosophy – whether this applies to the musicians, as expressed by Puzzle in the above quotation, or other participants in record production such as label owners: 'label owners often measure success by the amount of personal satisfaction and the sense of achievement gained from a particular release. Sometimes this is expressed through a pride in the actual artefact that they have produced' (Strachan 2007: 255).

Besides the organisation of the '10 Bands 10 Minutes' series, this DIY philosophy had also been present in the individual life-course of Married to the Sea, along with the Internet-based opportunities that helped to put it into practice. For example, in the early stages of their career, the band had set up and run a record label for themselves and a number of other Liverpool bands, mainly through MySpace sales:

We used to run a small label – it wasn't really a label, it was more like a collective where [...] we'd help out bands, put on gigs, do some recordings, together release stuff. None of [the bands] exist any more. [...] [The label] was only something that we did in our spare time so it was run through MySpace sales, we had our own website and things we sold through that website, and then if we did any gigs we'd take a few compilations out but the general idea was, we used to put on a lot of gigs and keep all the money from the gigs and then when we'd saved enough money, we got this compilation made and then we gave each band who was on the compilation 50 copies to sell for whatever price they wanted and keep all the money. So, a kind of win-win.

(Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009)



On the one hand, the approach expressed here places emphasis on ‘doing something in our spare time,’ that is, not professionally, not as a way of earning a living. The other key aspect emphasised is the win-win nature of the situation: the goal was not only to gain something, but also to give back to the community, i.e. the music scene the band felt part of. Both of these elements are in common with the approach of several of the interviewees of Strachan (2007), as well as the interviewees of Webb in his exploration of small-scale production and independent labels (e.g. Webb 2007: 178-179). In addition, however, in the case of Married to the Sea’s label, it is also important to stress the role of the Internet in the process of distribution: MySpace formed an essential element in promoting and selling the albums released.

## **Discussion**

Online technology, and MySpace in particular, provides a rich environment for bands for the establishing, maintenance, and representation of coherent identities. Not only do MySpace profiles function as online extensions of an image created through music, performance, and offline promotion, but in certain cases MySpace is where the band introduce themselves to the public. Their self-presentation is then extended in the offline space – Elle s’appelle’s appearance on the scene followed this pattern. Profile pages can inform us about bands’ individual goals, as well as their aesthetic identifications and self-positioning within the local environment. The analysis has shown that Elle s’appelle’s musical imagery of fairy tales, childhood, and fantasy, as well as technical representations of simplicity in the musical text, do not operate in isolation, but in a continuity that includes visual and textual references to childhood and nostalgia online, on the radio, at live performances, in videos, as part of record sleeve artwork, and also reinforced by online reviews of the band’s recordings. The interviews confirm that the band are conscious of this image, and employ it as a marketable brand. Yet, as the example of the reviews indicates, the construction of this identity also involves the participation of listeners.

On the one hand, the stability of a band’s online presence and the displayed online content is a key aspect of the creation and maintenance of a coherent band image. On the other hand, changes in online presence and content can be expressive of important events and developments in the band’s career, including their changing relationship with the industries. For example, shortly before the Green Day tribute gig, the participating bands changed their

profile pictures, and most of them kept the image as a symbolic bond with the event and other participants. As a different example, the changes in Elle s'appelle's management could be traced on their MySpace profile. Moreover, the dynamics within a band, such as the distribution of roles between band members, can also influence the particularities of their online presence.

The existence of an identifiable music scene is suggested by the articulated and represented taste consensus among bands, which is based on shared aesthetic values and preferences (this is not to deny the existence of significant individual differences). This scene, while, locally based, to a significant takes place online, and its course is determined by both online and temporal dynamics. In addition to taste and aesthetic values, the analysis of self-presentation has indicated further key aspects: firstly, the identification with locality, which is more often expressed in an implicit than an explicit way – for example, through the symbolic elements of the Dookie poster. Secondly, the similarities in self-presentation among bands, such as the correspondence between motifs of the self-presentation of Elle s'appelle and House that Jack Built. In the presented example of the '10 Bands 10 Minutes' events, these symbolic and tangible bonds were consistently recreated through online and offline means, in the context of actual shared events, and both offline and online communication among participants, including musicians and the audience.

The temporal aspect of the scene is also key, referring both to stability and dynamics. The former is guaranteed by local aspects such as typical venues (the Barfly, the Korova) and consistency in band lineups (e.g. the same bands performing at the same shows from time to time). Furthermore, it is reinforced through the maintenance of symbolic representations through a variety of media, including websites, particular images, and physical memorabilia. Online communication tools such as specific event pages facilitate the continuous maintenance of the visibility of the scene as a set of local and online social-creative relationships and meanings. Dynamics include the cycles of significant (online-and-offline) events involving participants.

## Chapter 5 Online interaction and the indie rock music scene

Treating self-presentation and interaction under separate headings may suggest that these aspects of online content can indeed be conceived of as separate; however, the following discussion will demonstrate that this is not the case. Most importantly, self-presentation is an act of one-to-many communication, whereby the ‘one’ is not necessarily an individual, but may be a collective entity such as a band, a group, or an organisation. Elements of self-presentation can be viewed as – verbal, visual, aural, multi-media – utterances, which may invite responses from their receivers.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, interactive features on the Internet such as blogs and message boards are very important elements of self-presentation and representation for bands online. Once available on the Internet, dialogues potentially become one-to-many messages in a similar manner to other posted content such as a biography or a news entry. My distinction therefore is only based on structural aspects: this chapter presents an analysis of the content and use of online features intended as interactive facilities, yet fulfilling a variety of functions and purposes simultaneously. These functions include establishing a coherent identity as a band through integrating the active discursive contribution of the audience, as well as the community-oriented expressions of support and participation that are a basic underpinning of the closely-knit music making environment that we can call a scene.

Online, it is through the displayed utterances, images, and sound (whether their own music, or music expressing their taste) that scene participants make themselves visible and audible. Besides being a source of music and related information, MySpace is primarily a space for socialising and the maintenance of communal ties with participants, with constant reinforcement of participation and (mostly) positive engagement with the music. Through the example of Elle s’appelle’s MySpace comment section, the first section of the chapter seeks to highlight the characteristics and significance of online interaction centred around bands, including the primary modes of communication and how these relate to fan and band identities, as well as the wider context of the simultaneously local and virtual music scene. The second example of the MySpace page of the band 28 Costumes demonstrates how interactive features – most notably, their blog – serve as a form of self-presentation for the band, as well as a vehicle for community formation and maintenance, actively involving participants connected to the band. This is followed by an analysis of online interaction

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<sup>140</sup> This observation is implicitly reliant on models of communication derived from Jakobson’s (1960) well-known classic model (with the main elements of writer – reader, message, channel, code, and context).

around the 10 Bands 10 Minutes gigs, with an emphasis on a grounded understanding of promotion and feedback in the context of MySpace. The final example in the chapter is the MySpace presence of the annual festival Liverpool Music Week. The festival had taken place at the end of autumn every year since 2003 and had involved a rapidly growing number of – resident as well as guest – bands and venues each year. Both of these events began as entirely grassroots organisations; however, Liverpool Music Week had quickly expanded into one of the largest and most significant indoors festivals of the UK, while 10 Bands 10 Minutes remained a small-scale, DIY-style event. As the analysis will show, the interaction patterns on the online spaces relating to these events in part mirror the aims and activities of the organisers, as well as the patterns of participation. At the same time, the lack of deliberate strategies regarding online interaction or its effective channelling can also be a hindrance for the establishment of a cohesive online-and-offline community.

As a preliminary methodological consideration, it needs to be noted that resulting from the characteristics of online media, communication takes place only partly through written text. Images, audio, and video material also form part of the ‘text’ of the communication model, as do hyperlinks – constituting what has in the context of computer-mediated communication been termed ‘hypertext.’ For this reason, when conducting online content and discourse analysis, the examination of written utterances in isolation would be insufficient and potentially misleading, as would the qualitative description of websites demarcated by a URL address in isolation from other online texts. Groups of online texts are directly interconnected and the connections themselves form part of the text in the form of published links. As Elliott observes: ‘the act of linking between sites should be considered a potentially community-building context (and thus, a primary ethnographic site) in and of itself’ (2004: 285). It can and has been argued that any text, including text in ‘traditional’ formats such as published literary works, is hyper-, or at least intertextual, as all texts draw upon and refer to already existing texts in certain, if very often implicit, ways – through conventions, the use of language, images, topoi, and so forth (c.f. Kristeva 1986). In the words of Mitra and Cohen, ‘[i]t is presupposed that texts do not operate in a vacuum and that any text gains meaning from its own formal and aesthetic qualities, but meaning is refracted by the primary text’s connection with other texts’ – this is what they refer to as the ‘realm of intertextuality’ (1999: 182). However, on the Internet the connections are to a certain extent directed, published and therefore traceable, namely through the particular hyperlinks that are displayed on websites.

## 1 Band profile comments

The comments on Elle s'appelle's MySpace page were analysed with the aim of determining the following: firstly, who is actively involved within the online spaces occupied by the band and what specific roles they assume or fulfil; secondly, in what ways they are involved – in other words, what are the identifiable modes of participation; thirdly, the intent and motivations behind participation. The analysis of user comments also revealed information regarding the evaluations and judgements made in relation to the music or other creative products (photos, videos), the expressed affiliations, as well as the indicated connections to offline places, events and relationships. These expressed values and attitudes play a central role in constituting community.

### Thematic content, approach, and modes of communication

MySpace enables the posting of users' comments directly onto the main profile page, as well as to individual blog posts and to the uploaded photos and videos. What is observable at any particular point in time is a synchronic 'snapshot' of the comments section, as new comments can appear all the time – and in fact did appear on a daily basis in the case of Elle s'appelle during the band's active period. Comments on the MySpace profile of Elle s'appelle on one particular day (06 October 2007) could be grouped under the following thematic categories:

- individuals' as well as bands' praise of the music video for 'Little Flame' (2007), which was new at that time, thus providing a topical issue, e.g.:

VIDEO!!! VIDEO!!! VIDEO!!! VIDEO!!! Arrrrrrgghhhhh... That's fucking brilliant guys. Proper massive grin on face here! Excellent stuff  
XX  
XXXX

(goFASTER>>, 03 October 2007);

- posts by both individuals and bands relating to gigs such as praise and/or confirmation of attendance, e.g.: 'yer I was at the gig, thanks for asking. I was pretty impressed with your stuff' (an individual, 02 October 2007);

‘think i may pop along on thursday :)’ (a member of the band Alexis Blue, 02 October 2007);

- promotion by other bands in the form of virtual posters advertising their gigs, sometimes, but not always, accompanied by one or two sentences; these are often – but not exclusively – bands with whom Elle s’appelle is in closer contact, e.g.: ‘come down to our gig in Korova next week if you're about. I see you're playing with The Vags this wk so I will try and get down’ (the Fountains, 02 October 2007); the promotional messages, however, also included impersonal ‘spamming;’<sup>141</sup>
- requesting information: typically in connection with gigs or recordings, e.g.: ‘Remind us of your liverpool gigs pls!’ (the band Accidents Never Happen, 02 October 2007) or ‘alright gang! where abouts online can i buy your single ?’ (posted by an individual, 03 October 2007);
- ‘thanks for the add’ posts, which are widely used on MySpace as an acknowledgment of the virtual ‘friendship,’ and can be considered as a conversational norm in the context of the website; lastly,
- general chat, which is connected to relationships that exist offline and typically posted by individuals, e.g. friends’ greetings or a reference to a party.

With regard to approach, the overwhelming majority of the comments are positive utterances of praise and support, whether in the form of an expression of appreciation of the band’s music or the confirmation of attending a show. This approach is closest to what is generally understood by ‘fandom,’ as it corresponding to three key criteria: firstly, positive value judgements regarding the cultural object in question and the expression of affiliation. Secondly, active participation: according to Fiske (1992), ‘industrially-produced texts encourage identification and participation by audience members’ (quoted in Lewis 1992: 3).

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<sup>141</sup> The term ‘spam’ in the online context is used for unsolicited promotional/advertising material.

In other words, fandom entails a creative engagement with, and appropriation of, the cultural object. Fan identity is constructed on the basis of this appropriation, accompanied by a varying degree of affective investment.<sup>142</sup> Thirdly, a dialectical, mutually preconditioning relationship exists between ‘the object of adoration’ – the creative product as well as the artist/‘star’ – and the fan, where the identities of the star and the fan are interrelated, but clearly distinguishable.

With the Internet, music fandom in general has acquired an unprecedented breadth of distribution in geographical terms in the form of fan sites, active presence on artists’ websites, interaction via newsletters, message boards, and social networking sites,<sup>143</sup> as well as – legal or illegal – music sharing. Perhaps even more importantly, it has gained a previously unprecedented degree of visibility – for example, fan correspondence had primarily been conducted in private, and unofficial networks of music trading (e.g. of bootlegs and other ‘rarities’) were also fairly closed and hidden, apart from a number of public institutions such as collectors’ fairs and particular record shops. Online, a great number of fan communities organised around particular artists or genres, individual or collective music blogs (‘weblogs’ i.e. online journals), legal or illegal file-sharing communities, and so on, can be accessed directly, often without the necessity of joining that community. With the rapid spread of, firstly, individual blogs expressing the author’s tastes and interests, then, more recently, social networking sites, where members publicly indicate their tastes, affiliations, opinions, attitudes etc. on their profiles, identity expressions and participation in music-related communal practices have also become visible to a broader audience than before. Modes of identity expression in relation to music, moreover, have changed and/or expanded: besides clothing style or frequenting particular venues, online discourse and activity has also become meaningful.

The comments from Elle s’appelle’s page indicate, however, that it is not only fans or members of the audience, but also fellow bands and musicians who express utterances of support. In the observed sample, the proportion of individual versus band/musician posts in the case of positive messages was 20:13 – some of the individuals, moreover, were also musicians using individual (as opposed to ‘MySpace Music’) profiles. Therefore, instead of the term ‘fandom,’ which implies a coherent individual identity based on affiliation and a

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<sup>142</sup> Regarding the construction of fan identity and the role of affect in this process, see Grossberg (1992: 58-59).

<sup>143</sup> Newsletters and online interactive message boards or forums are more ‘traditional,’ social networking sites and associated platforms more recent forms of online communication. The following chapters will describe these forms in more detail.

clear distinction between the object of adoration and the fan, it appears more adequate to speak of a 'fan' mode of communication. This mode involves the expression of enthusiasm and positive value judgement, often accompanied by discursive gestures of affirming involvement, whether the involvement is only affective or active/creative. Artists themselves, or bands as a collective, frequently communicate in the role of a fan when expressing their enthusiasm for the music of fellow artists or particular music events. This also entails that discursive roles are not to be thought of as fixed to individual identities.

Corresponding to the understanding of fandom as active participation, the fan mode of communication includes messages that move beyond the expression of affiliation or praise of the band's creative output. Such (pro)actively supportive messages include references to listeners recommending the band to others ('hey and, just got back from canada after 3 weeks away, was good and tried to get a couple people listening to little flame' [05 December 2007]; 'I keep dancing around my room to seesaw, it's ace. You have lovely voices. Been recommending your music to my university radio shows, great feedback' [28 November 2007]). A further example is a DJ expressing their interest and informing the band that they regularly play Elle s'appelle's single in their club: 'Hey ES! If your ever in the area of southport, you should visit Underground! I'm the new DJ of a Thursday night! Little Flame is a surefire spin :) hehe love u guys' (07 December 2007). Since the utterances are made in an environment where many of the online commentators know one another personally and attend the same local events, this mode could also be described in terms of the expression of community solidarity. The flexibility of discursive roles, as the proactively supportive messages suggest, had an actual basis in the modes of participation locally: musicians performed and acted as supportive audience often during the course at the same event.

### Blurred identities and the publicly private

A smaller fraction of the comments on Elle s'appelle's page can be considered as evidence of promotional activity, that is, a more 'self-centred' mode of communication. The users posting these comments are typically members of bands – occasionally the same bands that have also posted praises of Elle s'appelle's music or performances. Often, even the invitations to events tend to be 'natural' friendly gestures, in the sense that they are very similar to informal offline invitations addressed to friends, fellow musicians and 'gig goers.' The following invitation, for instance, posted by one of the bands performing at the show



(their own album launch), is addressed to one band member, even though posted on the band's profile:

Hey Andy

Really looking forward to seeing you at the launch next week dude.

It's gonna be a great night, the line-up is:

Ogo

Alistair and Nicky,

The Ryan Myddleton band

plus a funk DJ for the afterparty!!

(Elle s'appelle's MySpace comments, 09 December 2007)

The addressee, while ostensibly the named musician, is at the same time the whole readership of the website. The text, moreover, is accompanied by the official poster image for the show. The message, in a blurring of boundaries between public and private, is at once a personal invitation and an advertisement of the gig intended for the general audience – a 'publicly private' speech act.

Similar blurs can be found in the articulated identity of those posting comments. For example, the previously quoted invitation posted by the Fountains uses the band profile for posting, which means the band can be identified both by name and by the band's (abstract, stylised) profile image. However, the first person singular is used in the post ('I see you're playing with The Vags this wk so I will try and get down'), thus the speaker is an individual representative of the group. This blending of speaker identity proved to be common – the underlying assumption is that the addressee will know which band member is talking. Once again, there is a doubling of the addresser – addressee relationship: the speaker is at once conveying a message to the general public and talking to those with insider knowledge (regarding the poster's identity). The insider addressee is assumed to rely on contextual information – the source of which can be the offline relationship, but also other online channels such as private conversations carried out parallel to the public messages. The following quote from a musician (using a band profile) who plays in several bands is a witty meta-commentary on this mixing of online identities:

What lovely music you folks make. I shall have to try and drag my lazy self along to that there gig. Hey, I just noticed that the previous 2 comments are also from bands I'm in. Woohoo! I'm the winner in the game of ubiquity!

(flamingo 50, 18 May 2007)

Certain linguistic and typographic elements potentially reinforce the feeling of informality and the sense of 'in-group' interaction already suggested by the seemingly 'careless' mixing of identities. Examples are the use of slang, the ubiquity of abbreviations and spelling typical of informal online written language, and the excessive use of 'x's (standing for kisses) or exclamation marks in order to emphasise the emotive involvement (perhaps with a dose of self-irony, suggested by the obvious excess itself). Nevertheless, precisely because this type of informal language use is to an extent conventional within certain online contexts, e.g. chat rooms and message boards, we need to be careful with making an assertion regarding its in-group significance. It is the concrete references to familiar faces and places in Liverpool that, coupled with the informality of the language and the overall positive approach of the messages, suggest a community feeling. Further examples of online interaction in relation to bands and events will enable the refinement of these observations.

The particular online context thus provides a space for the creation of semi-private discursive 'compartments' within a public sphere. The semi-private, or 'publicly private,' is created through insider references, which are often allusions to offline occurrences, places, and relationships. Linguistic devices are also used to create intimacy and an insider feeling, although the use of slang or other insider linguistic elements do not automatically have this effect. In many cases they merely signify an awareness of the communicative context of the Internet or an identification with social networking site users in general. The online context, furthermore, also creates space for linguistic playfulness that draws on the specificities of the context, such as the potential confusion in relation to individual musician versus band identities. A more external referential context is provided by the temporal dynamics of the music making environment, including the career of the band.

### Band careers and maintaining symbolic distance

The online environment of interaction is also closely related to the discursive enactment of symbolic distance. Around mid-2008, once Elle s'appelle had begun to play festivals, including the major UK festival Glastonbury, a number of references to instances of 'fan-artist encounter,' along with other kind of statements of fandom appeared amongst the comments: 'Hey guys, really enjoyed your set at left field on thursday, it was brilliant. Also saw Andy at Late and Live after the show, was a bit too shy to ask for a photo though!' (30

June 2008); ‘You were marvellous in Norwich on Sunday night â have been a fan for a while and you were as fantastic live as I hoped you would be. Thanks tons! Xxx’ (06 February 2008); ‘Yeah man I was the guy that hassled you as soon as you got off the stage ha ha! And the kind words were very much deserved’ (05 February 2008). In terms of the communicated band – audience relationship, such posts can be clearly distinguished from casual posts alluding to offline relationships between the poster and the musicians, or posts obviously drawing on an existing friendship. The difference is that of a symbolic interpersonal distance. By 2008, the commenting users were not only close friends, i.e. people with whom the band is also acquainted offline or who enjoy the music but are unable to go to the gigs because of geographical distance (the band, for instance, received supportive messages from Japan, Sweden etc.). Some of the comment posters are people who attend Elle s’appelle’s gigs and praise their music, but approach the band as fans by maintaining a certain amount of distance. They engage primarily with the music (performance) and do not seeking to establish a more informal friendship and/or a collaborative relationship (e.g. performing at the same shows) with the members of the band.

This observed pattern vaguely corresponds to the well-known but schematic career narrative of a band: starting out with a local following who are also friends of the band, playing local venues, then gradually beginning to play around the country, getting press coverage and gaining national attention. Along with this process, the relationship with the audience morphs into an increasingly mediated one, whereby a symbolic distance between the musicians and fans is created through such practices as the setting up of fan sites, fan clubs, the ensuring of varying degrees of physical inaccessibility (e.g. by a security crew), the architectural structure of bigger venues (e.g. closed backstage areas), and so forth. However, in Elle s’appelle’s case, friends’ comments never disappeared, nor did references to offline relationships and events. A gradual alteration of the interactive structure of the online space could be observed, but this was far from a complete transformation. This can partly be explained by the fact that regardless of the radio appearances, increasing press coverage, tours and festival gigs, Elle s’appelle did not manage to reach the level of success where such symbolic distances are purposefully created. More important, however, is the role of the structural characteristics of the online context. Older comments are not automatically deleted, and therefore, unless the MySpace site is purposefully altered, they can remain accessible for a long period as a concrete ‘historical’ document of the interaction surrounding bands throughout their career. In the online context, the fan-artist symbolic distance is therefore structurally more difficult to maintain.

In addition, despite the symbolic differences in self-positioning and the actual differences in the types of audience – artist relationship articulated in the comments, the comment posters use a common site and medium of communication. Nor are there significant differences in linguistic and typographic terms – the majority of the posts contain informal language and spelling, with individual variations, but not along the lines of the symbolic distance between audience and artist. In sum, while in certain instances we can identify posters who communicate as ‘fans,’ more often than not the identities between fan and friendly audience is blurred on the discursive level. While the conceptualisation of fandom is not a primary goal of the thesis, this observation suggests that it may be an adequate interpretive framework – nevertheless, it is also complex one that needs to be conceptualised in view of the specific contexts of discursive, and in other ways active, participation. Within social networking sites, and in particular MySpace, technical barriers between the artist and the fan practically disappear, yet at the same time symbolic barriers can remain, and certain discursive means of creating distances and proximities are reinforced. Modes of communication, as we have seen, are flexible, nevertheless determined by the underlying motivation and expressed attitudes – in terms of musical taste, community-oriented affiliation, the assertion of participation, expression of support, and the predominance of positive messages. The following section examines the music-related functions and use of a specific, hybrid form of online communication, which is nevertheless embedded in, and informed by, other online channels of communication: namely, the blog as used by bands on MySpace.

## **2 Bands and blogging**

### Maintaining band identity via blogs

‘As we tend to be in contact via messaging and email with our fans we find that they appreciate and respond to things like blogs,’ the lead singer of Elle s’appelle observed in an online interview (23 November 2007). On MySpace, comments and blogs form part of a band profile alongside each other, and both potentially involve the participation of the audience. Nevertheless, blogging entails a distinct mode of computer-mediated communication, different in certain characteristics from message boards or comments sections. Profile comments, or the act of online ‘commenting’ in general, are arguably a form of interaction specific to the context of the Internet, and in particular social networking sites. They have become ubiquitous with the possibility of adding comments to pages on news websites, photo

and video sharing sites, or blogs themselves. Blogging has primarily evolved from the traditional genre of the journal or diary, yet at the same time, it has taken a directly interactive form in the online context, precisely as a result of the possibility of commenting.<sup>144</sup>

Blogs specifically related to music, moreover, constitute particular subgenres: one popular type is the music blog that primarily features reviews or musings on particular tracks, albums, or artists. ‘Streamed’ versions of songs (or a link to the corresponding video on YouTube) are often also made available along with the posts. This form combines the characteristics of the blog genre with those of the music review. A second subgenre is the artist/band blog, which is unique in its designation of the audience: it is primarily written for fans. Band blogs incorporate the self-centredness of the genres of the personal homepage and the artist website, as well as, at the same time, the focus on interaction with the audience. Besides the individualistic characteristics arising from the blog format, at the same time they also function as collective spaces through the interlinkedness of the blogs. Hodkinson’s (2007) analysis of the use of blogging site LiveJournal by Goths indicates this: in his case study, it was primarily members of the Goth community that constituted Goth bloggers’ online friendship circles within LiveJournal. Moreover, this LiveJournal collectivity could to an extent be considered a continuation of previously existing Goth communities on message boards – an earlier form of Internet-based socialising. The following discussion will demonstrate that band blogs can be even more pronouncedly collectively oriented than the journals analysed by Hodkinson, and that they not only provide an important platform where the relationship between the band and their audience is established, negotiated, and reinforced, but are also crucial in our understanding of a music scene. Furthermore, the analysis will also reinforce the hypothesis that music – including music blogging – has been a crucial factor and driving force in shaping online interaction.

The MySpace blog of the band 28 Costumes<sup>145</sup> (the analysed sample comprised the posts between 16 February 2007 – 21 February 2008) contained both the most frequent and extensive posts out of the observed band profiles. In addition, user comments adjacent to the blog posts were also the most frequent in 28 Costumes’ case. As further examples will confirm, this communicativeness, including the discursive participation of the audience, can be identified as a band characteristic and an essential element of 28 Costumes’ self-

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<sup>144</sup> boyd (2004 [online]) identifies the ‘four primary conceptual paradigms’ framing the practice of blogging as ‘1) journalism; 2) diarying or journaling; 3) note passing; 4) fieldbook note taking.’ At the same time, she correctly observes that it is ‘a new practice that transcends all four while drawing on aspects from all of them’ (ibid.).

<sup>145</sup> Available: <http://www.blog.myspace.com/28costumes>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

presentation. Notably, the blog posts were often signed by the singer, with some of the statements phrased in first person singular (e.g. ‘I enjoyed the gig, shame you shot off straight away but I definitely understand why [...] I’ll look out for you in the North, also give us a shout if you ever need a support band’ – addressing a supporting band, 21 March 2008) and some first person plural (e.g. ‘We’ll let you know how we get on in Ireland (If we get on at all) via daily blogs that we will write every week,’ 10 December 2008). This provides a variation in relation to the biography on the website, where the ‘speaker’ is the band as a collective identity. The identity of the speaker is particularly relevant in the case of personal utterances and remarks concerning blog posting or online communication itself. The former includes reflections such as: ‘Wat a night we had on New Year’s Eve at Evol? It was definitely one of the best Nye I’ve had in ages! Well fun.It's pretty much taken me until now to feel like I’ve made a recovery, so apologies for the lack of communication’ (07 January 2009). The latter will here be referred to as meta-commentary, a frequent device on 28 Costumes’ blog, including such remarks as the following: ‘This was not meant to be so long but myspace wouldn’t let me write this as a blog, it allowed me to post that I was listening to Weezer but without the actual content of the blog. So her it is. Screw you myspace!’ (10 December 2008).<sup>146</sup>

The combination of a single author and the frequency of personalised content implies personal authority and serves to establish an identity of a band that is not necessarily strictly democratic, but has a leader who speaks and acts on behalf of the whole group. This identity is in harmony with the particular performance style of the band, which involves the singer posing as a charismatic frontperson. Other bands show different patterns. The blog posts of House that Jack Built – not as frequent as those of 28 Costumes but as extensive – primarily use the pronoun ‘we,’ with only occasional personal reflections and/or meta-commentary (e.g. ‘My initial idea was to surmise a year using that “road” and “journey” metaphor, then I remembered that one of our earliest songs was actually written about the absurd over use of that analogy, so I’m going to refrain,’ 30 December 2008). The posts are signed by either of two band members – this suggests a more equal ‘division of labour’ among the band than in the case of 28 Costumes. The bands Married to the Sea and indie/disco/pop formation Bells For René both invariably use the first person plural (even if the posts are signed by one individual), and the blog entries consist of information regarding the whole band and the

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<sup>146</sup> The post makes reference to the ‘Currently listening’ feature of the MySpace blog, which enables the selection of a record; the artist, title, and cover image is then displayed along with the blog post.

music, with no (Married to the Sea) or very little (Bells for René) personal reference or reflection.

28 Costumes are a band who tour frequently, not only in the UK, but also in Germany and in Ireland. The most detailed blog posts were narratives from their tours or gigs played outside Liverpool, typically in an anecdotal fashion, with details of places, faces, humorous stories and calamities, echoing the genres of the tour diary as well as rock band road movie. The written posts were typically complemented by photo albums in a different section of the MySpace site, showing the band and individual members not only in performance, but also exploring places and generally behaving as tourists. A content analysis of the posts reveals that the most common motif in these stories is the band getting into some kind of trouble, then having to employ someone's assistance, typically that of their friends' and fans' at home, in order to solve the difficulty. The narrative pattern could be described as a sequence of *difficulties – seeking assistance – assistance received – resolution*. One such example is an incident whereby the band members were stuck in Ireland after the completion of their brief tour right before Christmas, because they had missed their ferry due to excessive boozing the previous night, and had no cash left.

We managed to hang around all day in Dublin long enough for all of our money to just evaporate into the void....it's SO expensive. We hung around the hostel all day for the 10pm ferry. [...] We legged it down to the other terminal to see if there was another ferry company who could do something to aid our horrid situation. Nothing. No ferries to Liverpool at all I'm afraid chaps. EVER. That's it. I'm afraid you're just going to have to live in your van in our compound [sic] FOR EVER.  
(28 Costumes MySpace blog, 19 December 2008)

As on several other occasions, they were rescued by a sympathetic friend at home who bought them ferry tickets online using his own credit card.

Besides following the *difficulties – assistance – resolution* pattern, the story also draws upon stereotypical elements of rock tour accounts such as excessive alcohol consumption on the part of the band, or the detailed description of the dodgy hotels and the junk food they were 'forced' to consume. On the other hand, there is remarkable emphasis on the assistance received from 'friends at home.' On the several similar occasions, this help was material, in the form of money or support with transport, and was always accompanied by public gestures of 'thank you' on the part of the band as part of the blog posts on the MySpace site. Also notable is the fact that help was at times actually sought online through the blog – this was the case of the mentioned ferry example: the singer of the band desperately elaborated on their

seemingly hopeless situation and subsequently received supporting comments on the blog from fans, and finally, the sought material help.

The comments section on 28 Costumes' MySpace was also relatively busy at the time of the research in comparison with the other observed bands, with often 2-4 comments a day, and rich communication in terms of content – not only praises, but also a significant amount of general conversation, personal content, and references to offline relationships and events. The band's entire MySpace profile, in particular the comment section and the blog – the latter also including user commentary – can almost be viewed as a tribute to the audience, but definitely as a space for the whole team of friends, i.e. supporters, as well as the band. Their single *This Band Has Eaten All Our Money* (2009), besides conveying the more obvious message of the constant financially troublesome situation of the band, was released with a cover consisting of the (small-type) names of the people who have assisted the band in some form and hence contributed to their progress. The band even posted an apology on the blog in case anyone had been left out. The sleeve image was also used as a background for their MySpace site. This gesture can be understood as a remarkable interweaving of media and functions: album art was conjoined with offline relationships and the online articulation of these. Moreover, it further reinforced the concept that the audience and their support are actually part of the product – the single –, the music, even the band. In sum, the relationship between audience and musicians here is a very strong symbiotic one, and it is acted out and represented in the form of the online content, as well as other material forms such as the single cover, and even the self-referentiality of the song itself. The online space corresponding to the band is a key site where this set of cooperative relationships is both represented and enacted – that is, where a supportive-creative network is created and maintained.

The band also acknowledges this set of mutual supportive relationships by active gestures such as compiling guest lists for gigs, providing free entry or a discount for the band's friends. This in fact was common practice among most of the unsigned bands I encountered in Liverpool. Discounts at times were provided in exchange for the possession of gig flyers, which friends of the band were able to get hold of prior to the show. In addition to this, in the case of 28 Costumes (as well as, among many others, Elle s'appelle), relevant announcements were also made online, such as: 'So, it's £10 on the door but we have some £5 entry guestlist places available so give us a holler through mysppaaaaz and we'll box you right off' (28 Costumes MySpace blog, 29 December 2008).

The themes of low budget and financial difficulties, constantly recurring in blog posts as well as featuring in the lyrics of 'This Band Had Eaten All Our Money' (2009), are



significant in terms of their self-referentiality. Besides this, they can be associated with the stereotype of struggling Liverpool musicians in times of economic difficulty. While this struggle may have been more poignant in economically more generally difficult times, the band's unarguably real lack of financial sources indicates that material problems have not disappeared, and therefore still have to be faced and somehow overcome by unsigned, lesser-known musicians. To quote one of the guitarists, 'bands [in Liverpool] typically want to keep a low budget, including 28 Costumes, when they go on tour, they always rely on other people's favours, trying to do it all without major expenses.'<sup>147</sup> The mentioning of the difficulties alongside the reference to the ethic underlying the band's activity – carrying on as they have done for several years despite any financial gain, in fact quite the opposite – again also brings stereotypical ideas of 'rock authenticity' and integrity to mind. The following excerpt from Q Magazine's review of the single testifies to this:

[...] a brash and jerky affair that lurches about with impassioned urgency, suggesting that the band has done more than just eaten all their money – it's buried itself so deep into their skin that they're unable to do anything else.

(Pearlman 2009 [online])

The statement makes an implicit reference to the manifestation of a genre ethic: music making is supposed to be 'buried into' the band's 'skin' as an inescapable part of their perceived rock identity.

Blogging was complemented by the sharing of photo albums as a typical practice for not only 28 Costumes, but also other observed bands, including Elle s'appelle and Voo. The material included amateur shots and recordings by friends and members of the audience (a relevant quote from 28 Costumes' blog: 'If you have any photographs of he [sic] gig last night, no matter what quality, please send em to us as we'll stick them up on the myspace asap,' 26 August 2008). Furthermore, some had evidently been taken at private gatherings, e.g. at a friend's house, and feature friends alongside the band members. This reinforces the idea that video and photo material is important in the online space not only for promotional purposes, but also as contributing to the creation of, and identification with, a community. This applies even if some of the displayed videos were explicitly promotional videos, and some photo albums featured images from professional band photo shoots of a more traditional sort.

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<sup>147</sup> Face-to-face interview with a member of 28 Costumes (04 March 2009)

Besides this, the creation of personal-style photo albums bears similarity to the individual use of the online spaces of social networking sites: the sharing of photos taken on holiday, at parties, with friends, and so on, is a ubiquitous practice on SNSs and a key organising feature. In other words, the self-representation of the band as an individual entity demonstrates the influence of the personal usage of the web for self-presentation and networking activity (the type of usage that is explored in detail by Liu 2007). The similarity of course partly results from the characteristics of the communication media – bands make use of the same available facilities as individual users in general, in part tailoring them to their own needs (e.g. using the photo album for displaying promotional material), in part tailoring their own self-presentation to social networking site norms.

In terms of self-presentation and branding, the above demonstrates that an important element of 28 Costumes' articulated identity is their mutual relationship with their friends and supportive audience.<sup>148</sup> This relationship is acted out online by the band as an entity, the band leader individually, and the community of friends and fans: firstly, directly through online speech/discursive acts and visual or verbal representations; secondly, by reinforcing offline relationships retrospectively (e.g. through the *This Band Has Eaten All Our Money* single cover citing friends' and helpers' names); thirdly, by anticipating future relationships through requests for help or collaboration. An example for the latter is an advertisement the band placed on their blog looking for a new band member, which actually resulted in a musician joining the band very soon afterwards.

### Communication among bands via blogs

Within this discursive environment of mutual support, communication *among* bands is an essential element. This communication often takes place via indirect forms. Elements of cohesion – a symbolic bond – within the online discourse are linguistic, thematic, as well as visual. Linguistic elements include the use of such in-group neologisms as 28 Costumes' 'songle' (a combination of 'song' and 'single,' first appearing in 28 Costumes' blog as a misspelling, then being consistently adopted by the band leader in his writing as a recurring

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<sup>148</sup> Similarly, O'Reilly and Doherty (2006) demonstrate through the example of New Model Army that the construction of a b(r)and can be the result of a communication process between the band and the fans/audience.

element of self-referentiality) or ‘gig-ography,’ first applied by Puzzle in their blog as a term for their list of previous shows,<sup>149</sup> and ‘nicked’ by Elle s’appelle for use in their own blog:

Our Gig-ography (Nicked from Puzzle) or gig history is now into double figures and we feel very happy on stage. Recently we have played with goFASTER>>, 28 Costumes, Hot Club de Paris and Wave Machines. All are Liverpool based and all have had something to do with the blowing of our minds. It is fair to say, we are having the time of our fucking lives.

(Elle s’appelle’s MySpace blog, 31 July 2007)<sup>150</sup>

Notably, the respective blog post is one celebrating the collaboration among Liverpool-based bands.

The most obvious examples of indirect inter-band online communication, however, are corresponding accounts relating to events or occurrences concerning more than one band. For instance, Voo and 28 Costumes toured in Germany together in both 2006 and 2008. In both cases the tour was accompanied by corresponding accounts in their respective blogs, including mutual references to each other:

[...] since then we have, once again, been away to germany with our bum-chums 28 Costumes where we had some of the best times we have ever had [...] there are also some amazing pictures up on the 28 Costumes myspace & we’ll be posting some up on ours soon.

(Voo’s MySpace blog, 21 August 2008)<sup>151</sup>

While many of the comments relate to events in general, some make reference to the creative collaboration: ‘Great place though and we met some lovely luxembourgiens! We even wrote a song for one (combined effort with Voo)’ (28 Costumes’ MySpace blog, 11 August 2008); or, another by 28 Costumes praising Voo’s performance:

We only played 2 more gigs on our little tour and this next one was in the basement of Alexander’s house, in Neumagen. [...] ! I think it was one of the best Voo gigs I’ve ever seen! Dead intense and the instrumental (aptly named Schnick Schnack Schnuck) was just mind-blowing.

(28 Costumes’ MySpace blog, 11 August 2008)

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<sup>149</sup> Puzzle’s MySpace blog (26 September 2008). Available: <http://blogs.myspace.com/puzzlepuzzle>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>150</sup> The underlined band names are links to the respective MySpace profiles.

<sup>151</sup> Available: <http://blogs.myspace.com/voorock>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

The practice of mutual referencing is not only evident of close connection of friendship and collaboration between the band, but also publicly reinforces and enriches this connection through sharing it with the audience at the same time. An even more evident, but more complex, instance of close collaboration between bands is series of local music events involving several Liverpool bands. The following section examines the significance of online interaction relating to such music events, and the relationship of online interaction to the construction of a locally based music scene.

### **3 Music events and online discursive participation**

#### Promotion and feedback

In order to determine the main characteristics and functions of online discourse around the ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ shows, I looked at online comments, blog posts and further content related to the events. The dominant implied purpose of the posts proved to be promotion, in the following forms:

- information relating to the events on the participating bands’ MySpace profiles in the ‘upcoming shows’ section;
- the display of the virtual poster as profile image on the part of the bands, and the same posted in the form of comments on the participating bands’ profiles by Married to the Sea;
- blog posts on bands’ profiles (such as the post from 28 Costumes’ MySpace blog cited in Chapter 4).

Besides the online promotional activity of the organising and participating bands, the representatives of the hosting venue also contributed – the Barfly, following their usual practice, used the ‘upcoming shows’ section of their MySpace profile for advertising the gigs.

In addition to promotional messages, we also find online posts from the audience confirming their attendance and expressing their enthusiasm on the bands’ MySpace pages: ‘see you lads tonight at barfly!’ (28 Costumes’ MySpace site, 24 January 2009) ‘Hooray for Weezer covers events!’ (Married to the Sea’s MySpace site, 15 January 2009). Comments from the audience are, however, more frequent following the events: ‘aw saturday was lovely thank you x’ (Married to the Sea’s MySpace site, 26 January 2009); ‘have any more pics from

the weezer night surfaced yet?’ (Married to the Sea’s MySpace site, 03 February 2009). Moreover, some of the participating bands also followed up the gigs by leaving a MySpace comment thanking Married to the Sea for organising the night: ‘I wish all Saturdays could be as mint!’ (Soul Cakers, 26 January 2009); ‘Why can’t it be last Saturday again... x’ (MyAmiga, 31 January 2009); ‘Cheers for last night guys, ‘twas good fun! Nice to see all that hard work you put in paying off! x’ (FightFightFight, 03 August 2008); ‘Thank you so much guys! Last night was truely awesome x’ (House that Jack Built, 3 August 2008 – all comments are from the MySpace site of Married to the Sea).

In some instances, bands compliment the performance of another participating band while reflecting on their own experience of the event:

thank you very much chaps! we had loads of fun (despite tuning and keyboard probs :S) hought your set was boss, havent managed to catch you guys live before we're all gonna be in practice thursday night so we shuld be able to take a stroll down to the metro! should be good looking forward to it!!

(MyAmiga, House that Jack Built’s MySpace site, 03 August 2008)

As the examples all indicate, the follow-up commentary is typically positive – just as comments in general on band’s websites as previously observed –, and serve as encouragement and an expression of affiliation. I called this the ‘fan’ mode of communication, as opposed to review or evaluation per se.

### **Fan versus critical modes of communication**

In broad terms, criticism in rock music is traditionally a function of the ‘official’ or (to a varying extent) mainstream music press and media (such as the radio) on the one hand, and ‘unofficial,’ fan-produced press – the so-called ‘fanzines’ – on the other. In the age of Web 2.0, this purpose is also fulfilled by particular online platforms such as webzines (examples relevant to the observed bands and events are: *This Is Fake DIY*; *The Skinny*<sup>152</sup>), music-related blogs (e.g. the *Liverpool Echo – Jade’s Music Blog*<sup>153</sup>; personal music blog *Milk Milk Lemonade*<sup>154</sup>), websites of – typically smaller, independent – record labels (e.g. Moshi

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<sup>152</sup> Available: <http://www.theskinny.co.uk>. Accessed: 04 November 2010. The site includes reviews of recordings by Liverpool bands 28 Costumes, Voo, Hot Club de Paris, and Kling Klang.

<sup>153</sup> Available: <http://musicblog.merseyblogs.co.uk>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>154</sup> Available: <http://milk-milk-lemonade.blogspot.com>. The blog’s review of Elle s’appelle can be found at: <http://milk-milk-lemonade.blogspot.com/2007/09/elle-sappelle.html>. Both accessed: 06 November 2010

Moshi), alongside online platforms of already existing music magazines (e.g. the website of *NME*<sup>155</sup> or *The Guardian*'s music section<sup>156</sup>). In contrast, feedback such as the positive follow-up comments after events primarily indicates participation or identification with a particular group. The cited examples are merely qualitative, but not analytic judgements, and are typically directed at the performance as a whole or the recordings of the band in general, not at particular songs or aspects of the music.

The musicians' own evaluations confirm that feedback received online, whether regarding a particular event or the band's music more generally, is not overly important from a professional point of view; it is more significant as an affirmation of engagement with the music and the scene. Elle s'appelle's lead singer/bass player explained that they as a band responded to every personal message, since they appreciated the time people took to 'say nice things;' nevertheless, they did not rely on feedback from listeners in a professional sense: 'We don't look for patterns in feedback or look to act on this. We're very much working to our own plan and are really pleased that we're getting such a positive response' (online interview, 23 November 2007). At times reviewers would contact them for information and/or to notify them about an upcoming review, and the musician always followed up on these, yet he was 'personally not in the habit of googling [their] band name' (ibid.).<sup>157</sup> On the one hand, he emphasised the unpleasantness of unprofessional criticism: 'I know from previous experience that it's best to ignore forum chat and "personal" blog critics.' At the same time, he acknowledged that 'there are some fantastic music blogs out there!' In general, the musician was of the opinion that online reviews and blogs were a good way of getting familiar with new music.

Sam Walkerdine from *Married to the Sea* emphasised the value of general expressions of support from the audience in the form of attending their gigs, as opposed to more 'direct' feedback along the lines of 'I like that song' (face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009). Remarkably, he also cited an example of creative collaboration between bands as a mutual expression of positive feedback: releasing a split 7-inch with *My Amiga* proved to him that 'they're into what we're doing as much as we're into what they're doing.' Through this example, he pointed to the fact that positive feedback was sometimes received in indirect ways. Sam also expressed his enthusiasm for searching for reviews on the Internet

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<sup>155</sup> Available: <http://www.nme.com/home>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>156</sup> Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>157</sup> The reference is to the ubiquitous search engine Google – available at <http://www.google.com>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

(‘sometimes I just Google and see what comes up’ – note the reference to the same practice as mentioned by Elle s’appelle’s singer) and finding reviews he had not been aware of – fans or critics writing for online sites often would not contact them to inform them about their review. In a similar manner to Elle s’appelle’s singer, he also reflected on the – hypothetical – difficulty of dealing with negative criticism, and the importance of positive feedback as reinforcement:

And I think I’d really take it very personally if someone said ‘I went to see Married To The Sea and they were total shit.’ I’d struggle to not take that to heart, but it is important to know what people out there actually think, because eventually that’s what you’re trying to reach. If they’re [the audience] kind of saying this is good, keep going, then it is a really nice thing to hear.

(Sam Walkerdine, face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009)

Jonathan Hering from the band a.P.A.t.T. also emphasised that they were ‘keeping an eye out’ for feedback and commentary received online, yet, conversely, he viewed detailed opinions as more ‘helpful’ than simply positive or simply negative comments:

In some ways it’s more useful for us to hear split opinions of our music, or maybe somebody saying “I love this song, but really don’t like the next one!”, as it shows that we’re actually achieving a broad variety in our work, rather than music that can easily be digested by the average listener.

(Jonathan Hering/Master Fader, online interview, 02 May 2009)

In other words, the stylistic complexity and variety of a.P.A.t.T.’s music entails that constructive feedback will also reflect this and will be divided. At the same time, Jonathan confirmed that the majority of criticism they received online was positive, even if they as a band ‘who isn’t aiming at a specific genre or audience [...] know that [they] won’t please everybody all of the time, and see this as a good thing’ (ibid.).

Finally, the members of Puzzle spoke about feedback only in terms of reviews, and while claiming they did not receive frequent coverage, they collectively mentioned a number of instances, including a review in the *NME*, recalling some amusing elements in an anecdotal fashion. In the opinion of the lead singer, bands are reviewed more frequently when they are new, as they themselves were when they appeared on the scene; the reviews primarily appeared online, and were based on the band’s material on MySpace (Lucy Johnson, face-to-face interview, 25 March 2009). This presumably applies to bands with similar career paths to theirs, i.e. bands with a steady, primarily local following, who go to their gigs and buy their

records, as well as a number of international contacts (in their case, record labels and a collaboration in the USA).

### **The dynamics of online discussion and the music scene**

Looking at the comments across the time span of all three '10 Bands 10 Minutes' events, we find that each event invited a growing number of (always positive) comments. On the one hand, this indicates the increasing number of online participants, which is equivalent to the growing online visibility of the community of participants. On the other hand, it also corresponds to the growing number of participants in the offline events. In other words, it is not possible to speak about an online participant community as separate from an offline one: the dynamics of offline and online participation are in close and mutual interaction. The frequency of the comments relating to an event is not unconnected to the event's significance within the music scene. Extensive online discussion of an event not only indicates, but also reinforces its relevance to participants. It can therefore be concluded that the nature and frequency of participants' comments contributes to the temporal framing of the event within the online context.

'10 Bands 10 Minutes,' despite its growing popularity, is still limited to ten participating bands and a single venue per event, and is still spontaneous in terms of its organisation. This spontaneity is reflected by the dispersed online presence of the event and the lack of one central online site. Instead, the collective-oriented online discourse regarding the events is embedded within the interaction surrounding bands. Conversely, the organisers of the well-established annual Liverpool Music Week festival maintain active MySpace and Facebook profile pages for the festival. Following a brief description of the festival's online presence, the final section of the chapter looks at the characteristics of the corresponding online interaction with an aim of comparing them to the previous examples.

### **Communicative aspects of the Liverpool Music Week 2007 website**

The Liverpool Music Week (LMW) 2007 MySpace profile<sup>158</sup> was presented as an official site in layout and content, with two main elements, namely brand markers and programme information. The former included the main header on the top of the page, an

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<sup>158</sup> Available: <http://www.myspace.com/liverpoolmusicweek>. Accessed 06 November 2010. The address of the official website as displayed on the MySpace profile - <http://www.liverpoolmusicweek.com> - also leads to the MySpace profile.



image replicating the official festival poster. Besides the festival logos – a pink ‘Liverpool Music Week 2007’ bubble and a black-and-white male face (see Figure 5.1), the main acts were listed here with the corresponding performance dates and venue information, followed by the logos of the main sponsors and information for booking tickets. As a further visual brand marker, the colours of the whole website had been set to echo the colours of the poster, and an enlarged version of the face of the logo was used as background wallpaper. The ‘nametag’ box comprised the name of the festival, the motto (‘LMW 2007 – NOVEMBER 30th – DECEMBER 9th’), the location (‘Liverpool, United Kingdom’), and the profile views counter (counting 37396 on 09 October 2007). The ‘Member since’ date was 03/11/2004, i.e. the second year of the festival. The ‘Influences’ section had been appropriated for the display of the festival’s promotional introductory text for 2007, including statistics such as the number of artists, venues, and days; repeating the list of ‘big names;’ providing ticket information; and finally, quoting praises from the national music press. The festival programme here had been tailored to the standard MySpace performance table format in the upcoming shows section (see Figure 5.2). The blog section served as a space for news entries (for example, entries announcing the appearance of new artists on the bill); finally, the ‘about’ section featured two promotional videos.<sup>159</sup> In sum, the page can be described as an elaborate, extended version of the event poster or as a virtual festival programme, focusing on promotion and providing information, while at least structurally retaining interactive aspects.



Figure 5.1 Liverpool Music Week 2007 MySpace profile (09 October 2007) (section 1)

<sup>159</sup> No longer available

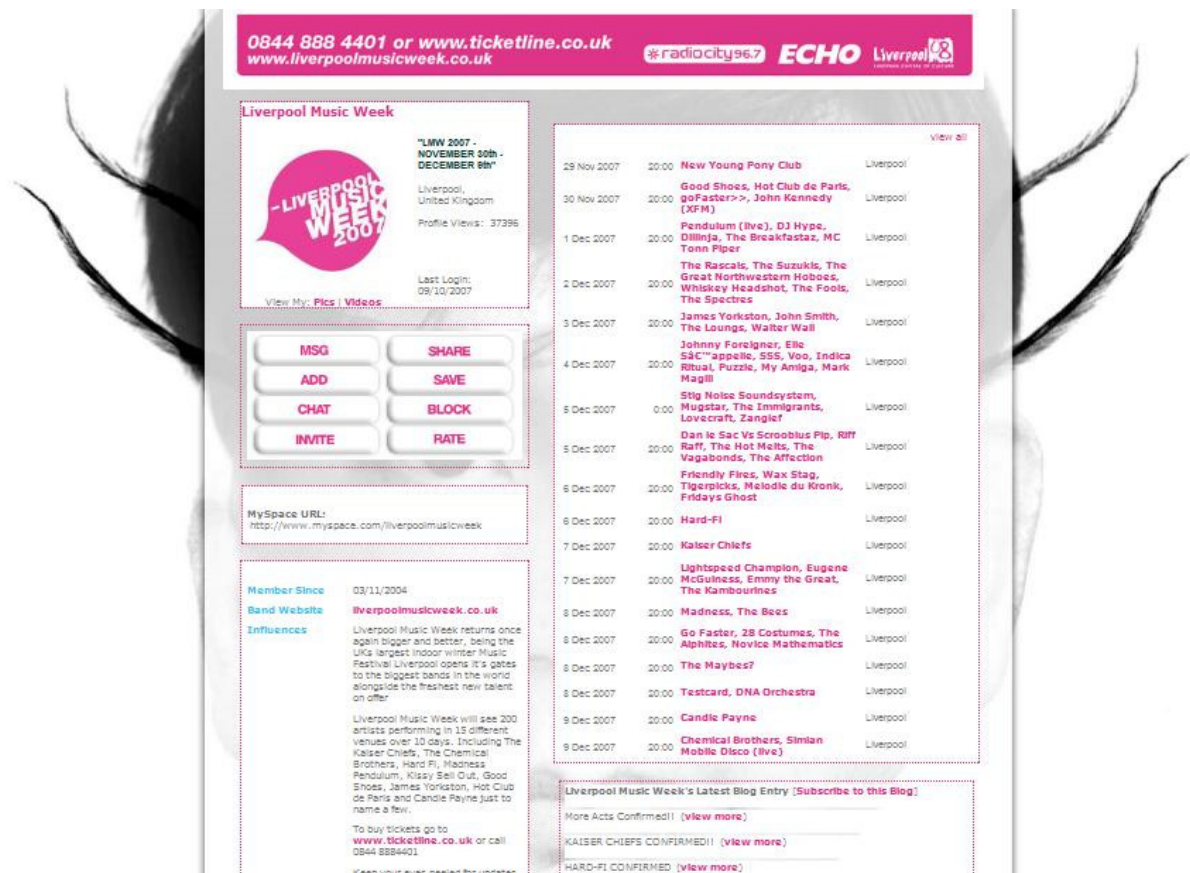


Figure 5.2 Liverpool Music Week 2007 MySpace profile (09 October 2007) (section 2)

In order to establish the actual extent and characteristics of the interactivity of Liverpool Music Week's MySpace page, friends' comments were examined in terms of their number, frequency, content and/or purpose, and the identity of the person posting (that is, whether they speak on behalf of themselves as individuals, a band, an organisation, etc.). Regarding content or purpose, the displayed comments on the LMW 2007 site on 09 October 2007 (50 out of a total of 1816), i.e. approximately seven weeks before the festival, can be categorised as:

- event advertisement, not directly connected to LMW: the majority of these are virtual posters (i.e. images), but some are written messages, typically posted by bands, promoters or venues ('Hello! I know Thursday nights out are very popular with people so on your way around the many drinking establishments tonight please make it down

to the Metropolitan on Berry Street! [...],’ Major Major, 20 September 2007); some virtual posters advertised new releases;

- ‘thanks for the add’ posts (‘You are currently in our “top friends” - thx for being out there for us!,’ event organiser Vod Music, 27 August 2007);
- requesting feedback and/or advertising one’s own site – this is typical for bands/artists (‘The vid[eo] is being edited right now but behind the scenes pics are up on our myspace right now. Have a look and see what you think. We are so excited!,’ GK & The Renegades, 14 August 2007; ‘Hey!! Thanx for the add:) By the way,do you like our Band?,’ Vuzz Vegas Queen, 07 October 2007);
- anticipation: the expression of enthusiasm for the upcoming events, typically by bands/musicians (‘Yay!!! Good to be on board for this years Music Week! Cannot, we repeat, CANNOT! fucking wait!,’ goFASTER>>, 27 September 2007), and the expression of support (‘What a great lineup - good luck with all the events,’ Liverpool Bands Friends,<sup>160</sup> 08 October 2007; ‘Hurrah for Liverpool / Hurrah for Music / Hurrah for Weeks / HURRAH FOR LIVERPOOL MUSIC WEEK!,’ More Mash Than SMASH, 20 September 2007);
- saying hello: typically by individuals (‘Just dropping, hope you having a nice day,’ 29 August 2007); and finally,
- requesting information (‘whos on the line and wen is the week>?’ S.H.A.P.E.S., 05 September 2007).

As the examples indicate, the majority of the comments were decidedly encouraging, celebrative, and enthusiastic – similarly to the comments regarding the ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ shows, as well as Elle s’appelle’s page and 28 Costumes’ blog. At the same time, content referring to personal relationships was practically absent, and in general, the personal mode was less typical in the utterances in comparison with the previous three examples (personal

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<sup>160</sup> ‘A Bulletin Board For Bands & Fans’ – a MySpace profile aiming at integrating information regarding shows, links to venues, news regarding music events etc. in Liverpool. Available: <http://www.myspace.com/liverpoolbandsfriends>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

mode is typically expressed in reference to individual activities, individual motives, or everyday situations involving the speaker). This is explained by the apparent informative and promotional purpose of the page, as opposed to, for instance, overtly community-oriented virtual spaces. Moreover, the majority of the comments were posted by bands/musicians; the rest included messages from collectives such as event organisers or online music magazines as well as individuals.

Besides the relatively impersonal expressions of enthusiasm, it is also evident that a large number of the comments served (self-)promotion. The articulated positive approach, furthermore, is not necessarily informative regarding the reception of the festival in general. It is potentially misleading to think of active online users as representative of the festival attending audience and the participating musicians. (The fact that the average number of posts per day was around 1-3 indicates that only a minority of participants – even if not necessarily a minority of the participating musicians – engaged in interaction.) It can nevertheless be clearly stated that those MySpace users who are willing to actively engage with the online activity surrounding the event do so in order to express their enthusiasm and support, and/or to draw attention to their own creative output – in other words, they use the online portal to network and socialise.

Looking at the comments from the very beginning in a longitudinal comparison, a pattern emerges, from a majority of posts with personal content towards a decreasing proportion of these (the first available comment is from 15 February 2006, while the profile had existed since 03 November 2004 – the initial posts may have been deleted, or the profile may not have been active before 2006). Throughout 2006, the frequency of comments was around 3-4 per day – slightly higher than in 2007. A number of the posting musicians addressed Mike Deane, the head organiser of the Week, personally, which indicates that at that point he was still the editor of the profile: ‘Hey Mikey good times once again had at last years music week. Cheers mate. Hope we can rawk out this year in big letters’ (21 February 2006); or,

howdy doody mike  
so you don't smoke and you don't drink...hmmm... if they're new years  
resolutions i hate them  
we're playing in hannahs on friday if you fancy it  
free to you of course  
keep rocking god

(Metro Manila Aid, 15 February 2006)

While the primary purpose of the second quoted post is an invitation to the band's show – ostensibly addressed to one person but publicly shared –, at the same time it also refers to the personal offline relationship existing between the musician<sup>161</sup> and the event organiser through the assurance of free entry. Furthermore, it alludes to personal information relating to the profile owner (smoking and drinking) that was at the time included on the page – such personal data is by default part of personal (as opposed to music) MySpace profiles. This suggests that the profile itself was initially more personalised, before becoming an event information and promotional site. In addition, it is evident from many of the comments that the organiser himself also engaged in the interaction, complimenting bands on their music as well as providing information regarding application for the festival (e.g.: 'Hey thanks for the add and the nice words. / good luck with the gigs,' 03 March 2006). In the earlier stages, online communication was therefore mutual in many cases.

We also find references to online communication taking place parallel via private messages, as well as offline communication and transactions such as bands sending demo CDs and then confirming this via MySpace:; 'ye – i'd b up 4 it like ...just get in contact if ur interested – i'll proly try send a demo down to wereva that adres is on the profile neway...glad u rememba! lol' (19 May 2006). These types of personal messages, whether regarding the technicalities of participating at the festival, other events, or focus on the relationship (e.g. saying hello), gradually disappear by the middle of 2007. Promotional messages and virtual posters become the dominating comment type, with occasional spam messages, and no evident discursive involvement on the part of the festival organiser, at least not in the public sphere.

The impersonal, brand- and information-focused profile mirrors the lack of community orientation in the comments section. The decreasing personal content and focus of interaction on the website is undoubtedly connected to the gradual expansion of the festival,

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<sup>161</sup> While posting in the name of the band, the musician used his first name in the signature (here omitted).

which is explored in more detail in the following chapter. The step-by-step, but fast-paced transformation of the event from a small-scale one to a multi-venue national festival in part explains the change in the organisers' strategies for communicating with participating bands and the audience. As a result, the discourse oriented towards the local network of bands, their performances, and the participating audience is primarily centred around bands' profiles. These provide more elaborate and active online interactive spaces than either the major festivals (although here not detailed, approximately the same observations apply to SoundCity as LMW) or smaller events with no directly corresponding online spaces.

## **Discussion**

The analysis of online interaction on bands' profiles further underlines the close connection between band identity and community-oriented identity expressions already indicated by the analysis of Elle s'appelle's self-presentation. The articulated identity of 28 Costumes as a band includes the symbiotic, i.e. mutually supportive relationship between the band and their audience as an integral element, along with the supportive relationship among a particular group of bands in Liverpool. Requesting assistance or expressing thank you, both verbally and through their musical product – whether the latter means a record sleeve or discounted entry to a performance – is an essential element of 28 Costumes' online existence and self-presentation as a band, as is the recognition of the creative output of other bands. Inter-band communication is no less significant than band – audience communication in the maintenance of a creative community, as demonstrated by mutual comments, discursive references, and the sharing of content (such as photos) among bands that are at the same time connected offline through performing at the same venues, touring together and/or collaborating on records. Individual variations in communication practices do occur among bands: some, including Married to the Sea and Puzzle, do not express their connection to others via their blogs and profiles as directly as 28 Costumes and Voo, yet they are frequently mentioned by other bands and themselves communicate via comments – which means they are present in the general discourse and the online interactive space of the scene.

Besides local personal connections, the band identity of 28 Costumes is articulated with reference to two further contextual levels, namely genre aesthetics and ethics (as in the case of Elle s'appelle – see Chapter 4) and the world of the Internet. While the reliance on 'mates,' i.e. a supportive type of bonding can also be related to locally based community and

social solidarity, the ethics of carrying on despite financial difficulties, even articulated in a song, resonates with the demands of rock authenticity. The journal-style blog of 28 Costumes, and in particular the sharing of photo albums depicting the band on tour, exploring places as well as performing, indicates the connection to recently established, but already conventionalised personal uses of social networking sites. The use of Internet- or MySpace-particular discursive norms, such as Internet slang, spelling conventions, and ‘thanks for the add’ posts on bands’ pages reinforces this connection by contributing to the establishment of an internal discursive and behavioural coherence within the online context. At the same time, neologisms and further particular linguistic uses are also used to indicate a bond among a close circle of Liverpool-based bands, reinforcing in-group cohesion. All three elements – local connections, genre, and online self-positioning – are crucial elements of the music scene.

The primary purposes of visitor-initiated interaction on websites of both bands and music events relate to promotion and the expression of participation and support. The examples have led to a grounded definition of the fan mode of communication as the expression of participation, support, and interest (for instance, in the form of requesting information). This definition helped to shed light on the complexity of roles within the local-virtual scene, instead of fixed identities of fan, musician or music critic. Modes of communication are not restricted to particular individuals: musicians communicate as musicians when posting an advertisement for their own show on their MySpace page, yet communicate as fans when they proceed to post a compliment on a fellow band’s page. Events can also be represented in different modes – for instance, when bands approach ‘Liverpool Music Week’ seeking opinion of their music, they request the opinion of a rock music (industry) expert, and it is in this respect that the response will be provided. Moreover, modalities of public and private often become blurred in interactive online spaces: addressers and addressees can at the same time be individuals (e.g. musicians, fans), collectives (bands, organisations), while in-group communication among bands and musicians is also directed at an undefined public audience.

Finally, the analysis of online interaction has demonstrated the close connection of online activity to offline events: online conversation, whether initiated by the profile editor or visitors, was frequently clustered around offline events such as gigs and tours, or partly online, partly offline events such as record releases. The interconnectedness, furthermore, also applies to spaces within the bounds of the Internet: interaction concerning and involving the observed bands and events was dispersed among a multiplicity of sites – band profiles as well

as other platforms. These were, however, structurally interlinked through mutual references and the contributing participants. The temporal – spatial organisation of bands' online activity and the structure of the connections is explored in the remaining two chapters.



## Chapter 6 The online representation of place and locality in indie rock

One of the central questions that prompted the research for this thesis concerned the role of place and locality in music making and in communication about music, where locality is to be understood as the (representation of) elements of local culture as well as the ‘sense of place.’<sup>162</sup> Initially, claims of ‘placelessness’ were made with regard to the Internet along the lines of the ideas of Meyrowitz (1985) regarding the loss of sense of place and the blurring of traditional social boundaries – for example, between public and private – as a result of electronic media. As Healy explains,

[f]rom one perspective, the Internet represents, for community-minded citizens, an almost limitless potential for an associational life. No longer limited by geographical happenstance to the interactions that might develop in a town or neighborhood or workplace, individuals can free themselves from the accidents of physical location to create their own virtual places.

(Healy 1996: 60-61)

Rheingold’s (2000 [1993]) study exemplifies this point of view (Healy *ibid.*). At the same time, the ‘placelessness’ of the Internet and the global network society has also been reiterated by others in support of the methodological argument for a new ethnographic approach. In their discussion of the ethnography of ‘new media worlds,’ Farnsworth and Austrin argue that as a result of globalization and global media, ‘the notion of place becomes increasingly problematic’ (2010: 1124); they cite Zierhofer (2005: 102), who, ‘in a study of passport control and the role of the nation-state, comments that world-society is becoming “a network of practices” in which “social space is of primary importance, and physical space is only subsidiary” to the process of fixing and managing identities (Hepp, 2004)’ (*ibid.*).

The one-sidedness of approaches dispensing with physical and geographical place altogether in favour of social space and connectivity, however, has also been widely criticised, in particular by ethnographic studies of the online world. In line with the principles of ethnographic research, these studies focus on how people make sense of the environment in which they operate (e.g. Dodge 2000; Hine 2000; Hine 2005). On the one hand, the Internet enables interconnectivity on a global level, facilitating and enhancing global flows of information, global communication, and representation on a potentially global scale.

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<sup>162</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan’s employment of the notion ‘topophilia’ in order to describe people’s experience of, and emotional connections to, the physical environment, is a compelling conceptualisation of the sense of place (Tuan 1974; 1977).

Furthermore, it has also been argued that on an affective level, the online experience can ‘transport’ the user to various spaces and places – this experience is implied by the application of the term ‘virtual world’ to online games or interactive online spaces such as Second Life.<sup>163</sup> On the other hand, users exist in specific geographical environments – urban and rural spaces, home and work environment, public and private spaces – that inform their access to, and usage of, Internet technology. Moreover, places and localities themselves are represented, referenced, and even re-created on the Internet – for example, via locality-based online forums, virtual representations of actual places (such as on the applications of Google Maps and Google Earth), or, in a more playful and creative way, via the (re)construction of the virtual equivalent of existing places (Second Life).<sup>164</sup>

This thesis is based on the premise that the study of music and the online socialisation related to music is crucial in exploring the complexities of place, movement, and the dynamics of the local and the global in the age of the Internet, not least because music is one of the crucial shaping factors in online socialisation and exchange. ‘Geographies of music,’ as Connell and Gibson observe, ‘are inextricable from the various contexts of performance, listening, and interaction in space’ (2003: 3). Spaces for music and communication about music, as the previous chapters have shown, are in part local and in part virtual. Correspondingly, the geography of music making in an online-and-offline setting has to be concerned with the connections – routes, interlinks – among relevant spaces, as well as locating the spaces. The present chapter seeks to understand the role of space and place in the virtual environment of music making, and how this can be described with the help of the concept of the scene. This will also provide a step towards understanding how online media affect local identity and the organisation of locally-based social groups.

Firstly, I present the ways the online representation of Liverpool Music Week festival in 2007 and 2008 draws on images of place and locality, including references to the popular culture of the city of Liverpool, and how these images are used to indicate a narrative of expansion in terms of space and participation. This narrative is compared to musicians’

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<sup>163</sup> For a detailed ethnographic analysis of Second Life, see Boellstorff (2008).

<sup>164</sup> Google Maps (available: <http://maps.google.com>; accessed: 06 November 2010) is a widely popular set of virtual maps covering a large part of the world, including information regarding local sights, businesses, as well as satellite images. Google Earth (available: <http://earth.google.com>; accessed: 06 November 2010) is an enhanced version of this, again combining maps and satellite images with photos of sights and various local information. In Second Life, places such as cities and venues are re-created by users to serve as virtual environments: the resemblance to the actual places varies, as some of the re-creations are fairly creative and only roughly follow the architecture or spatial arrangement of the geographical place – this applies to the Second Life city of Liverpool, which includes, among other sites, the Cavern Quarter and the Philharmonic Hall (my own observation between October 2007 – May 2008).

articulated experiences regarding the festival throughout the years. The observation of participation and attitudes leads to the identification of a particular scene, which provides the local basis of the festival. The chapter then proceeds to examine how performing musicians position themselves in relation to ‘Liverpool’ as a place and as a set of attributed characteristics. In order to integrate the focus on representation and experience, I analyse an attempt by the band a.P.A.t.T. on their blog to place themselves in relation to music in Liverpool and define what makes ‘Liverpool bands’ special at the same time. This includes examining how they represent Liverpool’s popular music past – a selective heritage – online, and how the band position themselves and others in relation to this heritage. The final section of the chapter explores musicians’ conceptions of the city of Liverpool today as a place for playing music through both online discourse analysis and the analysis of interviews. The analysis draws attention to the importance of both online and offline discourse in the construction of music scenes. I place my research within the framework of discussions of the role of place, the attachment to locality, and local characteristics in music, and argue that the Internet is used for the reinforcement of particular representations of the city, whether in the context of the definition and promotion of a national-scale music event or the self-definition of a band.

## **1 The promotion of Liverpool Music Week**

The online presence of a city-based music festival such as Liverpool Music Week (LMW) presents us with the duality of a potentially global, but in effect at least national audience on the one hand, and the representation of the place of the event, i.e. the city, on the other. What exactly the level of the ‘city’ means – whether something broader than Liverpool, including a whole region where musicians and other participants are from, or narrower, referring to a specific geographical or cultural segment (e.g. the city centre) – had not been determined in advance, but was expected to emerge through the analysis of the online content. Explicitly, the analysis is intended to reveal the image(s) of locality represented online to the implied or perceived audience, and implicitly, to inform us about the concept(s) of locality that such representations draw upon. Furthermore, it can allow us to determine the role of place within the context of the presentation and promotion of the music event. With these

purposes in mind, I looked at both written and visual references to place and local culture in the online text promoting the festival.<sup>165</sup>

### Place names and genre labels

In the online promotional material for Liverpool Music Weeks 2007 and 2008, publicised via MySpace blog entries and Facebook updates, geographical references are in abundance. The following excerpt, from 2007, promotes local bands:

In keeping with the ethos behind Liverpool Music Week, some of the cream of the north west's freshest talent have been confirmed including **Candie Payne** whose dulcet tones give a firm nod towards the classic 60's sound, Wirral based trio **The Rascals**, a firm favourite with the Arctic Monkeys having supported them this year and have been holed up in the studio producing their debut EP which is set for release in November, plus 2 other bands from the Deltasonic stable, Wigan band **The Suzukis**, a great guitar band with attitude, and **The Tigerpicks**, which comprises of two girls and one boy and a music manifesto which rewrites the indie dancefloor rulebook. Plus no north west musical bill would be complete without rock and roll rompers **The Maybes?**, this indie quartet have been cropping up everywhere from basement venues to sunshine gigs in the park. This is the tip of the iceberg for local bands performing at this years Liverpool Music Week with lots more still to be announced over the coming weeks.

Other acts confirmed to perform are Liverpool based punk rock band **Hot Club De Paris** [...]

(Liverpool Music Week MySpace blog,<sup>166</sup> 28 September 2007)

The blog post includes references to distinctive local elements as well as particular stylistic labels. The local references include well-known Liverpool record label Deltasonic<sup>167</sup> and the city of Liverpool, which is named in connection with Hot Club de Paris. The Wirral, Wigan and the 'North West' (twice) are also named, which are 'local' in a wider sense – not within the city of Liverpool, but still within the same geographical region; the phrase 'local bands' is

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<sup>165</sup> Stahl argues that out of Henri Lefebvre's (1991) three definitions of space, the first one, i.e. 'spatial practices' has received the most attention in accounts of music making, whereas 'representations of space' and 'spatial representations' have received less (2007: 150).

<sup>166</sup> Available: <http://blogs.myspace.com/liverpoolmusicweek>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>167</sup> For reference, see the label's self-description in their first blog post on MySpace dated 12 February 2007:

For anyone that doesn't know Deltasonic has been in existence for nearly six years now and our current roster of bands consists of The Coral, The Zutons, The Basement, The Dead 60s, The Little Flames, Candie Payne, The Suzukis and The Tigerpicks. We have our office on Rose Lane in leafy Mossley Hill, Liverpool and it's from here that all the magic happens! All our bands live, rehearse and hang out in Liverpool, so we get to see them all the time and keep up to date with what's going on.

Available: <http://blogs.myspace.com/deltasonicrecords>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

in fact also used in the text for the mentioned acts. The genre labels and stylistic references used within the excerpt, thus becoming discursively associated with the evoked geographical area, are the following: ‘classic 60’s sound,’ ‘guitar band,’ ‘indie dancefloor,’ ‘rock and roll,’ and ‘punk rock’ – in other words, styles within the guitar band/rock or rock’n’roll tradition. The main profile of the referred label Deltasonic is also ‘guitar bands,’ as exemplified by such acts as the Coral, the Zutons or the Rascals, amongst others. According to my observations at the festival, the majority of local – i.e. Liverpool and North-West – acts did indeed fit into these categories – the mentioned genres and styles, for instance, roughly correspond to the generic/stylistic self-identifications and affiliations of the bands participating in the ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ shows (discussed in Chapter 4). Nevertheless, the event also featured folk/acoustic artists, jazz, electronica, hip hop, or acts that combine any of these with the aforementioned styles. The promotional material elsewhere even draws attention to the multiplicity of musical genres and styles represented: ‘The festival features music from every genre imaginable from indie, rock, electronic, funk, soul, latin, nu wave, jazz, and world music to name a few’ (Liverpool Music Week MySpace blog, 10 November 2007). In contrast to the first quote, however, in this excerpt there are no associated geographical references. The abundance of ‘guitar bands’ and the affiliation with (classic) rock, punk rock and indie rock may have applied in very general terms to live music in Liverpool. Nevertheless, it certainly is a generalisation, and it can definitely be stated that the online profile of Liverpool Music Week 2007 drew on this popular image.

Moreover, the reference in the first blog excerpt to the 1960s’ sound (in relation to Candie Payne) also has a particular resonance in the context of Liverpool due to the association of the city with what has in music journalism been called ‘Merseybeat’ or ‘Mersey sound.’ ‘Mersey sound’ refers to the impact of not only the Beatles, but also other acts from Liverpool gaining popularity during the first half of the 1960s, such as Gerry and the Pacemakers, Cilla Black, the Swinging Blue Jeans, or Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas. These acts, while arguably distinct in aspects of musical style, performance, attitude, and influences (c.f. Inglis 2010), had been claimed to act as an inspiration for guitar bands in subsequent decades. The association of Liverpool with guitar bands – from ‘Merseybeat’ through the La’s to the Coral and contemporary bands such as the Zutons and the Wombats (even referred to as the ‘second Merseybeat wave’<sup>168</sup>) – had continuously been reinforced by the music press, TV

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<sup>168</sup> See *Virtual Festivals* quoting the bassist of Liverpool band The Drellas, interviewed at LMW 2007: ‘He points to when NME first picked the second Merseybeat wave, which included The Coral and The Zutons. “Now it’s just lots of great bands playing all sorts of stuff. There’s no way you can heap them in a group.”’

documentaries, and other popular media, and echoed by rock histories, including Paul DuNoyer's (2002). In terms of media representations, the above example suggests that new media, including the online press and social networking sites, can maintain a continuity and extension of representations constructed through traditional media such as the written music press, radio, and television.

### From the local to the (inter)national

During the period covered by my research, two important partnerships occurred in the organisation of LMW that were of symbolic as well as practical significance. Both instances of expansion were announced online on the promotional platforms and reflected upon in interviews. In the first instance, in 2007 Mike Deane's team entered into a joint venture with James Barton, the CEO of the Cream enterprise, who thus became co-director of the festival. On a symbolic level, this meant that LMW festival became associated with another segment of the city's popular music culture. Cream had already been a legendary, even canonised element within Liverpool popular culture (e.g. it is featured in the title of the first edition of DuNoyer's [2002] *Wondrous Place*), while at the same time still 'happening,' since the enterprise continued to organise parties as well as the Creamfields festival. The following commentary on the partnership emphasises the event's ensuing expansion:

Liverpool Music Week was founded in 2003 by Mike Deane, and has gone onto [sic] become a nationally recognized event and highlight of the live music calendar, in order to push the event to even greater heights, last year a JV partnership was formed with one of the UK's most prolific music industry figures, Cream CEO James Barton.

(Liverpool Music Week MySpace blog, 21 July 2008<sup>169</sup>)

In the second instance, LMW partnered with MTV for the 2008 event, and the event was re-branded as MTV Liverpool Music Week. This development was announced on MySpace and Facebook in the mid-summer of the same year:

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*Virtual Festivals* (2007) 'Liverpool Music Week – LIVE.' 07 December. Available: <http://www.virtualfestivals.com/latest/news/4203>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>169</sup> Available: <http://www.myspace.com/liverpoolmusicweek/blog>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

We are thrilled to announce our partnership with MTV, underlining just how far this festival has come since it's [sic] creation in 2003 we will celebrate this with the largest and most diverse LMW to date.

(Liverpool Music Week MySpace blog, 21 July 2008)

This year, Liverpool Music Week have partnered with MTV to coincide with this years [sic] European Music Awards, which is one of the highlights of Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture. MTV Liverpool Music Week is set to stage over 50 events, in 16 venues throughout the city, across 8 days and feature over 250 live acts, in what has grown to become the UK's biggest indoor winter music festival.

(Liverpool Music Week Facebook update; 24 July 2008<sup>170</sup>)

The process of spatial expansion is discursively represented in the Facebook quote in the following ways: on one level, the reference to the cultural events of the year 2008 taking place in Liverpool, signified by the term 'European Capital of Culture' positions the festival within a *local* context. The term was ubiquitous in the media during, and even before and after 2008. By alluding to other cultural events taking place at the same locus at the same time, the level of the city is represented as a complex cultural and social environment. On a second level, the reference to the UK in relation to other music festivals taking place in the country signifies an expansion to a *national* scale. On a third level, the 'European' of both the 'European Capital of Culture' and the 'European Music Awards' signifies an *international* expansion, which is reinforced by the iconic status of MTV as an international music brand. In accordance with this, the reviews cited on the festival's 2007 MySpace website refer simultaneously to the city and to 'becoming national' (not yet international in that year):

"Liverpool Music Week continues its amazing growth into a truly national festival. The list of artists can only add to its credibility as a key event on the music calender [sic]" Steve Levy, Director of Global Marketing, BMG Publishing International

(Liverpool Music Week MySpace, 09 October 2007)

The national-level expansion is here actually equated with 'credibility.' However, the online representation of the festival also draws on local references to underline its credibility.

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<sup>170</sup> Updates, like private messages, are accessible through individual Facebook accounts, providing a URL address would therefore be irrelevant.

## **Affirming significance through local references**

Besides the promotional messages on the festival's blog and external sources such as reviews, further elements of the online content representing the festival allude to the festival's process of expansion. The MySpace profile for Liverpool Music Week 2008 predominantly used the same features as the 2007 profile (described in Chapter 5). The main header, however, was altered significantly to include not only the advertising posters for four of the highlights – the 'big names' – of the music festival, but also a roll-down 'history' section titled 'A Little History Lesson' (Figure 6.1). The prominence of the festival's history on the page is notable – besides the year's main attractions, it is certainly the first thing the viewer comes across when entering the page.

The history section proceeds through each year from 2003 to 2007 with a list of statistics: the number of venues, days, acts, and the audience. This is followed by a brief description of each event in comparison to other years and a list of featured performing acts. The changing name of the event – the changing brand – indicates a simultaneous process of gaining local identity and expanding spatially: *Music Week* (in 2003 and 2004, taking place solely at the Liverpool venue the Tea Factory) to *Liverpool Music Week* (signifying the 'launch of multi-venue "Liverpool Music Week"' in 2005) to *MTV Liverpool Music Week* (in 2008). The rapidly increasing number of venues and bands, accompanied by a growing audience, indicates a spectacular 'career' of the festival: for example, from 9 venues to 16 between 2005 and 2006; from an audience of 26,000+ in 2006 to one of 60,000 in 2007; from 30 live acts in 2003 to 150 in 2005 and 250 in 2006. The number of 'important' bands and artists (their significance implied by their highlighted status) similarly indicates expansion, more in terms of quality than quantity.



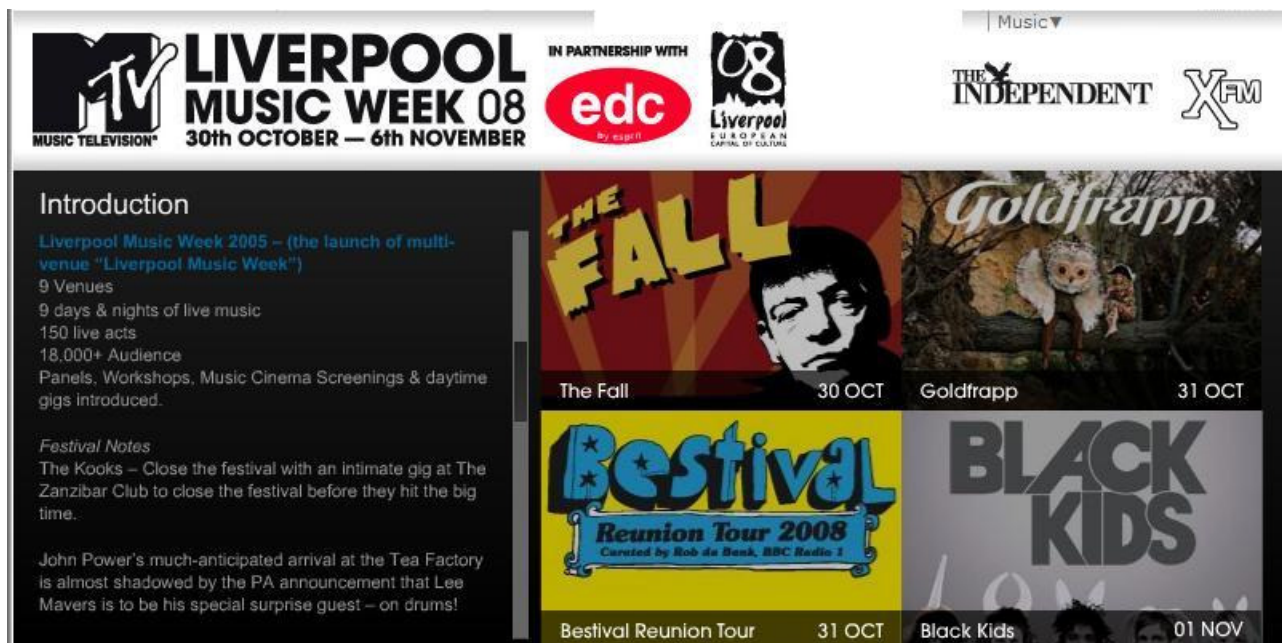


Figure 6.1 Liverpool Music Week 2008 on MySpace (main header)

At the same time, the references to certain names function as allusions to Liverpool's popular music history and collective memory. Examples are Ian McCulloch ('Bunnymen frontman,' the lead singer of the internationally recognised and locally revered 1980s Liverpool band Echo and the Bunnymen<sup>171</sup>), who is also quoted in relation to the 2004 festival (see below), and 'local legends' Shack – another Liverpool guitar rock band who began their career in the late 1980s, but were still active at the time.<sup>172</sup>

*Festival notes* [for Liverpool Music Week 2004]

Ian McCulloch – Bunnymen frontman supports the new event by performing very special covers set.

*“This was one of my favourite gigs of recent times. This is an event that Liverpool has been craving.”*

(Liverpool Music Week MySpace, 23 October 2008)

The quoted 'authority,' the local rock music legend, evidently identified the event as an important occasion in the city's cultural life – already in 2004, when the Week still took place at one single venue.

<sup>171</sup> The band's official website can be found at <http://www.bunnymen.com> (accessed 06 November 2010).

<sup>172</sup> While accessible during the time of research, Shack no longer have a separate official site. Their MySpace profile is available at <http://www.myspace.com/shacktheband> (accessed 06 November 2010).

The quoted statistics indicate growth in terms of quantity by listing more and more performances, as well as popularity by listing an increasing number of spectators. In addition to this, they also indicate an expansion in space. The lists of bands demonstrate that there had been a growing number of acts from outside Liverpool and from all over the country. In the same way, the increasing audience numbers imply a process of ‘nationalisation’ of a local event. Correspondingly, in an interview published on the webzine *Virtual Festivals*<sup>173</sup> in 2007, festival director Mike Deane spoke of a predominantly local audience, but at the same time growing national recognition in anticipation of 2008 as a breakthrough assisted by the MTV cooperation and the city’s Capital of Culture status:

[...] we’ve got all our big headliners the [sic] closing the weekend, which will bring a load more people in to the city and onto the streets. I do feel the crowd is coming from further a field this year. We do lock-in a predominantly local crowd but the festival has got good national recognition over the past 18 months, and hopefully in the next couple of years, continuing with a strong 2008, we will be increasing the numbers from outside the city.

(Purdie 2007a)

Liverpool Music Week exemplifies that in order for a small-scale local event to gain ‘local’ identity, some recognition from ‘outside’ needs to exist, on a scale broader than local. Local references evoke Liverpool’s popular music history alongside the current music scenes in Liverpool through naming bands and venues – including those with iconic status, such as the Picket. One of the most important features of the online representation of the festival appears to be the simultaneous presence of these local references and the representation of a process of extension to a national and even, through the teaming with MTV, global level. The listing of names – especially ‘big’ names – in retrospect, besides an indication of spatial expansion, also serves as a kind of validation: an indication that the festival is not only currently a notable – national – event, but has already played a significant part in the UK’s popular music culture up to the present.

### **A narrative of spatial expansion**

Based on the cited interview with Mike Deane (Purdie 2007a), the narrative of expansion was also entirely consistent with the aim of the festival organisers. But how did the participating musicians experience and value the changing festival? Bands, in general,

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<sup>173</sup> Available: <http://virtualfestivals.com>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

acknowledged the opportunities provided by the festival, such as gaining more visibility to industry professionals, which in some cases resulted in performing opportunities outside Liverpool. On the other hand, they also reflected on the changes brought about by the expansion of the festival, which were not entirely perceived as positive. The lead singer of 28 Costumes was quoted in relation to the festival and their own participation in an interview by *Virtual Festivals* at the time of the 2007 Week:

We've been involved since the word go. It started in 2003 and it was basically in this really swanky pub that nobody ever really went to and it was big enough to fit three stages in. It was really good then because it was just Liverpool bands. Every night there was around 600 people there no matter what the line-up was, so everyone was always brilliant. It has got bigger each year and it seems it's taken a massive leap from last year with bands like Hard-Fi. So Mike Deane has been really dedicated to it from day one. We did an event at SXSW<sup>174</sup> as well. It was us, Hot Club De Paris, Eugene McGuinness and The Wombats and that was a Liverpool Music Week event as well.

(Purdie 2007b [online])

The singer clearly expressed his nostalgic enthusiasm for the years when the festival only involved Liverpool bands, while at the same time acknowledging the effort of the head organiser to expand the festival and explaining how this expansion has been beneficial in terms of their own career. The exporting of Liverpool acts to a similar event in the US was enabled by the bands' association with LMW. Notably, this exporting of local bands is a further way of facilitating international expansion, complementary to bringing national/international bands into the city.<sup>175</sup>

A certain kind of nostalgia regarding the first years of the festival in contrast to more recent years was also expressed by other musicians. Fifteen months after the cited interview with the singer, one of the guitarists of 28 Costumes talked to me about performing at Liverpool Music Week with his first band (at one of the events before 2007), emphasising that this was a 'big thing' then. At that time it had not been as usual for lesser-known Liverpool bands to play the festival, whereas in 2008 in his opinion it was almost expected, 'everyone is

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<sup>174</sup> South by Southwest Music and Media Conference and Festival, a major annual event in Austin, Texas. 28 Costumes' participation was an important step in the band's career and was accompanied by much online commentary, including detailed blog posts.

<sup>175</sup> A similar example was cited by Sam Walkerdine of Married to the Sea in relation to the European Capital of Culture status of Liverpool: a promoter organised a Liverpool 08 tent at Glastonbury festival, and Married to the Sea were one of the six Liverpool bands chosen to perform there. According to Sam, it was thanks to the Capital of Culture year that they had the opportunity to play at Glastonbury (face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009).

there.<sup>176</sup> This observation suggests that the expansion had also taken place on a local level, resulting in the inclusion of more and more local and lesser known – unsigned – bands and artists. Mike Deane expressed this in terms of an explicit aim of LMW: ‘[during the ]last 2 years we’ve also introduced ticketed shows in order to attract bigger artists and raise the profile of the festival even more. It goes hand in hand with allowing more slots for unsigned and breakthrough talent [at free shows], which we will always continue to do’ (Purdie 2007a).

My interviewee also mentioned that they had headlined the Bumper – the main host venue from 2006 onwards, primarily featuring bands from Liverpool, never ticketed – with Elle s’appelle (his former band) in 2007 and again in 2008 with 28 Costumes. While there was definitely a different audience and a lot more people around the venues in 2008, they as a band still played the same venue, the same room, and ‘it felt almost the same’ (ibid.). From this it may be concluded that while the event had drawn a larger and probably more geographically varied audience than ever before, the atmosphere experienced by bands at the particular venues had not been significantly influenced or altered by this. In an earlier interview, however, the same musician also expressed a sort of resentment towards the festival organisation of the 2007 event for not giving the more prominent slots to local bands:

Liverpool music week was a good thing. I would have liked to have seen some of the top Liverpool acts playing on the larger stages and getting something for it though. In our case, before we had time to think about a Liverpool music week show, we were approached to play. I think this was just our exposure doing us favours.<sup>177</sup>

(Online interview with a member of Elle s’appelle, 16 December 2007)

It is not impossible that the 2008 Week, taking place at more venues than ever and involving more participants than ever, favoured local acts and guests at the same time – hence the more optimistic view following that year’s event. All in all, the experience suggested by the musicians does not seem to contradict the official discourse of LMW.

On the basis of the observed practices and expressed experiences of musicians, a cluster of local bands participating at the festival and forming a distinct symbolic group can be identified. This cluster is, firstly, physically separated through allocating particular venues for unsigned, primarily local bands (such as the Bumper). Secondly, it is discursively marked by the organisers through the reference to the free shows as opposed to the ticketed events. Thirdly, on a symbolic level, the cluster is also demarcated in the online discourse through the

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<sup>176</sup> Face-to-face interview with a member of 28 Costumes, formerly of Elle s’appelle (04 March 2009)

<sup>177</sup> Mike Deane named Elle s’appelle as the most convincing act of 2007 for him personally (Purdie 2007a).

use of place names and the association of these with particular generic and stylistic labels ('guitar bands'), central to popular images of music making in Liverpool. Fourthly, the existence of the local cluster on an experiential level is suggested by musicians' narratives. It would not be adequate to define this cluster as one particular scene – the musical styles vary, and there is no evidence of a corresponding cohesive identity. However, it can be described as an identifiable network of musicians, venues, and promoters.

Mike Deane emphasised the importance of collaborating with local venues and promoters during the organisation of the event:

**LMW Founder Mike Deane Comments:** "Liverpool Music Week works closely with the best local promoters to ensure the most diverse and best agenda possible for the inner city festival. Alternative promoters Class A Audio have pulled a gem in Clinic's first Liverpool show for years, Evol has had a stunning year, and made Korova one of the most prestigious venues for new bands, while Gold in the Shade continues to carve its own niche at the Magnet and provides a quality night of funk and afrobeat. Dan Deacon is new, alternative and very fresh, and a great booking by Barfly for LMW. [...]"

(Liverpool Music Week MySpace blog,<sup>178</sup> 19 October 2007)

Besides showing that the event can benefit not only local musicians, but also promoters and venues in Liverpool, the quote also draws attention to the professional-organisational network operating on a local level that is essential for the maintenance of the event. The pattern of online participation, as observed in the previous chapter, further details this picture. The characteristics of the online commentary on LMW's MySpace site demonstrated a local community focus in 2006, with a significant ratio of personal content and in-group communication. However, interaction became gradually less personal from 2007 onwards. It appears that, in line with the observations of 28 Costumes' singer, the exclusively local atmosphere of the festival had practically disappeared. Nevertheless, a primarily local segment had continued to exist. The online presence of this network, however, is not centred around the online spaces directly representing Liverpool Music Week, but is rather dispersed across bands' webpages, as Chapter 7 will show in more detail.

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<sup>178</sup> Available: <http://www.myspace.com/liverpoolmusicweek/blog>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

## The visual representation of tradition and locality

The editors of the 2008 LMW profile evoked the past of the festival through the history section in order to indicate continuity in time and represent an existing tradition. Some further online content provides additional reinforcement of this. The photo gallery (already available on the 2007 profile and still featured in 2009) displayed photographs from performances at previous years' festivals, as well as the posters for each year. The gallery can therefore be considered a visual equivalent to the history section of the main site. Besides the LMW posters, however, posters advertising other Liverpool events such as the 2007 Sound City festival and further Liverpool gigs from 2007 were also displayed. The majority of these events were organised by the LMW team, even if they did not take place during the Week. Nevertheless, through the display of such images, a connection is made to Liverpool as a music scene – as a creative hub where various musical events are happening. The inclusion of a photo from a Liverpool FC – Barcelona football match featuring two Liverpool FC players (amongst a number of other football references) is a further visual reference to local identity and popular culture associated with the city. Interestingly, by the time of writing, this was the only picture in the gallery that had drawn several comments (four) from viewers, such as: 'devils red forever, never you walk alone;' 'best match ever it was the greatest match i have ever watched for a thing i dont like barcelona and liverpool is my favorite team welll w/e.' All of the comments express affiliation with Liverpool football and a certain pride and/or enthusiasm.<sup>179</sup>

The display of this systematic collection of memorabilia from past events and past years in general can once again be understood in the frame of a collector aesthetics that has been transferred to the online context. Thanks to the standard MySpace format – that is, a structural characteristic arising from the form of the communication medium –, the collection resembles an individual's collection of photographs: a photo album with personal memories (in a similar manner to bands' photo collections, which were compared to individual photo sharing on social networking sites in Chapter 5). Through the creation of an aura of remembering, perhaps even nostalgia, the site contributes to the perception of a local music scene by involving the participants' own experiences and memories – as well as anticipations, represented by the current year's upcoming programme. The integration of a collective notion

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<sup>179</sup> Connections and associations between popular music and football in the context of Liverpool are discussed in Chapter 3.

of the past evoked through ‘restorative nostalgia’ (Boym 2001) with the present (represented by the current year’s programme) and the future helps to reinforce in-group identity.

On the other hand, as in the case of album and poster artwork (discussed in Chapter 4), this virtual collection of visual memorabilia can also be linked to the particularities of visual aesthetics in the indie genre. The ethics of DIY production implied by the genre emphasises the personal value of the produced artefact that arises from individual – or collective, but still small-scale – effort. Small-scale organisation, the promotion of local venues (initially the Tea Factory) and local talent were evidently primary goals for the festival organisers during the event’s formation and the early years. The online content, written and visual, ensures that values corresponding to the bottom-up approach, along with an emphasis on locality, are maintained as characteristic elements of the festival’s identity.

It appears therefore that place, both in the form of canonised local heritage and the locus of personal and cultural memories, is a crucial element in the definition and representation of the city’s biggest rock music festival, both online and offline. At the same time, for both the organisers and participating bands, the originally local-scale, community-oriented nature of the festival was a crucial, defining element of the event. With the events’ expansion, on the one hand they mourned the loss of this ‘familiarity,’ on the other hand they were happy with the opportunity to showcase their work to a broader audience. This duality of representing the local while emphasising openness towards larger, national- and international-scale audiences, as well as the ‘branching out’ in order to bring national acts to the local audience, was consistently replicated in the promotional material of the festival. The following section examines the notions of place and local identity that have similar importance and play similar roles in the self-presentation of Liverpool-based bands.

## **2 Bands and the online representation of local identity**

a.P.A.t.T.’s definition of ‘Liverpool bands’

References to place and local characteristics, especially in terms of music and musical heritage, appear in the representation of not only music events, but also bands themselves. A blog post by a.P.A.t.T. entitled ‘Liverpools [sic] collective noise makers’ introduces their own pre-Christmas online compilation of exciting contemporary Liverpool bands and artists at the end of the city’s year as Capital of Culture – tying in with the great amount of reflection on

the city's cultural heritage the year involved, whether in the media or directly through the cultural events.<sup>180</sup> The post alludes simultaneously to Liverpool's musical past and its canonised present, both through the written text and through the use of images. The latter is exemplified by the photo of an evidently ageing Cilla Black featured with the caption 'The Wombats<sup>181</sup> earlier,' alongside a picture of a five-member Asian Beatles tribute band with the caption 'The Beatles "Yesterday".' The accompanying text is an attempt to define the essence of Liverpool music:

Liverpool has always had a long lineage of musicians and artists. In fact, there can't be many people who aren't aware that Liverpool's artists have reached the coveted [sic] Number 1 spot in Britain more than anywhere else. Well whoop-de-doo!

What on Earth does that mean ? We have better P.R. companies ? Better haircuts ? What's the relevance?

Who knows! What I do know is that there is large amount of music being made in Liverpool that will never sink into 'average Joe's' CD collection.

Music that seems to be intrinsically trying to put the listener off can only be liked to a threshold [sic] point by the normal music listening public!

Thank God, thank Dog. It's ours.

(*a.P.A.t.T. Syndication Blog*, 16 December 2008<sup>182</sup>)

The excerpt includes allusions to popular narratives of Liverpool's popular music, such as the 'haircuts,' reminding one, once again, of the Beatles. The references to the city's popular music heritage appear alongside a depiction of 'unpopular' music that is nevertheless 'ours' – this can be interpreted as the expression of a locally based musical identity, whereby the lack of popularity or mainstream qualities ensures authenticity and genuineness. Furthermore, the ironic attitude itself, manifest in wordplay and phraseology, can be viewed as an element of the expressed collective identity.

The blog post continues by quoting Wikipedia<sup>183</sup> with a list of band and artist names as a representation of Liverpool's more recent popular music history starting with the 1990s, as well as its present – a.P.A.t.T. themselves are included.

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<sup>180</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the city's year as European Capital of Culture.

<sup>181</sup> The Wombats are a contemporary Liverpool indie rock band that formed at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts and achieved international success in 2008.

<sup>182</sup> Available: <http://apatt.wordpress.com/2008/12/16/liverpools-collective-noise-makers-an-apatt-syndication-show-special>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>183</sup> Wikipedia is an extensive and popular free online multilingual encyclopaedia based on an openly editable model. Available: <http://www.wikipedia.org>. Accessed: 06 November 2010



According to Wiki:

“1990s bands that enjoyed success were The Boo Radleys, The La’s, The Farm, Ooberman, Scorpio Rising, Sian and Slug.

Since 2000 bands such as The Zutons, The Wombats and The Coral have become popular. As a backlash to this regular guitar pop music, another scene far more influenced by post punk and experimental music has emerged more recently, spearheaded by bands such as a.P.A.t.T. , Hot Club de Paris, Kling Klang and Stig”  
(*a.P.A.t.T. Syndication Blog*, 16 December 2008)<sup>184</sup>

By citing Wikipedia, a kind of online authority is evoked, although possibly with irony.

The quote is followed by a playful attempt to connect the list of names by defining the ultimate musical feature characterising music from Liverpool:

So, there must be something that binds a lot of bands together in Liverpool; well, progressive is one aspect...hmmm and it’s safe to say that simply the music MUST must be a little Wonky.

(*a.P.A.t.T. Syndication Blog*, 16 December 2008)

As the text proceeds to explain, ‘Wonky’ roughly denotes eccentricity in the present context. Notably, the term, in the compound ‘wonky guitars,’ also appears in the music press in relation to 28 Costumes and pop music in Liverpool in 2008, placed in the broader context of UK indie music.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, it is also used as ‘wonky dancefloors’ in a quote from a member of Hot Club de Paris, again relating to 28 Costumes: ‘28 Costumes are important fun. “This Band Has Eaten All Our Money” is laced with twists, turns and skewif supprises that should (justice permitting) set wonky dancefloors ablaze.’ (Paul Rafferty, Hot Club de Paris, cited on 28 Costumes’ main MySpace page). The word therefore appears to be part of an insider discourse.

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<sup>184</sup> The quoted Wikipedia entry is: ‘Music in Liverpool.’ Available: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool\\_music\\_scene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool_music_scene). Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>185</sup> The extract is from the website of Edinburgh radio station Fresh Air, quoted by 28 Costumes (the original now unavailable):

If the last couple of years have belonged to Yorkshire thanks to Arctic Monkeys, Kaiser Chiefs, The Cribs, Pigeon Detectives and many others 2008 may well be the year that the focus shifts back to Liverpool. Obviously the Wombats are firmly in the music world’s eye following the fantastic ‘Let’s Dance To Joy Division’ but there are a couple more acts waiting to break through in 2008 and prove there is something special in the Mersey water once again. 28 Costumes ([www.myspace.com/28costumes](http://www.myspace.com/28costumes)) put out the fantastic ‘Electrical Fever’ in 2007 but the fuss that they are creating now means a re-release of this funky little number is entirely possible and could lead it to being one of THE tracks of 2008, and the changing pace and wonky guitars could well see this tune becoming the soundtrack to summer 2008.

([www.freshair.org.uk](http://www.freshair.org.uk), quoted on 28 Costumes’ MySpace blog, 07 February 2008)

This blog post can be viewed as an attempt on the part of the band to define themselves and the music scene that they felt part of along aesthetic values and attitudes: possessing a unique eccentricity and being progressive. Whether the latter term is to be understood in narrower stylistic terms or as a general attitude of attempting to transcend already existing boundaries is unclear, but both connotations are evoked. a.P.A.t.T.'s juxtaposition of an almost excessive variety of musical styles ('File next to ABBA / Zappa skipping through all the genres on the way'<sup>186</sup>), the experimentation with a multiplicity of musical instruments, the creative integration of visual and theatrical elements into their performance style all testify to their 'progressive' attitude. While displaying a connection with Liverpool's canonised popular music history (Cilla Black, the Beatles), a.P.A.t.T. also distance themselves from this heritage through an emphasised ironic attitude and the identifying of a central aesthetic characteristic of their own and their peers' music, namely an experimental approach that goes against the mainstream. Paradoxically, the ironic and mocking attitude already characterised some of the more canonised artists they aim to distance themselves from – the Beatles and their famous wit are an obvious example. Wit and humour, moreover, is a key element in popular descriptions of Liverpool culture, as indicated by following writing by Liverpool-born journalist and broadcaster Spencer Leigh: 'The wit was everywhere. No matter how depressed its economy has been, the city has always generated warmth. To illustrate the point, the Cavern DJ Bob Wooler said that Liverpool was a city of one-liners and ocean liners' (2010: 30).

### Naming faces and places

References to cultural elements associated with the city in the examples above were used as symbolic expressions of attachment or, on the contrary, disassociation. Besides these indirect expressions of local identity, I also looked at indicated connections to actual geographical places and local sites such as venues on the MySpace pages of bands. Venues, logically, are primarily cited in relation to advertisements for live shows. Besides this, however, they are further reinforced in friends' comments relating to these shows. The significance of this lies in the fact that the frequent references to local venues within the discourse surrounding bands draw on and in their turn contribute to the establishing of a

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<sup>186</sup> A self-description recurring on various websites, including [www.apatt.com](http://www.apatt.com), [apatt.wordpress.com](http://apatt.wordpress.com), and [www.soundcloud.com/apatt](http://www.soundcloud.com/apatt). All accessed: 06 November 2010

concept of a Liverpool scene – not unlike the way journalistic accounts of Toronto pubs in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the public perception of a scene in Straw’s (2001) case study.

References to locality can also be understood as references to Liverpool itself, either as a complex and coherent concept of the city, involving ascribed social, economic and cultural characteristics and traditions, or in the form of references to specific local elements. The extract from Elle s’appelle’s MySpace blog relating to their live performances already quoted in Chapter 5 exemplifies hyperlinking other Liverpool bands’ profiles while simultaneously commenting on their significance – and that of the locality – in their own music-making career:

Our Gig-ography (Nicked from Puzzle) or gig history is now into double figures and we feel very happy on stage. Recently we have played with goFASTER>>, 28 Costumes, Hot Club de Paris and Wave Machines. All are Liverpool based and all have had something to do with the blowing of our minds. It is fair to say, we are having the time of our fucking lives.

(Elle s’appelle MySpace blog, 31 July 2007)<sup>187</sup>

Posts like the above also reinforce the idea of a locally based scene, by emphasising mutual influence and collaboration among bands from the same city, playing at the same venues. The network of bands exists offline, since the mentioned bands perform with each other and act as mutual musical and attitudinal influences. Nevertheless, it is through online discursive reinforcements such as the above that an image of this scene is created and maintained. Some of the musicians articulated experiences that underline the ‘actual’ basis of the post, i.e. the collaborative set of relationships that exists among this definable group of bands:

We very much wanted to play with the bands in Liverpool like goFASTER>>, Hot Club de Paris and 28 Costumes as we are all fans. We didn’t have a specific audience, we just wanted to enjoy similar success in Liverpool as the bands I mentioned. The types of shows that we played were definitely influenced by this, but our music is very much our own.

(Online interview with a member of Elle s’appelle, 23 November 2007)

The musician hints at a connection between the group of bands they ‘socialised’ in, and thus the local (musical) environment on the one hand, and the style of their music on the other – even if while making a connection with the other bands, he at once singles out Elle s’appelle’s own music as something unique.

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<sup>187</sup> Available: <http://blogs.myspace.com/ellesappelleband>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

At the same time, geographical place names were not typically featured directly in the online content produced by bands or in the interaction on their websites. Whereas Liverpool was almost invariably mentioned as a place of origin in reviews, i.e. external sources, apart from indicating the city as location on the MySpace and Facebook profiles, the bands did not frequently use such references overtly. When places were named on the interactive platforms, the context was casual conversation, as the following example – one half of a two-way comment interaction – indicates: ‘yeah definately, i love the wirral, and you definately appreciate it more when you dont live there’ (Elle s’appelle MySpace, 04 October 2007). The topic of the discussion here is constituted by the merits of the Wirral (the peninsula between the River Dee and the Mersey) as a living environment, yet the place is not discursively linked to music. One explanation of this lack of overt geographical identification may be a reluctance to be classified as a ‘Liverpool band’ and ensuing strategies to avoid popular associations and pigeonholing. This seems to be the case with Elle s’appelle: in radio interviews, members of the band – in particular the female singer – deliberately expressed their desire *not* to be viewed as a ‘Liverpool band.’

On the other hand, references to place and particular local elements need to be interpreted in the broader context of the reception of the bands’ creative output, with a view to the musical text as well as the band image. As we have already seen, through its title and lyrics – the first verse consists of a repetition of the title, further repeated in the chorus –, 28 Costumes’ ‘This Band Has Eaten All Our Money’ directly reflects on their music making practices and the social-economic conditions in which these practices are embedded. Such meta-commentary – reflecting on the practices of being a band through music – creates a symbolic community tie among musicians: the implied audience is one that appreciates and sympathises with the struggle and frustration of trying to get a rock band off the ground without any financial backing or rewards. However, this attitude, i.e. the basis of the assumed solidarity, is even more closely linked to rock genre aesthetics and ethics, and therefore signifies a connecting bond through musical style and taste.

More directly, Married to the Sea’s name itself has drawn – stereotypical – associations in terms of locality. While the guitarist explained that the name was influenced by a line in the film *Rushmore* (1998), directed by Wes Anderson, the image of the sea clearly has a local resonance in a city that is famous for its past as a seaport. As Strachan observes, this past has ensured the ubiquitous presence and influence of seafaring songs – sea shanties –

in the popular culture of Liverpool (2010: 46-47).<sup>188</sup> Reviews of Married to the Sea's music do not fail to make the connection between Liverpool's association with sea imagery and the band name, as indicated by the following live review from *Sandman Magazine*:

Married to the Sea come from Liverpool, which, being a major port, may be the source of this wilfully obtuse name. Or they could be named after an internet comic (Google it). Who knows.

(Ersatz-Culture 2008 [online])

At the same time as linking the name with the image of Liverpool as seaport, the article also makes reference to the – unrelated – comics page by the same name,<sup>189</sup> which the reviewer evidently stumbled upon while conducting his preliminary online research – exemplifying an intriguing instance of online intertextuality. Further instances alluding to the same imagery include the review of *Manchestermusic.co.uk* of the EP *Hello Digger* (2009), which mentions 'harmonies' that 'swell like big waves.'<sup>190</sup>

Elsewhere, Married to the Sea is clearly identified as a 'scouse' band:

Hand picked to represent Liverpool at this years [2008] Glastonbury this summer, you'd be hard pressed to find a more fitting selection of scouse talent. Talent like Married to the sea, whose chug along fair ground keys and Death Cab squeals make for an unashamedly brilliant start.

(*The Fly*, quoted on *Marriedtothesea.co.uk*)<sup>191</sup>

These associations, almost inevitably, also include the reference to 'scouse wit' – which, we have seen, is a key element in the popular image of Liverpool identity: 'Using their Scouse wit to win the crowd over with their fair share of **Grace Jones** jokes they seem genuinely excited to be playing and go as far as hailing the festival as the best in the UK' (Secret Garden Festival review on *Clickmusic.com*, quoted on *Marriedtothesea.co.uk*).

Even though the band cites the respective reviews on their own site, the association of Married to the Sea with local characteristics originates from external sources. Puzzle, however, directly evoked Liverpool as a place through their EP *Patterns We Left* (2009). The three songs were released as a mini CD through Wolverhampton-based indie label Lightningheart Records with a front cover featuring a segment of an old map of Liverpool,

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<sup>188</sup> 'In the half light of a side-street, you could imagine you're back in Melville's time, when harlots haunted the sailors' grog-shops, or even in the notorious hell-hole of slaving days, when press-gangs roamed and shanty songs ran out in Paradise street' – writes Paul DuNoyer in the first chapter of *Liverpool: Wondrous Place* (2002: 2).

<sup>189</sup> See <http://www.marriedtothesea.com>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>190</sup> Quoted on Married to the Sea's main website. Available: [http://www.marriedtothesea.co.uk/?page\\_id=6](http://www.marriedtothesea.co.uk/?page_id=6). Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>191</sup> As above

including Sefton Park, Princes Park, and the Upper Parliament Street area (Figure 6.2). (A limited edition hologram version of the cover was also available, corresponding the indie bands' already observed attention to artwork, with the aim of making the physical release special in comparison with the digital tracks available online). Notably, the band found the map on an online forum *Yoliverpool.com*.<sup>192</sup> To my online enquiry regarding the exact date of the map, the musicians were initially unable to provide this information. However, my question prompted guitarist David Johnson to do some additional research and come up with the following result:

After some quick detective work, we reckon the map is after 1904 because the original says liverpool cathedral is being built but also before 1934 as Queensway tunnel is not on there. We're probably wrong though!! [...] More evidence! It seems that the Liverbuilding is on the map, but the Cunard building isn't, which means it must be between 1911 and 1917!!

(Puzzle MySpace blog, 14 October 2009)

The image of place, represented by the old map, is coupled with a chronotopic<sup>193</sup> image of past times (reinforced by the retro-style typewriter font under the map), creating, once again, an aura of remembering. While the songs on the EP do not continue this theme, the cover reinforces the identity of Puzzle as a Liverpool band, where the identification with the city is inextricably linked to an engagement with its past.

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<sup>192</sup> Available: <http://www.yoliverpool.com/forum/forum.php>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

<sup>193</sup> M. M. Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope integrates time and space on the basis of 'the unity of time and space markers (a unity without a merging)' in novels (1996: 97). The concept is based on the idea that in literature and art, 'temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values' (243).

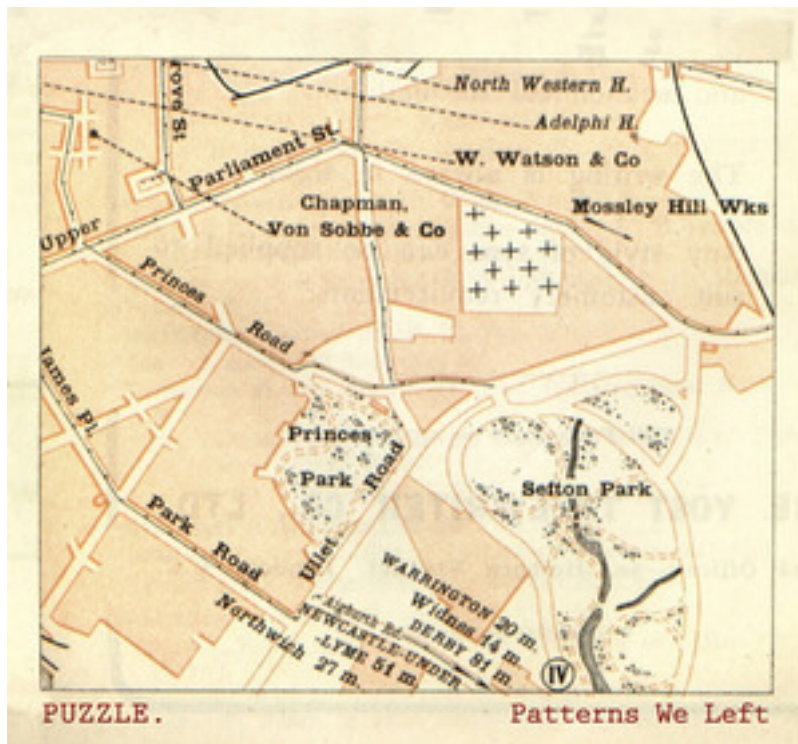


Figure 6.2 Puzzle's *Patterns We Left* (2009) EP mini CD cover<sup>194</sup>

## Discussion

The chapter has shown that place and locality are key aspects of online representation in the case of music events. They also form an important aspect of bands' self-presentation, self-definition, as well as the definition of their relationship to other bands and their audience. The analysis of place references and spatial expressions in the online content relating to the promotion of Liverpool Music Week indicated an expansion of the festival through its years as the key element in its online representation. Expansion was represented online in the following ways: firstly, in terms of the festival's organisation, on a local level – exemplified by partnerships and collaboration. Secondly, in terms of space – with regard to the location of performers (national level), participants, and venues (local level). Thirdly, in terms of volume (the number of participants, performers, and venues); and lastly, in terms of media presence, including online representation. The latter is linked to space in a more abstract sense: as space for interaction and participation, which had been gradually extended to the virtual.

It has become evident that in the online discourse related to bands, references to and representations of place, as well as other local elements such as venues, people, groups, and organisations, are most common in the context of creative collaborations. In other words,

<sup>194</sup> Published with the permission of Puzzle

local references are primarily indicative of an existing offline set of relationships and serve to reinforce these, or, in some cases, even lead to their emergence. The online is far from being placeless; on the contrary, it not only provides space for the representation of local scenes, but the online spaces also in effect form part of scenes through the reinforcement of localities. The representation of locality, moreover, is to be understood with reference to genre aesthetics and ethics: symbolic connections among bands, as well as between bands and their audience, are at once framed and articulated along elements of local culture and expressions relating to rock authenticity – a symbolic bond that transcends place to create connections between distant locations.

At the same time, references to Liverpool as a city are not always prevalent in the online content produced by the bands. The direct association of the observed bands with Liverpool, often using stereotypical images, is more typically made from ‘outside,’ in particular by the reviewing online music press. Nevertheless, through hyperlinks and citations, these associations become an integral part of bands’ self-presentation. It is arguably the unique features of the Internet as a set of communication media that facilitate this kind of direct linking. Given the symbolic meaning of the connections, this underlines the significance of online presence in the representation of place and locality in music making. Moreover, there are important instances whereby bands themselves engage with their place of origin – whether through their online output (e.g. the blog post relating to Liverpool music by a.P.A.t.T.), or a both online and offline creative product (e.g. Puzzle’s EP cover imagery).



## Chapter 7 Networks and scenes: understanding online-and-offline worlds

Music making in any environment is centred around, firstly, particular spaces – of production and consumption, recording and distributing, rehearsing, performing and listening; and secondly, relationships, i.e. meaningful personal or institutional connections involving some kind of exchange (of goods, service, information, values) or symbolic content (e.g. based on taste and style). Online platforms such as MySpace have provided both additional spaces and additional facilities for the establishing and maintenance of relationships. But how exactly are these ‘spaces’ and ‘relationships’ to be understood?

The name ‘MySpace’ itself refers to an individualisation of space through the act of displaying oneself online. However, these structurally individual spaces are in fact most often group spaces, involving and representing more than one individual – band profiles are the most obvious example, in particular where several members actively contribute to editing content. The profiles of bands can be understood as virtual spaces allocated through a corresponding web address (URL), functioning as sites for a particular group of musicians, their music, other products such as artwork, as well as fans and associated friends and acquaintances. At the same time, these structurally separated spaces are also interconnected through branching off the same main portal and through forming part of a broader hyperlink network. While Chapter 4 presented a description of group spaces that are set apart from the rest of the MySpace domain by URLs (such as [www.myspace.com/ellesappelleband](http://www.myspace.com/ellesappelleband)) both symbolically and in effect, this chapter explores how these spaces are interlinked with each other and embedded in wider spaces, both on- and offline.

What do these connections tell us about the bands and the music scene? How do hyperlink networks relate to meaningful personal, organisational, and symbolic relationships, online and offline? The conceptualisation and understanding of the spatial and temporal structure of online presence is a prerequisite to answering these questions. It also leads to an understanding of the dynamism of networks of relationships. The first section of the chapter therefore presents a structural analysis of the spaces occupied by the bands, reflecting on the changes in the technological environment and participants’ perceptions of such changes. On the one hand, the usage of technology, that is, the Internet-based activity of musicians, music fans, and other users within the music industries, impacts upon its form.<sup>195</sup> On the other hand, the specificities of the technological context also determine use to an extent, for example,

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<sup>195</sup> This can be referred to as ‘the social construction of technology’ perspective (Baym 2010: 24).

through the available platforms for interaction, self-presentation, content sharing, and forming and displaying connections.<sup>196</sup> Furthermore, the temporal dynamics of the technological context is inseparable from the internal temporal dynamics of a band's career, the dynamics of a (recurring) music event, and the entire music scene or local – virtual network. Once the notion of online presence in both space and time has been defined, the chapter proceeds with the analysis of the structure and meaning of online connections – this forms the core of the second, final section. The section uncovers the characteristics of online networks of relationships related to bands and music events, and interprets this in the broader context of the online and offline social and creative environment. It also conceptualises the notion of the scene event as a collective event based on sets of meaningful economic, symbolic, and creative relationships.

## **1 The spatial and temporal organisation of bands' online activity**

Uncovering the relationship of space, time, and the online environment is necessary for the conceptualisation of the relationship of the online and the offline. In her discussion of virtual ethnography, Hine (2000) takes a critical stance towards Castells' (1996) notions of the 'space of flows' and the 'temporal collage' (c.f. Chapter 1). Rather than places or locations, Castells proposes thinking in terms of flows – of people, information, money – within the world of computer-mediated communication and global networks. Within the conceptual framework of the network, the emphasis is thus on connection rather than location (Hine 2000: 84). In criticism of Castells' theory, Hine asserts that

[m]ost of this thinking [extrapolating the social consequences of forms of interaction that transcend time and space] has been conducted on assumptions about the capacities of the Internet without grounds in observations of what the current relationship of Internet interaction with time and space actually is.

(Hine 2000: 84)

While not contesting Castells' emphasis on connections themselves as potentially meaningful (virtual) spaces, this study reiterates the proposal that the sense of space, place, and time is constructed via the actual social interaction between users and technology. In accordance with

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<sup>196</sup> C.f. Azenha (2006: par. 3): 'There is a conflation in academic and popular discussions of the Internet between possibilities and actualities [...] '[utopian] interpretations [of the impacts of Internet technologies] fail to recognise the complex social nature of technologies and the ways in which cultural, economic and political contexts inform the uses and impacts of technologies.'

this, the chapter offers an understanding of temporality and spatial structures in the online environments of music, in particular social networking sites.

### The temporal dynamics of online presence

A crucial aspect of a band's or event's online presence is its temporal dynamic, that is, the extent to which the occupied spaces (sites), the relevant content, and discursive participation remains stable or changes over time. Nevertheless, apart from Hine's (2000) analysis, temporality has mostly been present as an aspect implicit to the discussion of the relationship of online communication technology and online and offline communities, but not explicitly theorised. For instance, Kibby stops short of directly problematising the question of temporality, yet she traces the changing dynamics of the John Prine discussion forum<sup>197</sup> by identifying the first negative exchange that resulted in a recognisable shift in the characteristics of the forum (2000: 98). In this instance, the change is discursive and internal to the community. At the same time, commenting on the significance of real-time versus delayed interaction, Kibby observes that '[t]he nature of the particular software imposes its own dynamics on the communicative process' (98). Furthermore, she demonstrates how offline events or situations relating to the artist's career (the cancelling of Prine's tour, no new albums to be released, Prine's illness) influence the dynamics of the discussion, and thus the life course of the online-based community (96-97).

Leonard's case study of Ladyfest explores the mutual relationship between the online and the offline network of DIY promotion (2007, 163-180). Yet, besides demonstrating how 'an offline Ladyfest network is established and facilitated by online communication tools' (197), she does not purposefully investigate change within the Ladyfest community. Nor does the chapter problematise the relationship between the online activity and (self-)representation of the community and the development of Internet technology. Wilson and Atkinson (2005) position their case studies of the Rave and Straightedge subcultures in a historical perspective by presenting the process whereby the two subcultures and their respective local forms developed. Furthermore, Atkinson's analysis of Straightedge in particular assumes a longitudinal perspective in order to show how the subculture's online presence and representation altered its geographical structure: the Internet contributed to the establishment of new urban centres for the subculture, as well as providing a means for independent record

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<sup>197</sup> C.f. Chapter 1

distribution, which resulted in a greater degree of agency for the members of the subculture (Wilson and Atkinson 2005: 297-8). Yet these case studies also fail to consider the development of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology and changes in online media usage, which weakens their analysis of the relationship between subcultures and media.

I will argue that the set of problems relating to temporality can be formulated along two main areas: firstly, the dynamics of the changing technological context and the changing usage patterns; and secondly, the dynamics of the online and offline context of usage not directly linked to technology or online media. The latter area includes the progression of the band's career, (commercial) success, geographical movement, local events and their online representation, the shifting of fans' approach and on- and offline participation, changes relating to management or record label involvement, and so forth. This area has been the concern of previous chapters: the temporal self-positioning of bands via their profiles was discussed in Chapter 4, the relationship between the dynamics of online discussion and the online-and-offline music scene in Chapter 5. The former area, on the other hand, can also be formulated as the shifting relationship between social function and technological context. In the following, I investigate how different CMC platforms can serve similar social purposes, and how the same platforms can be used in different ways and for different purposes by different users. I will also look at how usage has changed with time, and, most importantly, what the significance of this is for musicians and music making.

### **Online presence across platforms**

As discussed in Chapter 4, Elle's appelle used their MySpace site as the band's default online space, while Facebook was home to their more recently established profile. Following its initial years, the designers of MySpace quickly reacted to the extreme volume of interest from musicians and bands who had begun to use the portal as an outlet of their music and for interaction with fans.<sup>198</sup> Hence, by the time Elle s'appelle began using it, the site had acquired important elements specifically designed to accommodate band profiles (c.f. Chapter 3). The same tendency can be observed in the case of other social networking sites that were originally intended for other purposes than the promotion of music, including Facebook and

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<sup>198</sup> As well as an unexpected volume of interest on the part of music fans who used the site for interaction with artists, interaction amongst themselves, and as an expression of their musical tastes and identities as fans.

Bebo.<sup>199</sup> This phenomenon can be regarded as an example for the user-based adaptation of technology to purposes that do not necessarily fully correspond to the original aims behind the structural design. A methodological implication is that for an satisfactory analysis of online spaces, the studying of the organization of content and facilities needs to be combined with an understanding of the ways in which users make use of these available possibilities in effect.

Changes in usage are also manifest in the dynamics of observed bands' use of online technology. The similarities and differences between the usage of various platforms, moreover, inform us about the extent to which online spaces are adapted by users for their own needs. Elle s'appelle's first Facebook page, a so-called 'group' profile, besides the name, biography, contact details, location, news, photos, 'posted items,' members, and links to 'related groups,' also featured a message board with a number of thematic threads. These were not closely related to the band, but were more fan-oriented (e.g. the 'Obligatory favourite song thread') or scene-oriented (e.g. 'New Meshuggy facebook group' – the promoter Meshuggy, as previously mentioned, was an important indie scene figure in Liverpool). The functions of the message board are similar to the comments section on MySpace, but its format, i.e. the thematic threads, can be considered more 'traditional' with regard to the history of computer-mediated communication. A more approximate equivalent to the MySpace comments section regarding both function and layout on Facebook is the so-called 'Wall.'

An apparent structural difference between the MySpace and Facebook sites regards the representation of bands and individuals: on Facebook, at the initial period of data collection, bands were typically present as 'groups.' This category, besides serving for bands and artists, included a large number of other types of groups, relating to, for instance, television series, celebrities, brands or social and political causes. Elle s'appelle's move from the more general 'group' profile to the more specific 'musician' profile<sup>200</sup> therefore illustrates the trend of the portal becoming increasingly music-oriented. On Facebook, individual users can join groups or musician pages. While groups have 'members,' however, musician pages have 'fans' – the

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<sup>199</sup> It is important to note that the dynamics of the development of online media technology have had a specific geographic distribution. For example, the choice of preferred social networking sites differs from country to country (c.f. boyd and Ellison 2007). The general observations here are made in the context of the United Kingdom, although they may equally apply to some other countries.

<sup>200</sup> Announced by the band to the members of the original group through the following Facebook mail message:

This group is going to disappear... into the abyss of cyberspace, never to be found again. It was getting confusing having a group AND an official page, so from now on Elle s'appelle's Facebook happenings will all be going down on the official page, which you can find here: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Elle-sappelle/8117317283>

(Elle s'appelle via Facebook group email, 21 March 2008)

structure specific to music therefore reproduces the artist – fan dichotomy. When users join a page, the page becomes visible on the individual’s profile, while the individual also appears with their name and thumbnail profile image as a member on the group profile. In the case of Elle s’appelle’s original Facebook page, the individual members of the group included band members, close associates (e.g. management), and fans alike. Facebook’s arrangement, furthermore, results in a communication structure that is slightly different from MySpace: for example, bands can send promotional messages to members of the group, but the sender appears as an individual, whereas on MySpace bands are able to communicate as single entities.<sup>201</sup> This corresponds to a difference in the general usage of the sites: Facebook is more individual-based – groups and organisations typically have pages, but not profiles –, while MySpace intergrates individuals, groups, and organisations with uniform profiles.

In some instances, disparate forms are used for similar purposes. The combination of the ‘similar groups’ feature on Facebook group profiles and the list of members largely equals the ‘friends’ section on MySpace. For example, in the case of Elle s’appelle, both Facebook’s ‘similar groups’ and MySpace’s (top) ‘friends’ included the band goFASTER>>. However, there were also dissimilarities, as their Facebook profile also displayed links to groups related to the city of Liverpool (‘Petition to Facebook to create a Liverpool Network;’ ‘Liverpool Network’), which clearly placed them in a geographically localised context. Networks based on institution and – later – geographical location were a central organising feature of the original Facebook,<sup>202</sup> such location-related specifications are therefore also related to the internal character of the online platform. Besides the location indicator, direct markers alluding to geographical place and geographical networking are absent from the band’s MySpace profile (which does not mean, however, that indirect markers are absent, as already shown).

### **The scene participants’ view of technology and change**

When speaking about Internet usage, the interviewed bands referred primarily to MySpace and, with less frequency, Facebook. The relative significance and popularity of MySpace and Facebook as online platforms for music-related communication, in particular correspondence, promotion, and feedback, did not remain static throughout the time of the research. Changes could be observed both in terms of structural shifts in online participation,

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<sup>201</sup> For a more detailed discussion of discursive identities, see Chapter 5.

<sup>202</sup> C.f. Chapter 3

and in a subjective sense, that is, in terms of musicians' experience. The observed bands had correspondingly also given thought to the temporal dynamics of CMC technology and in particular social networking sites. Members of Puzzle, while acknowledging that they were not a hugely 'ambitious' band with regard to promoting themselves and were not putting too much effort into online promotion, concurred with the interviewed member of Elle s'appelle that the first call when 'checking out' unfamiliar bands was MySpace.<sup>203</sup> At the same time, they also found that Facebook was a 'good choice' to advertise gigs; in the opinion of lead singer and guitarist Lucy Johnson, by the time of the interview people in general (referring to musicians and those interested in music) had begun to use it more frequently than MySpace (this may refer to the frequency of logging on to the site, not only the number of people who have profiles). Notably, Puzzle did not have a Facebook profile, yet this did not mean that they as a band were entirely absent from the social site, as some of the events they performed at were advertised there by other participants. Moreover, the members had their individual profiles and visibly used the site for communication about music and for indicating their participation in music events. Lucy made the following observation: 'I think when we started MySpace was a lot more popular and people used it more to contact bands and I don't think people use it that much any more [...],' which was echoed by drummer James Mounsey's declaration regarding MySpace as 'so 2007 ...been there, done that.'

Puzzle talked not only about their use of the site, but also, with at least as much emphasis, about various music industry organisations and companies contacting them through MySpace with offers relating to distribution and commerce. As mentioned in Chapter 5, James observed that these types of messages were most frequent at the initial stages of a band's career (which also implies that 'beginner' bands can be identified by their MySpace pages). The two distinct aspects of temporality previously identified are both implied here: firstly, the changing usage of the available technology as a band's career progresses – Puzzle's MySpace site also indicated that their own online activity had not been evenly distributed in time. Secondly, the change in technology and the shifting of general usage patterns – from MySpace towards Facebook, or a selective use of the two online spaces. Guitarist David Johnson was of the view that self-promoting musicians were always keen on using the latest available technology. In addition, James emphasised the commitment online promotion involved: in order to 'keep up,' one needs to keep sending messages – e.g. advertising gigs – on all the relevant networking sites, and this can be laborious.

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<sup>203</sup> Face-to-face interview with three members of Puzzle (25 March 2009); online interview with a member of Elle s'appelle (16 December 2007).

Online spaces of music have their own lifecycles, but rather than replacing one another, they exist in a dynamic layered structure. Besides MySpace and Facebook, there are several other collective websites and portals that Liverpool indie bands use simultaneously, such as Bebo, LastFM, Twitter, or Ning, and the dynamic of online spaces is more complicated than the quoted observations would suggest. Identifying the perceived trends is nevertheless revealing in terms of bands' attitudes to technology – the attitudes that influence their decisions regarding usage. At least hypothetically, a general perception in the discourse of Liverpool indie rock can be phrased as the following: if 2007 was the year of MySpace, then 2008 that of Facebook – and, perhaps, 2009 that of Twitter. In connection with the last, the band a.P.A.t.T. quoted the blog of managing organisation Sentric Music on their own networking site: 'If you're unaware of Twitter then allow me to inform you that 2009 will be the year of Tweeting and all things Twitterific.'<sup>204</sup> The statement is one of the pieces of advice from Sentric to independent musicians in 2009.

#### a.P.A.t.T. and the spatial structure of online presence

As suggested above, the trends referred to by Elle s'appelle and Puzzle and implied by the characteristics of their online presence may be more complicated in other cases. The distribution of the online spaces occupied by the band a.P.A.t.T. reveals a different, more complex pattern of usage. The figure below demonstrates the central online spaces used by the band.

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<sup>204</sup> 'If I was an unsigned/independent artist in 2009, I would (in no particular order)...' *Sentric Music*. 7 January 2009. Available: <http://www.sentric.wordpress.com>, quoted on <http://itsapatt.ning.com>. Accessed: 06 November 2010





Figure 7.1 Online presence of a.P.A.t.T. (April 2009)

Notes: The rectangular labels indicate the website or portal (using their respective logos), while the oval labels indicate the name of a.P.A.t.T.'s site or profile on the given portal. Where not indicated, there is no particular title for a.P.A.t.T.'s profile. The figure is based on data from April 2009, and would have looked slightly different a few months earlier or later.

Unlike any other band I observed in Liverpool – or elsewhere –, and untypically for the website, a.P.A.t.T. maintain several profiles on MySpace: two separate band profile pages, a page for one of their E.P.s (featuring the tracks themselves), one for a.P.A.t.T. Media Company,<sup>205</sup> and one for their 'Post Music' label and networking organisation (described below). While an unusual arrangement, it is indicative of the diverse activity of the band, which includes the production of their own films, the facilitating of cooperation with other bands, musicians, and creative artists, the collecting of technical information and distributing advice for musicians, and the active encouragement of social networking among bands and other scene participants. At the same time, it is also indicative of a strong individual commitment to promotion, even if the underlying strategy is not clearly defined or definable. The band have various pages on Facebook, a profile on Twitter and one on Last.FM, as well as their biography on the interactive online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. They also edit a blog on

<sup>205</sup> Now inaccessible

Blogger.com titled ‘a.P.A.t.T Syndication,’ and have their own YouTube.com channel featuring videos of live shows and other promotional material. Perhaps most uniquely, they run a webspace for social networking among bands and musicians under the ‘Post Music’ label on the network-creating portal Ning.com. Ning, according to its slogan, is a site that ‘lets you create and join new social networks for your interests and passions’ – in other words, it is a space that aims at creating groups based upon interest as opposed to, or as well as, ‘friendship’ in general. Lastly, a.P.A.t.T. have their own website, [www.apatt.com](http://www.apatt.com), with links to all of the mentioned profiles as well as further online spaces.

This group of websites is only the core of the band’s online presence, as any online search on a.P.A.t.T.’s name will confirm. A wealth of content relating to the band from sources external to a.P.A.t.T. – reviews, instances of cooperation – can be found on music-related blogs, websites edited by other bands, music magazines, news sites (e.g. Drowned in Sound, NME or BBC Music), and the websites of record labels (e.g. that of Pickled Egg Records or Chinchilla). It is evident from the presented core, i.e. the online content produced by a.P.A.t.T., that they invest much energy into their online presence. One member is particularly active, but all of the musicians are online both as members of a.P.A.t.T. and as individual musicians who actively and visibly participate in the online spaces of Liverpool-based music making (as well as other music sites or events). Nor are they only attentive to their own online presence: the Post Music initiative testifies to their commitment to providing an online space for other bands to ‘network,’ that is, to introduce themselves, share information, creative output, and tips with regard to music making – technology in particular – and distribution, as well as to cooperate in the forms of joint events or releases. The exploration of the network of links around the band enables us to further refine these initial observations.

## **2 Bridging online presence and offline activity: the music network**

Having defined the online presence of bands in terms of temporality and spatiality, the next logical step is to explore the connections – links – among their websites. It needs to be stressed again that connections between sites are an inherent aspect of online spatiality. One main aspect of the online ‘interlinkedness’ of music sites is *intra-connectivity* among a band’s various online spaces. For instance, a.P.A.t.T. cite the links to their most important sites and profiles (indicated on Figure 7.1) on their main website, [www.apatt.com](http://www.apatt.com), in order to ensure easy access to all content produced by them. In essence, they provide a map to their own

online presence. Further cross-references include the their several MySpace profiles referring both to one another and to the main website. The second aspect is *inter-connectivity* among the bands and other participants of music making such as promoters, record labels, retail outlets, webzines etc.<sup>206</sup> In the following, I map a particular set of these links, namely the top friends on the bands' MySpace profiles. Choosing this particular set of links is not arbitrary, since both the interviews and announcements at gigs implied that MySpace was still the most important space and first point of reference for the majority of Liverpool indie bands. While links appeared in the news and blog sections as well as in the comments, the section of the bands' 'Friend Space' displayed on the main profile page (i.e. the 'Top Friends') was typically the most conspicuous.

### Bands' networks

As a theoretical preconsideration, we need to differentiate between the representation of networks and the actual, to an extent covert network of social, creative, and industrial relationships in which a band is embedded. The displaying of top friends is only one means for representating such a network online – other examples include virtual collections of photos featuring other bands or the displaying of bands' names in the 'influences' section of the MySpace site. This kind of representation forms part of the self-presentation and identity expression of bands, regardless of the extent to which it is deliberate.<sup>207</sup> The symbolic significance of network representations is evident from such comments as the following: 'You rock the shit. Won't be long til you are superstars, I have top friended you!' (posted by the musician Ryan Middleton on Elle s'appelle's MySpace page, 18 May 2007). I now proceed to explore Elle s'appelle's representation of an interpersonal and inter-band network through their MySpace page, and interpret this network in terms of the geographical locations and types of relationships that are represented.

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<sup>206</sup> The distinction between intra- and intraconnectivity is primarily of analytical, and not experiential, significance.

<sup>207</sup> Donath and boyd (2004) explore the social significance of individual users' visible representations of interpersonal networks on social networking sites.

## Elle's appelle's friendship network

The first analysis is a segment of Elle s'appelle's network of MySpace friends, based on the 'top friends' on the band's MySpace profile and the links within the blog section (Figure 7.2). The data is from 06 October 2007, which corresponds to the period in the band's career around the release of their first single and the accompanying video, the launch event, and the anticipation of their debut at Liverpool Music Week. The uni- or bidirectional quality of the relationship between profiles or websites is indicated by arrows. Elle s'appelle is in central position (with 24 links in total, 11 of which are Elle s'appelle's displayed top friends<sup>208</sup>), as their profile was the chosen starting point; it is evident from the map, however, that the bands Hot Club De Paris (12 incoming and/or outgoing links) and goFASTER>> (9 links) are also important nodes within the network. The latter is the band with whom Elle s'appelle proceeded to go on tour in early 2008.

While the map is the representation of only one of the possible networks that Elle s'appelle can be considered part of, it demonstrates the variety of types of entities that represent themselves online and form ties, namely: bands or artists, record retail outlets, radio programmes, a record label, a promoter, an online magazine, and a festival. Band profiles dominate as the most frequently and conspicuously cited links (Figure 7.2). Elle s'appelle's top friends consist mainly of other bands, with the exception of their record label Moshi Moshi, local promoter Meshuggy and an individual (not included in the map) – the rest of the entities are present through links in the MySpace blog.

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<sup>208</sup> One link was excluded for data protection reasons as it referred to an individual's profile.

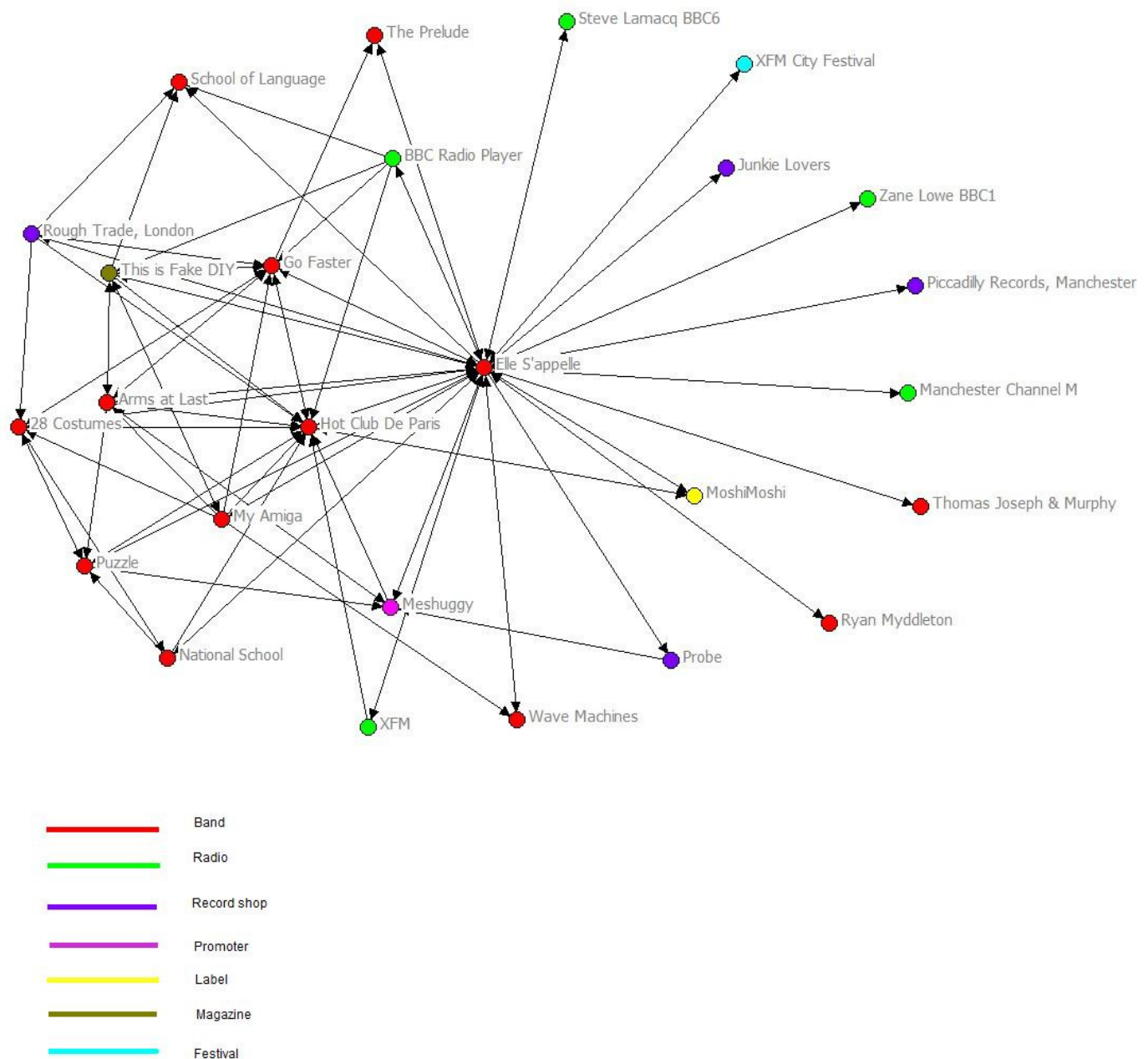


Figure 7.2 Elle s'appelle's MySpace top friends and links I (06 October 2007)

Notes: The map is based on data processed through the network analysis software UCINET. It includes the MySpace 'top friends' of Elle s'appelle as well as the links in their blog posts ( $n = 26$ ). The direction of the arrows indicates the direction of the links: some of the connections are unidirectional and some are bidirectional (mutual connection).

The dense core around Elle s'appelle, goFASTER>>, and Hot Club de Paris, consisting of 'red' nodes (bands) on the first representation (Figure 7.2), is a close network of bands, which is more loosely and arbitrarily connected to the other entities such as the label, the magazine, and the festival. Notably, the online linkage among these bands, namely Elle s'appelle, My Amiga, Arms At Last, 28 Costumes, Hot Club de Paris, and Puzzle,

corresponds to actual offline relations of friendship, support and cooperation – a set of relations that can be referred to as ‘community’ in the sense that the term is used by, for example, Wellman and Giulia (1997). For instance, these bands regularly performed at the same events; the musicians typically attended each others’ gigs even when they themselves were not performing; they tended to list each other as influences and/or favourite Liverpool bands; furthermore, there were regular instances of professional collaboration between them, e.g. the lead singer of Elle s’appelle did production work for Arms At Last and Puzzle.

In contrast, the majority of the more loosely connected profiles or websites are only linked to Elle s’appelle and not the rest of the bands, and the connection is unidirectional in almost all cases, pointing outwards from Elle s’appelle’s profile. These connections typically refer to some content related to Elle s’appelle – as exemplified by the online magazine and the radio programmes –, or are indicators of some kind of professional and/or industry relationship – exemplified by the label as top friend. In sum, besides representing variety of entities, these links also signify a variety of types of relationships, based on the following aspects:

- the (mutual) appreciation of music;
- professional collaboration among bands (shows, recordings);
- commercial and/or industrial relationship;
- content-oriented relationship (e.g. link to a review in a webzine).

These aspects overlap in some cases. For example, the content-oriented relationship between a band and the reviewing webzine may be based on the author’s appreciation of the bands’ music – this is especially true in the case of independent reviewers.

The second representation (Figure 7.3) indicates the geographical location of the nodes. In the case of bands, this equals the location displayed on the ‘nametag’ section of their profiles.<sup>209</sup> The city of Liverpool evidently dominates, while London is involved through the radio stations and the record label; the third dominant place is the city of Manchester, geographically proximate in relation to Liverpool. This distribution implies that at this particular stage of their career, the connections the band chooses to display are mainly local in a geographical sense; in other words, there is a certain level of correlation between online and offline proximities.

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<sup>209</sup> In the case of radio programmes, the location of the studio is indicated, as the band needed to travel from Liverpool to London in order to participate in the programmes; however, the audience is – at least potentially – nationwide.

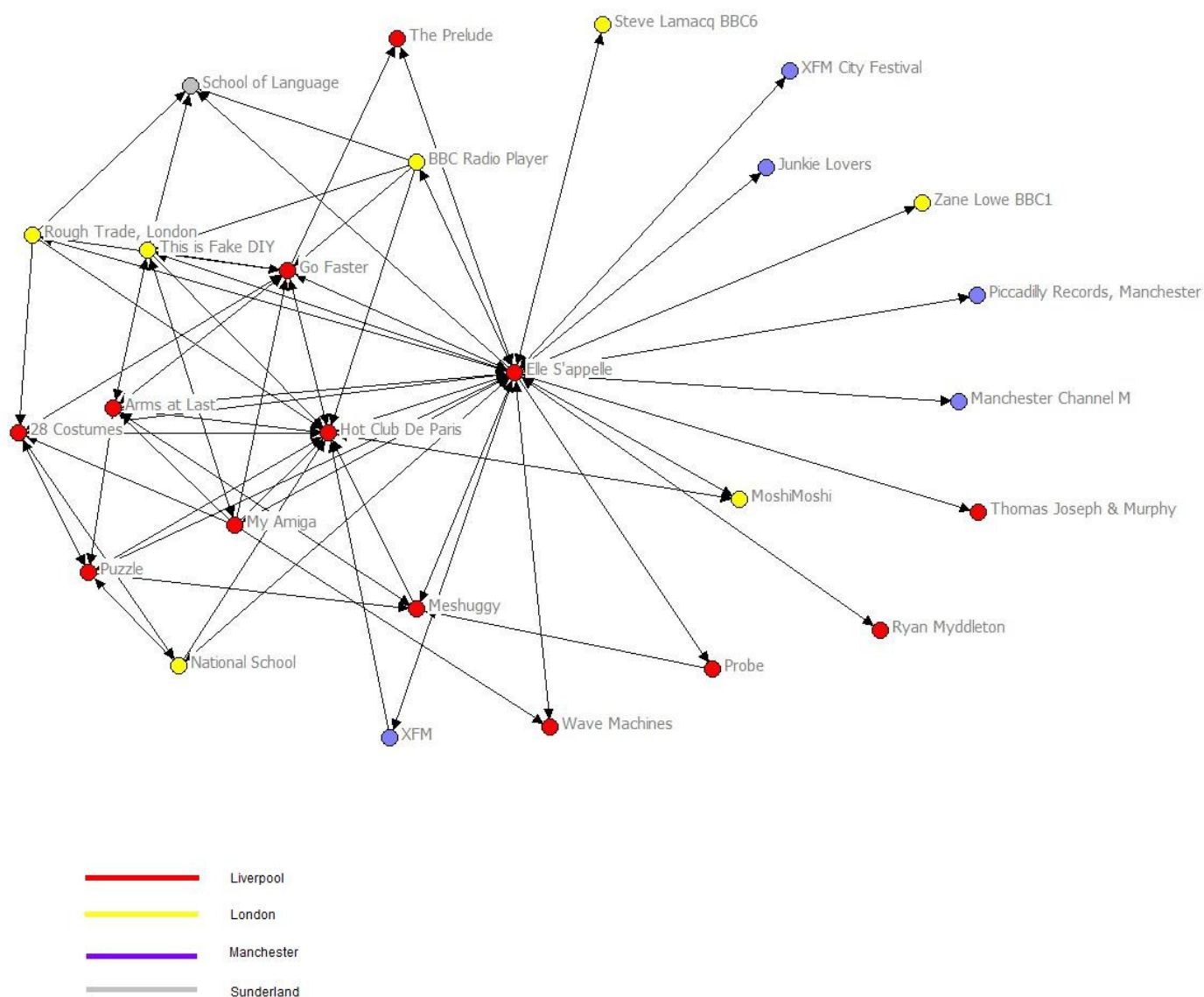


Figure 7.3 Elle s'appelle's MySpace top friends and links II (6 October 2007)

Some of the locations are also indicative of routes: for BBC radio sessions (with the exception of BBC Merseyside), Elle s'appelle had to travel to London. A further example is adding bands as friends that were encountered outside Liverpool on tours – although Elle s'appelle did not exist long enough to tour extensively, some of the more distant locations among the top friends of 28 Costumes are the result of such connections (see 2.2 in

Appendix 5 for 28 Costumes' top friends network). The displaying of links can be viewed in the context of the entertaining tour accounts on the blog<sup>210</sup> – typical of the profiles of Elle s'appelle, 28 Costumes, and Voo – and the accompanying photos in the gallery. The aggregate of all this content ensures that not only the act of travelling, but also specific routes and locations become important elements of a band's self-presentation – for instance, particular towns/cities and venues in Germany for Voo and 28 Costumes.

Hyperlinks contribute to the establishment of a network of online spaces, signifying relationships among bands and other participants in music production and distribution such as (independent) record labels, local or national radio stations, magazines and online journals. Yet connections between the same entities often exist both on- and offline, since certain offline entities such as venues, record labels or stores have an online presence – for example, recordings are simultaneously being sold offline and online.

From the perspective of bands, the mapping of top friends indicates a set of locations with Liverpool as centre. In other words, the core group of bands is definable as a Liverpool-based sub-network by relying exclusively on the online representation of friends. At the same time, a mapping of the whole of the participating online audience, including the rest of Elle s'appelle's MySpace friends not highlighted on the front page, would show a much wider, international, and to a great extent arbitrary distribution. On the level of the audience, the potentially global-scale distribution of computer-mediated-communication prevails. In contrast, the community of bands is an area that, while online, still remains predominantly 'local.'

### **A comparative analysis of bands' friendship networks**

As a second step, network maps of further Liverpool bands – namely Voo, 28 Costumes, Puzzle, Hot Club de Paris, Married to the Sea, and Arms At Last – and their top friends were compared (see Figures 1-6, Appendix 5). An immediately evident dissimilarity among the represented networks is the number of top friends, i.e. the size of the network. Both online and offline observations of the bands suggest that the size of the top friends network cannot be equated with an actually wider or narrower network of friends, the number of nodes therefore should not be assigned too great a significance – it merely reflects a personal decision on the band's part (i.e. how many friends to display). Moreover, we need to

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<sup>210</sup> See Chapter 5 for a detailed analysis of these accounts.



remember that a band's space of friends on MySpace is much larger than what appears on their main profile page, and potentially all friends can be viewed by visiting the 'Friend Space' page. The total number of MySpace friends (indicated in Appendix 5) is a better indicator of network size. Hot Club de Paris have undoubtedly the largest online friends' network among the six bands (seven times more than the average of the rest of the bands), which implies a larger fan base. Correspondingly, Hot Club de Paris is the most well-established of the bands and the furthest in their career with regard to commercial success.

In terms of the structure of the networks, in most cases a sub-network can be identified, which I will term the core group. The core group is visible on the network maps of Voo, 28 Costumes, Puzzle, Married to the Sea, and Arms At Last. As an example, figure 5.2 in Appendix 5 shows the network of Married to the Sea following the omission of Married to the Sea itself. It is apparent that 9 out of the 14 friends of the band form part of a sub-network independently of Married to the Sea, to which the band is connected through multiple and mutual links. Arms At Last have practically no connections outside the core network, except for the bands SSS and Hooray for Humans (Figure 6 in Appendix 5).

Most importantly, the core has online existence that is independent of the central node chosen as the observer's focus point. This means that there is a correspondence among different maps with regard to the bands that are closely interconnected (the promoter Meshuggy is the only non-band element of the core). Also notable is the lack of significant change in the structure of the core network over the period I observed the bands' activity on MySpace – as the dates indicate, the presented maps were not all constructed at the same time, yet the core is nevertheless clearly identifiable. This finding corresponds to the previous observations according to which the same bands that are closely linked to each other online were also the ones who:

- regularly shared bills or even toured together (e.g. Voo and 28 Costumes, goFASTER>> and Elle s'appelle);
- played frequently at particular Liverpool venues, including the Barfly, Korova, the Everyman Bistro, Bumper, and Magnet;
- were all from and based in Liverpool;
- made frequent references to one another in conversation and on the Internet, e.g. in news items or blog posts, and maintained interaction via online comments;

- cited one another in the interviews as creative influences, exciting acts in Liverpool, and/or friends.

This close online network can therefore be identified as the basis for a spatially and discursively definable music scene.

The boundaries of the core MySpace network, however, are not clear. Somewhat more peripheral to the core itself, but nevertheless connected, are bands that cooperated with one or two elements of the core. The band Barbieshop in Voo's network is such an example (Figure 1, Appendix 5) – one of the three singers in the a capella trio cooperated on a recording with Voo as well as being a member Hallo...I Love You! Correspondingly, Barbieshop is part of the core network on Voo's map, yet does not appear in the core in the other networks. Whether the connection existed before the cooperation or resulted from it, the virtual and actual links reinforce each other.

The only exception to the core – peripheries structural pattern is the network of Hot Club de Paris (Figure 4, Appendix 5). The structure here resembles a spider web – in other words, most of the band's top friends are only linked to the centre and are not top friends of one another. Hot Club de Paris, moreover, is not connected to the indie core network that the rest of the bands form part of. Once again, we need to take caution when assuming that there is no connection, or even that there is no existing online connection among these entities – the maps primarily serve to provide suggestions as to where to look further in order to explore the connections in more detail. For instance, the map centred around Hot Club de Paris hints towards a sub-network with the band Ice King of California as a central node. Looking at an integrated network allows us to refine these observations.

### **The 'core network' and online stability**

In order to further test the hypothesis of the individually existing core group, I constructed the integrated network map of the MySpace friends of the most linked bands, namely Elle s'appelle, Arms At Last, 28 Costumes, Voo, House that Jack Built, goFASTER>>, Hot Club de Paris, Married to the Sea, and Puzzle (Figure 7.4). The predefined core, also including the promoter Meshuggy, as well as Liverpool bands My Amiga and Hallo...I Love You!, can be seen at the centre of the map.

The integrated map postdates the individual maps, as it represents data collected on 05 September 2009. A comparison with the individual maps reinforces the observation that the

links and groupings of links – in other words, the main structure of the network – did not change significantly over the period of data collection, despite the fact that some bands split during this period (Elle s'appelle), new bands formed (House that Jack Built, Hallo...I Love You!), and new instances of cooperation occurred (e.g. in the form of production work). This relative stableness implies a structure that is almost frozen in time – in contrast to the offline temporal dynamism resulting from bands forming, splitting, reforming, and friendships and acquaintances being made. In other words, there are two parallel temporalities. On the one hand, friendships are arguably just as easily and rapidly made in online space – by clicking on a page, adding a band as friend – as, for instance, within the context of a rock gig. On the other hand, via the primary, most easily accessed profile features, profile owners are able to maintain an almost atemporal space – only almost, since there are time markers to orientate viewers. (The Web can be viewed as a source for archive material just as a means for immediate interaction and keeping up-to-date in any sphere.)

It can be hypothesised that through maintaining a stable image of a set of connections, the – somewhat 'false' – stability of online space may even reinforce the idea of a constant music making community – a scene with identifiable boundaries. Straw identifies a conservative, preserving characteristic as a central feature of scenes:

Within [scenes], minor tastes and habits are perpetuated, supported by networks of small-scale institutions, like record stores or specialized bars. At this level, scenes might be seen as conservative, asserting the values of diversity dispersed across space over those of regularized obsolescence and renewal in time.

(Straw 2001: 16)

Through the continuous and, in relation to 'offline time,' only slowly changing preservation of a visible and available set of connections among bands and offline spaces such as venues, this conservative characteristic becomes even more evidently significant.

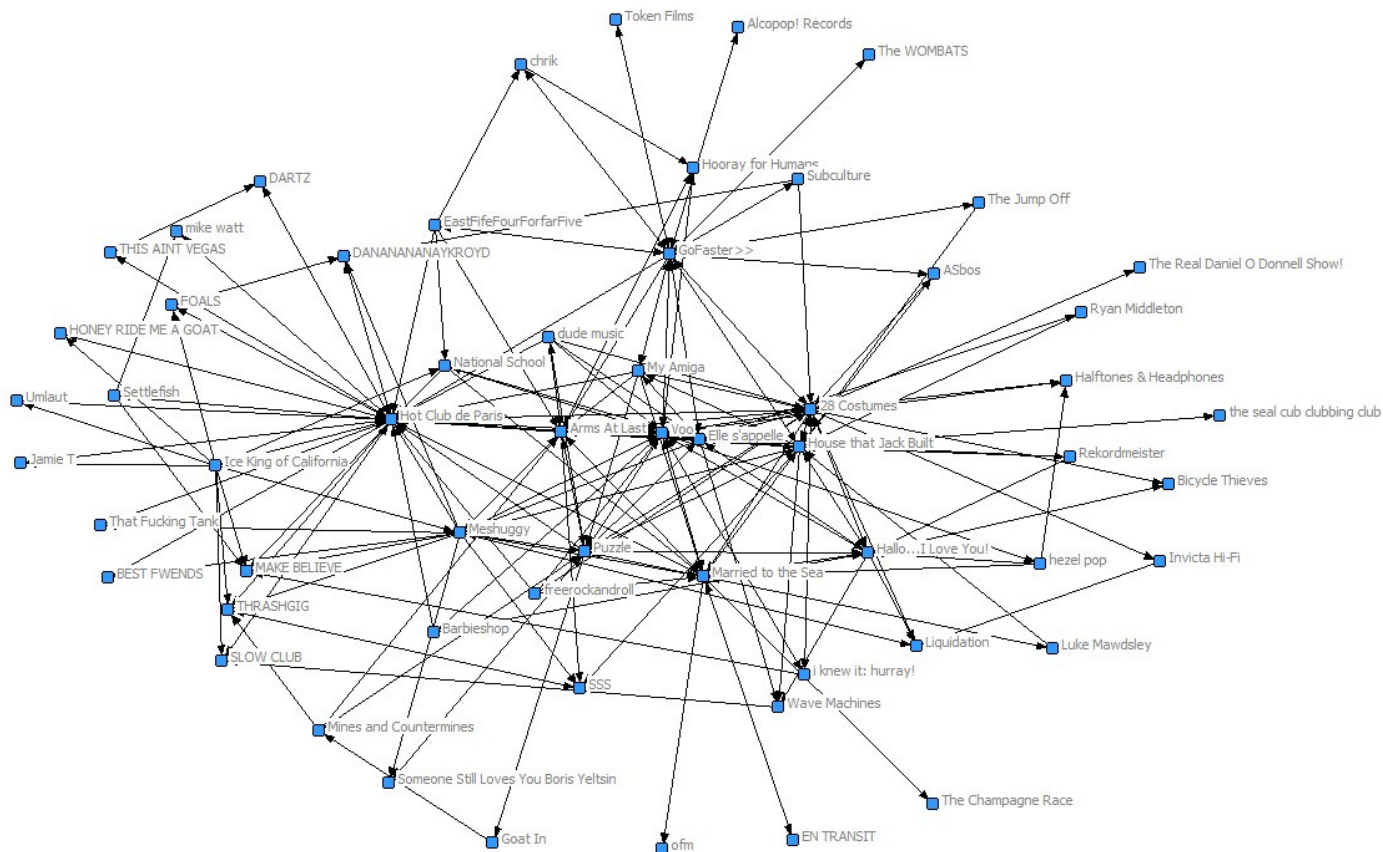


Figure 7.4 MySpace top friends of Elle s'appelle, Arms At Last, 28 Costumes, Voo, House that Jack Built, goFASTER>>, Hot Club de Paris, Married to the Sea and Puzzle I (05 September 2009)

Note: In the case of promoter Meshuggy, I included the list of links accompanied by images on the main MySpace page displayed above the 'Friend Space' section, as this list of links to band' profiles functions as an extension of the friends' space.

The network map also confirms the hypothesis regarding a second sub-network with Ice King of California as centre, which is linked to the central core through Hot Club de Paris and Meshuggy. The sub-network is clearly visible on Figure 7.5, where the central nodes, that is, the bands whose top friends were mapped, have been removed – i.e. the network of only the top friends is shown. As opposed to the indie core, where location and regular shared events are fundamental, this latter sub-network is not based in Liverpool; the bands are from various locations in the UK and even the US. While this second sub-network is not explored here in detail, online data suggests that the connection is primarily based on performing at the same event, the 'DIY festival' Munkyst. If this is the case, the connections within this core

are weaker, more accidental than the central core. Nevertheless, a similarity in genre and aesthetics, as well as ethical attitude – the DIY philosophy – does exist.

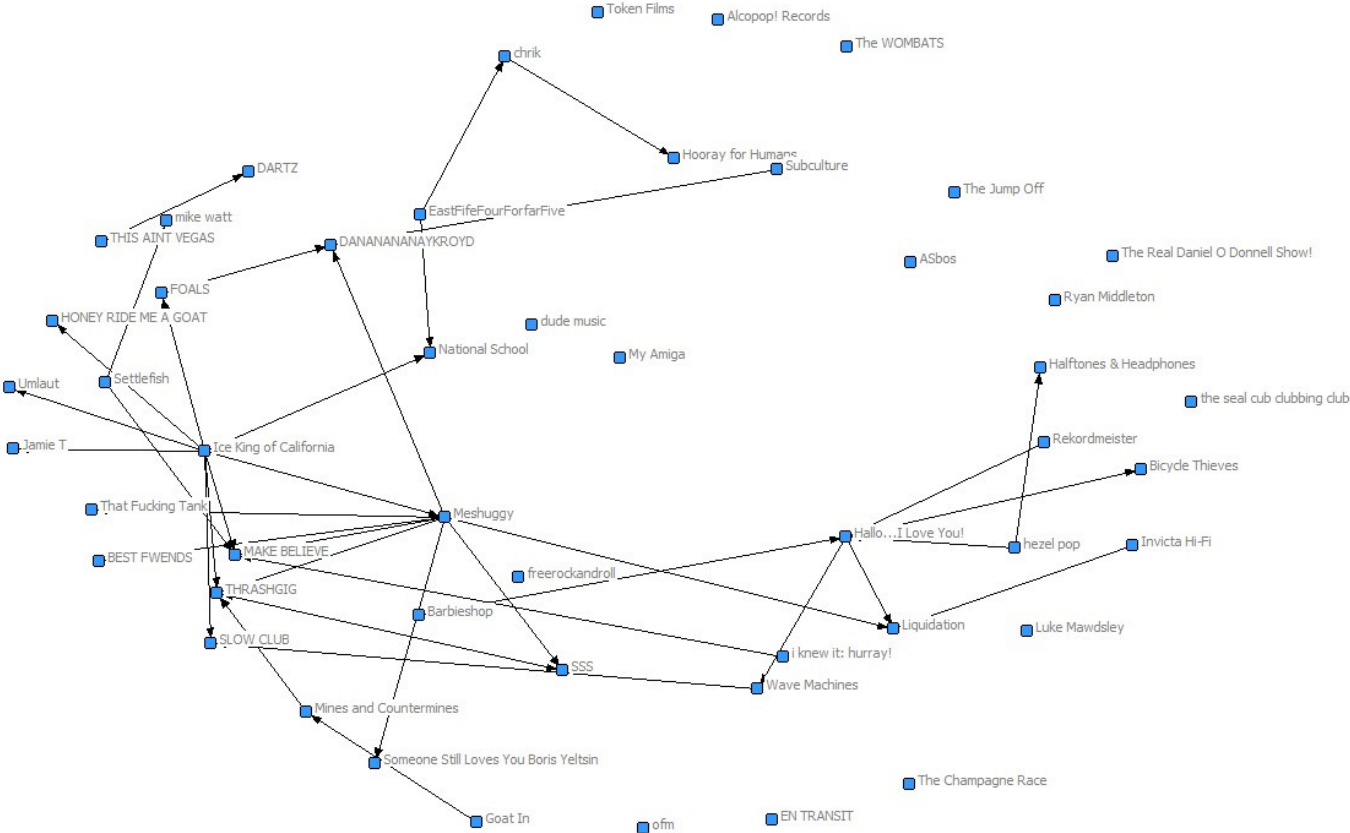


Figure 7.5 MySpace top friends of Elle s’appelle, Arms At Last, 28 Costumes, Voo, House that Jack Built, goFASTER>>, Hot Club de Paris, Married to the Sea and Puzzle II (05 September 2009): centre nodes removed

The unique position of Hot Club de Paris within the network, who were arguably the most commercially successful and best known of the bands, may also be noted. It is the node with the highest number of connections, yet the connections with the central core are primarily incoming. This reinforces the fact that in interviews, several of the bands, including Puzzle or Elle s’appelle, made references to ‘Hot Club’ – with their more advanced career and ambitious attitude, they appeared to serve as inspiration for other local bands and occupy a higher position in a symbolic local hierarchy. The local hierarchy can be described as a symbolic structure of influences as well as the concrete manifestation of this in terms of performances – for example, Hot Club de Paris often occupied the position of headlining act at gigs in Liverpool. The band is at the same time linked to the second, looser subgroup, but with significantly more outgoing and mutual links. Thus the band is practically more embedded within the second network, even if it is symbolically present as referential point for

the bands in the central network. It also appears to be in less of a prominent hierarchical position within the second network.

### Network, genre, and style

As indicated by the network map belonging to a.P.A.t.T.'s default MySpace profile (Figure 7.6 and Figures 6.1 and 6.2, Appendix 5), they display more top friends – 32 in total – on their main profile than the previously discussed bands. One possible explanation for this is the attention a.P.A.t.T. pay to their online presence, proven by the extensiveness of this presence and the daily frequency of their online activity, as well as their proactive networking activity. Furthermore, a.P.A.t.T. have a highly open attitude with regard to instances of cooperation, it is therefore safe to assume that they would intend to make this openness and inter-connectedness manifest. In other words, the displaying of these connections forms part of their self-definition and self-presentation as a band that aims to transcend – stylistic, formal – boundaries and therefore participates in a wide variety of projects, events and initiatives.

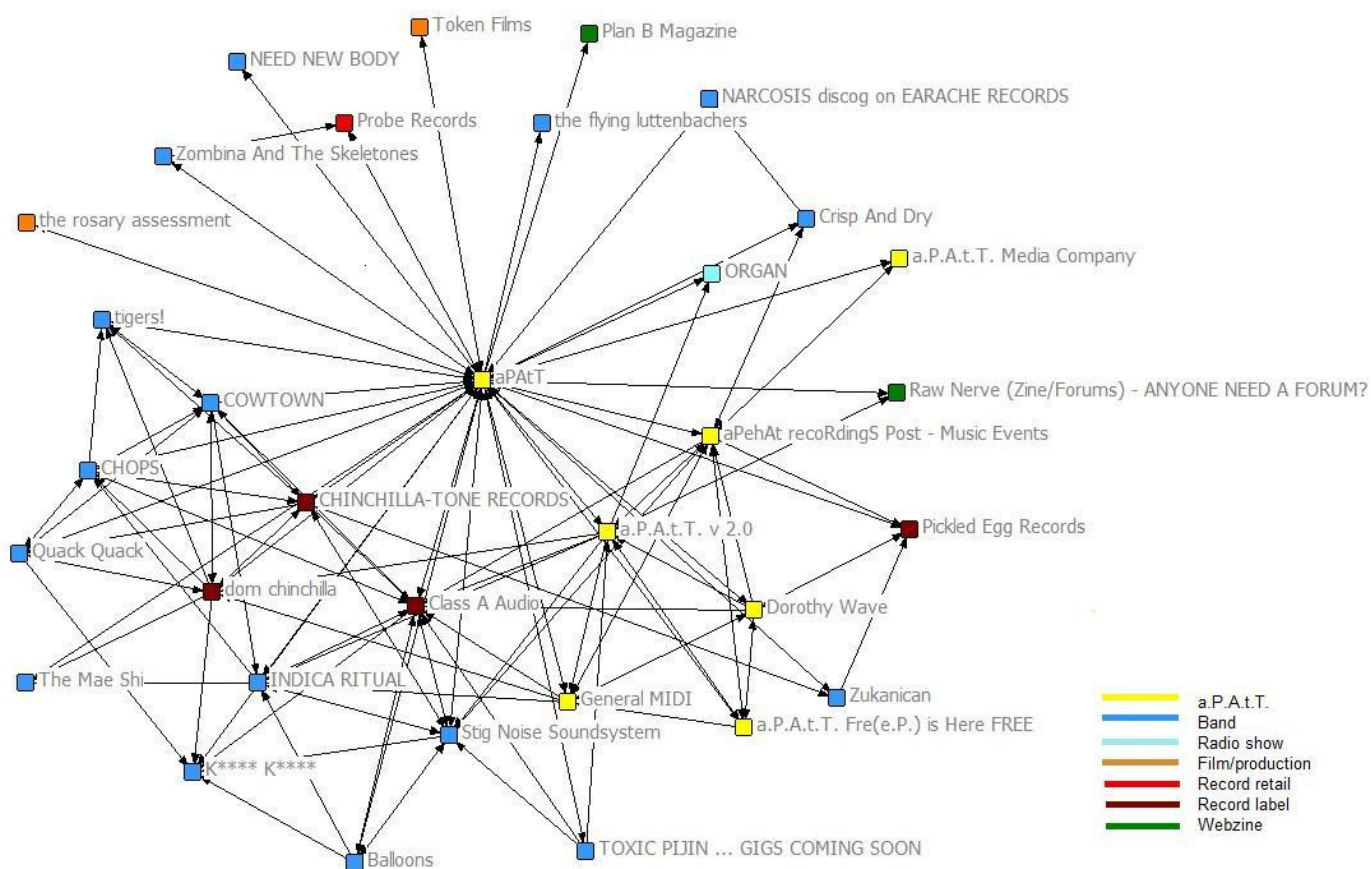


Figure 7.6 a.P.A.t.T. – MySpace top friends (28 July 2008): types of entity

a.P.A.t.T.'s network is geographically more dispersed than the previously discussed networks (the indicated locations are, in alphabetical order: California; Leeds; Leicester; Liverpool; London; Philadelphia; Worcester). Moreover, the variety regarding the types of entities represented is greater (see Figures 6.2 and especially 6.3 in Appendix 5 – the latter is the integrated network map of all top friends of the five a.P.A.t.T. profiles combined). This variety is in part explained by the band's releases with several independent record labels to date, hence the connection with the record labels Class A Audio, Chinchilla-Tone Records, Pickled Egg Records and Buzz Buzz? Bang!, as well as with other bands who released records with the same labels and/or are promoted by them.<sup>211</sup> Many of these bands feature on compilations together (e.g. a.P.A.t.T. and Stig Noise on a Buzz Buzz? Bang release<sup>212</sup>) and perform together at events. Secondly, the variety of entities is also an indication of the diversity of projects in which a.P.A.t.T. are involved, including a focus on producing music videos as an integral element of their art – exemplified by the link to Token Films. Also featured among the top friends are independent-focused webzines that make reference to, and even actively promote, the band and events where the band participates. For example, the a.P.A.t.T./Stig Noise tour of April 2007 was promoted on *Plan B* magazine's forum.<sup>213</sup> The links to the retail outlet Probe Records are again related to the band's releases.

The maps indicate a sub-network centred around the Leeds-based record label Chinchilla-Tone Records and the Liverpool-based label Class-A Audio (most clearly visible on the map without the nodes representing a.P.A.t.T.'s profiles [Figure 6.3, Appendix 5]). a.P.A.t.T. released records through both labels, and frequently performed at joint gigs with some of the artists affiliated with the labels – for example, they toured with Chinchilla-associated band Chops in April-May 2008, and released a split 12-inch with the group Stig Noise. Among the bands in this sub-network there also exists an active practice of mutual online promotion. Therefore, once again, the online grouping is indicative of an offline network of bands and record labels.

Nevertheless, certain types of entities that are definitely part of the offline network of activity are clearly missing from the online network. Venues and record studios, the most

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<sup>211</sup> Several of these independent labels (Buzz Buzz? Bang! among them) characteristically do not solely function as labels, but also as collectives formed with the aim of releasing records and integrating other activities such as events promotion and the facilitation of networking among bands. Further examples are a.P.A.t.T.'s own Post Music initiative and Married to the Sea's grassroots label (c.f. Chapter 3).

<sup>212</sup> *jARG?* (2006) UK: Buzz Buzz? Bang!

<sup>213</sup> Available: <http://www.planbmag.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=6041>. Accessed: 06 November 2010

important spaces where music making takes place, while not absent from the Internet (most of the Liverpool venues listed in Appendix 2 have their own MySpace sites or individual websites), are not visibly linked to the bands in question, at least not on the main sites.

A comparison of a.P.A.t.T.'s network map to the integrated network analysed above leads to the conclusion that genre specificities are determining factors in the structure and characteristics of a band's online network. Clear similarities were identified among the bands that can be defined as indie or indie rock with regard to location – primarily Liverpool-based – and entity – primarily bands, while other entities are more loosely connected. Based on self-identification (e.g. Puzzle), the musical text, performance style, as well as offline connections, including professional and friendship ties (generally present simultaneously), I described this group of bands not only as a real active, networking, and supportive community, but also as the basis of a Liverpool music scene. Defining the group of bands as indie appears justified on the basis of musical characteristics such as song structure (verse, chorus, and – sometimes lengthy – instrumental breaks, the bridge typically missing); instrumentation (guitar and vocal dominance in many cases, in other cases the main melody provided primarily by the vocal(s) and the keyboard); rhythm (upbeat tempo, structuring role, varying time signature); lyrical content (introspective themes, daily life, irony and wordplay); performance style and appearance (dressing down, the lack of spectacularity – with a few exceptions, where conspicuous stylisation was still restricted to one or two band members); ethics and attitude (the emphasised disinterest in a mainstream career, instead a focus on the perfecting of songwriting skills and musicianship, the concern with the local music making community, cooperation among bands etc.). The identification applies regardless of the impreciseness of the label or the marked individual differences among the bands – some (such as Puzzle or Married to the Sea) are more grounded in indie in its 'classic' – 1990s' – sense, while others (Elle s'appelle, House that Jack Built) belong to more contemporary, 2000s styles such as 'powerpop.'

a.P.A.t.T.'s musical and artistic directions, however, clearly differed from this group along a number of aspects: the songs are deliberately eclectic in terms of musical style; they are often significantly longer than the traditional rock/pop song, and would be more correctly defined as linearly unfolding musical pieces; the instrumentation is diverse and varies from song to song throughout the live set; the band's appearance is extravagant (as opposed to indie's deliberate 'dressing down') and clearly defined, with each member wearing the same uniform from performance to performance. Correspondingly, there are differences in terms of the identity of their main connections and the characteristics of the network: it is



geographically broader and more varied with regard to the types of entity represented by the profiles. Yet, even if the band overtly attempts to transcend boundaries, they do evidently belong to particular groups, namely those consisting of bands with similar aims – i.e. the crossing of traditional genre boundaries by experimentation, the refusal of genre labels, as well as a general ironic and/or postmodern attitude. These are, as we have seen, joined under certain independent labels, promoters and particular series of events, typically organised by either the same promoters and organisations or the bands themselves.

### Network, band careers, and success

The unique position of Hot Club de Paris – functioning as referential point for a group of Liverpool bands but being linked to a different, geographically broadly distributed set of bands that are themselves not connected to one another – suggests a correspondence between the structure of the online social – professional network and bands’ career stage. On the one hand, it is not unexpected that a band at a more advanced career stage should have a broader network, partly as a result of playing shows that are not locally based and partly as a result of being associated with a record label and acts on that label (Moshi Moshi Records in this case). On the other hand, the correspondence between the offline network and the friends displayed on the MySpace site should not be automatic or self-evident. Yet in this case also, the network map indicates a correspondence.

In the example of the indie core network described above, the bands primarily perform locally, for a local audience, with occasional gigs and tours elsewhere, yet without a national-scale following or significant national-scale media representation. But what does the network of a newly formed band look like, and how is it possible for a new band to become integrated into an already existing network? The members of Puzzle talked about cycles of new bands appearing and disappearing, and described the general excitement within the local music making community surrounding the formation of new bands – in their example, House that Jack Built; as well as their regret in connection with the disbanding of others – in their example, Fight Fight Fight.<sup>214</sup> Some of the same events were cited by other bands: House that Jack Built and the excitement surrounding their debut was mentioned by a member of 28 Costumes.<sup>215</sup> This reinforces the idea of cohesion within the scene. In both instances, the appearance of House that Jack Built was mentioned as one of the best things happening at the

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<sup>214</sup> James Mounsey, face-to-face interview with three members of Puzzle (25 March 2010)

<sup>215</sup> Face-to-face interview with a member of 28 Costumes (04 March 2009)

moment in Liverpool in terms of popular music. In view of this, it would be correct to assume the existence of a general discourse of temporal progression in terms of bands' careers across the group of bands in question.

Remaining by the example of House that Jack Built, the shared feeling of excitement is also traceable in the online discourse in the frequency of supportive messages on MySpace, such as: 'I had a dream last night that I was checking the midweek chart positions (I don't know why) and HTJB were number two, but I wasn't shocked at all...it seemed perfectly expected.C x' (posted by 28 Costumes, 20 October 2008). As the quotation indicates, many of these messages are from bands to whom House that Jack Built are personally connected. From the perspective of House that Jack Built, the great speed – indeed, immediacy – with which they integrated themselves into the existing online network with the help of other, already active and better-known bands is remarkable: they set up their MySpace profile, gathered comments from 'friend bands' as well as other listeners, became involved in the mutual commenting and referencing via the comments section and the blog. Examples of mutual referencing include:

You'll probably already know that our good friends 28 Costumes are having a load of good press at the moment concerning their new single 'This Band Has Eaten All Our Money' and we're absolutely chuffed that they have asked us to play their single launch party in Korova on the 24th Feb. It should be an awesome night with other support from Bicycle Thieves. We Can't Wait!

(House that Jack Built's MySpace blog, 18 February 2009)

The corresponding blog post from 28 Costumes:

I've got two really totally fucking good things to tell you about. The first is about our gig last night in Liverpool. I think it was one of my favourite ever Liverpool shows! The whole night was just ace! House That Jack Built and Bicycle Thieves are both amazing bands and you should almost certainly become both of their BEST friends.

(28 Costumes' MySpace blog, 25 February 2009)<sup>216</sup>

This process of online integration ran parallel to House that Jack Built's establishing themselves as a Liverpool rock band by playing shows alongside 28 Costumes or Married to the Sea. A year before, Elle s'appelle's appearance followed a similar pattern: in both cases,

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<sup>216</sup> For a more detailed analysis of mutual referencing on MySpace, see Chapter 5.

the bands' online presence actually preceded the offline debut; moreover, the availability of prospective band members on MySpace affected the band lineup.

As the cited mutual references indicate, many of the comments and posts allude to live shows, that is, music making in the physical environment, which means that the online process of integration effectively gains meaning through the offline context. From the opposite direction, the online presence extends, documents, makes visible, and thus reinforces the offline activity of the band. The arguably unprecedented *immediacy*<sup>217</sup> – referring both to the speed of integration and availability or accessibility – and *visibility* of networks on the Internet ensures that they are able to function as a resource which a newcomer can ‘tap into’ – be it a newly formed band, a record label representative, or an interested music fan. The example of House that Jack Built demonstrates how an actively networking band is able to make use of already available online resources consisting of interpersonal connections and information, through both relying on and extending offline personal ties of friendship, appreciation, and collaboration.

On the structural level, as we have seen, the online network of bands, friends, fans, and other entities is relatively static. At the same time, this makes it uncomplicated for a new band – a new node in the network – to make use of the already existing connections and become an integral part of the network. The central, well-connected position of House that Jack Built despite their status as newly formed band is evident on the integrated network map (Figure 7.4). Since it impacts on the parallel process of integration into the local music making activity (playing shows), the easiness of online integration can diminish the time aspect of a new band becoming known. Elle s'appelle's example demonstrated that it is possible for a band to have a presence in the local scene before having played one gig. Forms of this phenomenon such as hype creation have of course existed in the past – for instance, due to Capitol Records' forceful ‘The Beatles are Coming!’ marketing campaign preceding the group's first visit in the US in 1964, the Beatles had become the biggest thing in the States before they even arrived (Harry 2004: 24-25). Ubiquitous and easily accessible online spaces such as MySpace, however, have ensured an easily available opportunity for a multitude of bands and musicians. It needs to be emphasised that this strategy worked because a local context of other bands, venues, promoters, and music fans had existed. In contrast, the example of Hot Club de Paris shows that a further stage of a band's career may necessitate the

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<sup>217</sup> Baym uses the term ‘immediacy’ in the context of online communication practices: she identifies social cues employed by users in order to create immediacy (as well as emotions) in the online context (e.g. Baym 2010: 62).

establishment and online display of a network that is separate from the band's initial supportive network.

In relation to immediacy, accessibility, and visibility, Elle s'appelle's founder made a notable observation in the context of Elle s'appelle's career and how it came to an end before they had managed to make a truly significant impact. In the musician's opinion, before the time of the Internet, if they had followed a traditional model, Elle s'appelle would have achieved much bigger success. In contrast, today there is such an abundance of available acts online that it is difficult for a band to make it precisely for this reason. The musician was not certain whether the Internet had a negative effect on the live music scene in general but was suspecting that this might be the case, due to the fact that 'everything' is available online (face-to-face interview, 04 March 2009). This opinion resonates with the general argument that the sheer profusion of acts online makes selection processes more complicated than ever before for both the music consuming audience and the music industry. This tendency, one could argue, instead of heralding a process of democratisation, might actually reinforce the power of record labels and distribution channels in determining commercial success, since due to the abundance of acts choices can be arbitrary (c.f. Azenha 2006<sup>218</sup>). While the observed bands all used MySpace as well as other online sites – with varying enthusiasm –, their expressed attitude was not necessarily celebratory in every respect.

### Network, individual approach, aims, and strategies

In addition to genre and career stage, the interviews suggested a third aspect that influences the structure and characteristics of a band's network independently of the other two factors, namely the individual approaches and aims particular to the band. To put it differently, understanding the activity of a band in the context of the set of connections in which it is embedded helps us to distinguish the particular purposes and strategies that inform the decisions and actions of that band. Members of Puzzle hinted at the significance of individual aims in connection with – both online and offline – promotion by referring to bands who are 'more ambitious' than them: 'I don't know how really ambitious bands do it, but I

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<sup>218</sup> Azenha's study provides an insightful, empirically grounded analysis of the impact of Internet technologies on the structure of the music industry, refuting simple claims of 'democratisation,' and reiterating certain aspects of the 'cultural imperialism' theory instead. According to his observations, a 'more nuanced understanding of the history and organisation of the music industry and its current trajectory indicates that major labels are currently repositioning themselves in ways that maintain or enhance their gate-keeping powers' (2006: para 4).

don't know how to imagine what us as a really ambitious band would look like ... I'm not sending CDs to the NME [contacting] some journalist.'<sup>219</sup> The statement makes reference both to the band's aims and the applied strategies (e.g. sending CDs to the music press). Puzzle's reluctance to engage with boldly assertive strategies is commensurate with the fact that their top friends network consists primarily of local 'friend bands,' apart from their American record label and the American band with whom they released a split record.

Puzzle's top friend network structure very closely resembles those of Married to the Sea, Arms At Last, and 28 Costumes: in all cases, the band is present as part of the central sub-network I identified as a Liverpool-based indie rock core, and is also linked to a smaller number of profiles not deeply integrated into this core. The similarities between these bands in terms of musical genre, career stage as well as aims – not pronouncedly 'ambitious' in the sense defined by members of Puzzle – may explain the correspondence. The guitarist of 28 Costumes articulated the observation that there were many bands in Liverpool 'with the same, really strong work ethic' (as themselves), including House that Jack Built, Voo, or Married to the Sea. Apart from Hot Club de Paris and 28 Costumes, who regularly performed outside Liverpool, the mentioned bands were mainly happy to play at Liverpool venues. The guitarist quoted his brother, the singer of House that Jack Built, according to whom 'their goal was to be able to play at the venues they go to anyway and play along with the bands they go to see.'<sup>220</sup> He also connected this 'work ethic' to the commitment to 'keeping a low budget' – 28 Costumes always relied on other people's favours when they went on tour in order to keep expenses down. Moreover, as we have seen, they had incorporated this practice into their online discourse of self-presentation as well as to the creative product.

An example for different individual aims and strategies is a.P.A.t.T.'s pronounced 'network-focused' activity – with a number of MySpace profiles and several other homepages for the band, each with its own set of links, and the intention to integrate bands into one virtual space through the PostMusic sites. Out of the bands I observed, a.P.A.t.T. were both the most active and most creative in their usage of the Internet (even if this activity was primarily down to one member, General Midi<sup>221</sup>), and their more extensive and geographically varied top friends network reflects this.

In sum, many of these bands' *articulated* ambitions were directed, on the one hand, to the creative process and product, that is, musicianship and writing and performing good

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<sup>219</sup> James Mounsey, face-to-face interview with three members of Puzzle (25 March 2009)

<sup>220</sup> Face-to-face interview, 04 March 2009

<sup>221</sup> Online interview with Jonathan Hering a.k.a. Master Fader (02 May 2009)

songs. Interestingly, Cohen's observations regarding rock bands in the 1980s suggested different aims: '[f]or most [bands], their overwhelming ambition is to "make it" – that is, sign a contract with a major record company in order to sell records and reach wider audiences' (1999: 240). This signifies a change in attitudes, as well as a change in the music industry in general: getting signed by a major label towards the 21<sup>st</sup> decade was no longer regarded a necessity – indie bands, of course, in particular deliberately attempted to avoid major label contracts.

On the other hand, bands' ambitions were directed towards the local environment, as opposed to a national or international audience or market (of course, it cannot be assumed that the articulated ambitions entirely correspond to the ideas, wishes, secret desires etc. of all musicians concerned). This implies that individual approach can also be framed in terms of place and routes. In relation to 1980s' Liverpool rock bands, Cohen (2007) also refers to the perceived and articulated connection between 'making it' and moving away from Liverpool, typically to London. In contrast, in my case study this discursive opposition of staying in Liverpool (city level) versus becoming big (inter/national level) was also absent. When asked about the bands' plans and aims, the most common response was 'writing good songs' – as explained by Puzzle's drummer:

I think inherently if you're in a band, your first ambition has to be writing good songs. And therefore if I was to continue to write songs that I thought were good songs that could become number ones, that could be your biggest ambition, therefore you could pursue your biggest ambition. Because the biggest ambition for us is to write good songs. [...] We don't pretend to be some kind of massive hot new band, we're just pretending that we're Puzzle, and these are our songs, and we think they are good songs. I think if we had an ambition, it would just be to carry on.  
(James Mounsey, face-to-face interview with three members of Puzzle, 25 March 2009)

The same objective – producing songs of quality – was identified across the bands as the most important criterion for success:

You just got to have really really good songs. A lot of people [say that] to make it in the industry, you've got to do this, and then you've got to do that, and then ... but if you find that [the songs are] not any good, then it's not gonna do any good at all. I've read an interview recently with Robert Smith [of the Cure], [...] he said don't worry about music industry stuff, just be as good as you can and they'll come to you. Maybe that's a bit of wishful thinking, but if you're a really good band with killer songs, then that's the most important thing.  
(Sam Walkerdine of Married to the Sea, face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009)

In other words, the generally articulated objective was to focus on the quality of the creative product, and the fulfilling of these creative aims would in an ideal situation also guarantee commercial success.

28 Costumes' guitarist made the observation that there was an abundance of bands at the time in Liverpool, but it was not easy to predict how far they would get (in terms of commercial success).<sup>222</sup> In relation to this, he emphasised the difficulty yet importance of *not* sounding as a typical 'Liverpool band.' He understood this category as used by the popular music press – if a band sounded like the Zutons (arguably the most successful contemporary Liverpool rock band at the time of the research), they would immediately be placed into this pigeonhole. Considering the discursive practice of popular UK rock music journalism, epitomised by the *NME*, of describing new bands primarily through comparisons with better-established acts, the concern expressed by the musician seems justified. a.P.A.t.T., as we have seen, applied a creative strategy in order to define and appropriate the ultimate characteristics of Liverpool popular music – and perhaps in a way subvert the exact dominant definitions resented by 28 Costumes' guitarist (by communicating an ironic attitude towards the canonised pop heritage, depicted through referencing Cilla Black and the Beatles). This attempt at a collective self-definition appears an empowering move – at the same time, the deliberate attempt to swim against the mainstream always carries the paradox of trying to achieve success by being unpopular.

As a final note, aims, while particular to a band, are also in part informed by, and therefore indicative of, the local socio-cultural milieu.<sup>223</sup> The self-ironic attitude – whether present through emphasising the lo-fi environment, the technical and material difficulties of making a career as a band, as in the case of 28 Costumes, or referring to the eccentric and not entirely listener-friendly character of the music, as in the case of a.P.A.t.T. – is more easily understood with reference to the cultural and social-economic history of the city. In the first case, the concern with material conditions is rooted in a history of unfavourable economic conditions particular to working-class musicians in Liverpool. Cohen observes how rock music in 1980s was viewed by many musicians as a potential 'way out' ('it was commonly

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<sup>222</sup> Face-to-face interview, 04 March 2009

<sup>223</sup> Webb's (2007) concept of 'milieu cultures' incorporates this idea. Webb's understanding is in part based on Durrschmidt's notion of the 'extended milieu,' resonating with Bourdieu's habitus and understood as a 'relatively stable configuration of action and meaning in which the individual actively maintains a degree of familiarity, competence, and normalcy, based on the continuity and consistency of personal disposition, habitualities and routines, and experienced as a feeling of situatedness' (Durrschmidt 2000: 19, quoted by Webb 2007: 4). Here, however, I use the notion primarily to refer to the set of circumstances, meanings, social relationships and situatedness in which the individual operates, and only secondarily to the individual's (or group's) perception and incorporation of this context in the form of habits, attitudes, etc.

suggested to me that the desire to join a band and “get out” was more intense in Liverpool than elsewhere’ [2007: 45]), with the motif of escape also appearing in song lyrics of some local bands (ibid.). Based on the blog posts and their latest single, in the case of 28 Costumes the way out is not even present as a goal, the only aspect depicted is the economic struggle. In the second case, a.P.A.t.T.’s definition of music made in Liverpool as a little ‘Wonky’ draws on Liverpool’s popular image as eccentric, as somehow different from other cities. This image again is partly rooted in the city’s economic and cultural history and its popular presentation in the press and other media – Cohen discusses the outright negative side of this image in the 1980s and 1990s, when Liverpool was used as a symbol of economic, social, and moral decay (2007: 43-44).

### Network, organisation, and participation

The relationship between the level of the individual creative entity – the band – and the virtual – local environment can be further investigated in the context of the organisation of, and participation in, local music events. Following an enquiry into identifying similarities and differences among bands along the aspects of genre and style, career stage, and individual strategies, network maps of online relationships will be examined in relation to music events and their situatedness in relation to place and space – whether imagined, virtual or physical. This will also lead to the conceptualisation of the scene event.

### **The on- and offline organisation of a local scene event**

The second and third events of the ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ series were both held at the Barfly Club, one of the typical venues for local indie/rock bands (e.g. participating bands Elle s’appelle, 28 Costumes, Arms At Last, Married to the Sea all performed regularly at this venue). This not only meant that the organising band was able to rely on well-established contacts, but also that they were able to count on an audience that was familiar with the venue. Promotion took place partly via offline means (e.g. flyers), but primarily online, including the Barfly Club’s own MySpace profile.<sup>224</sup> The latter was used as advertising platform not only by the venue, i.e. the editors of the profile, but also by performing bands, typically by posting virtual posters (and accompanying messages) as comments.

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<sup>224</sup> Available: <http://www.myspace.com/liverpoolbarfly>. Accessed: 06 November 2010



MySpace in general served as an important tool in the process of organising gigs for unsigned and relatively little-known bands in Liverpool: it was very common for promoters to contact bands via MySpace after having listened to their music online, and consequently post a review of the music on their own (MySpace or Facebook) site – i.e. that of the venue or the specific event – which would serve as promotion of the event. As Sam from Married to the Sea recounted, in the case of the first event, several of the invited bands had already been friends of Married to the Sea and had shared gigs with them. Besides these, however, Married to the Sea also deliberately invited local bands they had not been familiar with and who they identified as stylistically different from them and their ‘friends’ but judged to be of quality. The decisions were made by searching out these bands’ MySpace profiles and listening to their uploaded tracks:

[The bands invited] were just our friends’ bands, and also [...] we tried to transcend things a little bit. We picked bands who we were not necessarily friends with, but thought we could get – we tried to cross over boundaries.

*But did you know them personally?* No.

*So how did you find them?* MySpace. It was just a case of looking up Liverpool bands that were good that perhaps we didn’t know and [who would] bring more people I suppose.

(Sam Walkerdine of Married to the Sea, face-to-face interview, 11 March 2009)

The reference in the above quote to ‘boundaries’ is notable: it implies that the band, or at least the speaking musician, employed discursive demarcations on the basis of musical genre and style – for example, one of the bands who they contacted this way, the Random Family, was an acoustic/folk act. The boundaries at the same time also refer to the close circle of ‘friends’ bands.’ Thirdly, locality is also implied by the specific reference to ‘Liverpool bands.’ These three elements – boundaries based on genre, the connection between friendship and professional relationships (implying a local network), and the emphasis on locality (the city) – are crucial to what I have termed a music scene. The ‘10 Bands 10 Minutes’ events can subsequently be understood as *scene events* – small-scale, locally based, but taking place in the relevant virtual spaces as well as the physical venue, operating with generic categories expressed in the organising and participating musicians’ discourse, and to a great extent relying on an existing on- and offline network of personal-professional relationships. The task that remains is to determine whether a network analysis confirms the existence of a set of cohesive forces implied by the musicians’ discourse.

## The network of participants

A network map analysis of the MySpace top friends of the bands participating in all three events (Figure 7.6) shows a densely interconnected hub of Liverpool-based bands – the network of ‘friends’ bands’ referred to by Sam of Married to the Sea. In terms of ego network,<sup>225</sup> the most connected are Married to the Sea (10 connections: 9 incoming and 10 outgoing), Arms At Last (10 connections: 8 incoming and 5 outgoing), Puzzle (10 connections: 10 incoming and 10 outgoing), Voo (10 connections: 10 incoming and 1 outgoing), and House that Jack Built (10 connections: 6 incoming and 8 outgoing), with Elle s’appelle (9 connections: 7 incoming and 7 outgoing), the Sporting Life (9 connections: 3 incoming and 7 outgoing), 28 Costumes (8 connections: 7 incoming and 7 outgoing), Hot Club de Paris (8 connections: 8 incoming and 0 outgoing), and My Amiga (7 connections: 4 incoming and 6 outgoing) only slightly behind. In other words, in a network of 22 bands in total, there are ten important central nodes, almost half of the total number – which means the network is very densely connected, and not centralised (Figure 7.7 shows the smaller network of this densely connected ‘core’ or hub of ten bands). The number of isolated bands or artists – the ones that are not connected via MySpace top friends at all – is four.

The network map shows that besides one band each from Manchester, Leeds, and London, all of the bands are from or partly from Liverpool or the Northwest – in other words, the event series, as Sam’s statement implied, was a primarily local one. Even more importantly, the ten nodes identified as central – i.e. the bands with the largest number of connections (7-10) – are all based in Liverpool. Out of the 8 bands or artists with few (1 or 0) connections, 50% are based in Liverpool and 50% elsewhere. These data once again prove that online connections mirror offline locations to a significant extent.

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<sup>225</sup> In network analysis, the terms ‘ego network’ or ‘ego-centred network’ refers to the ties (connections) of any one individual (node) in the network (c.f. Garton, Haythornthwaite, and Wellman 1999: 82).

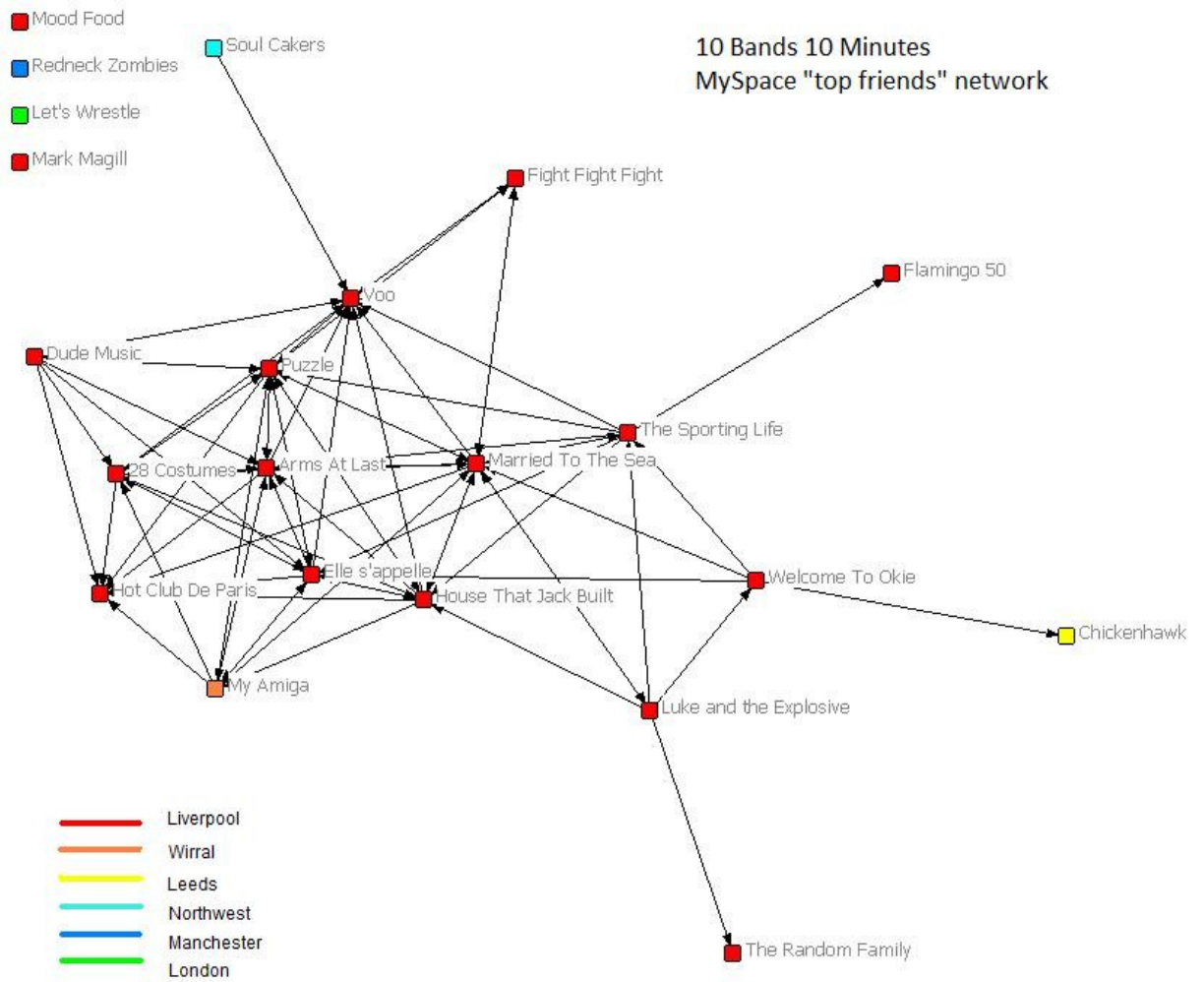


Figure 7.6 '10 Bands 10 Minutes' MySpace top friends network (02 March 2009)

Notes: The network map includes the MySpace 'top friends' of the bands and artist participating in the event series (n=22); those participants without a MySpace site (two bands/artists) were excluded.

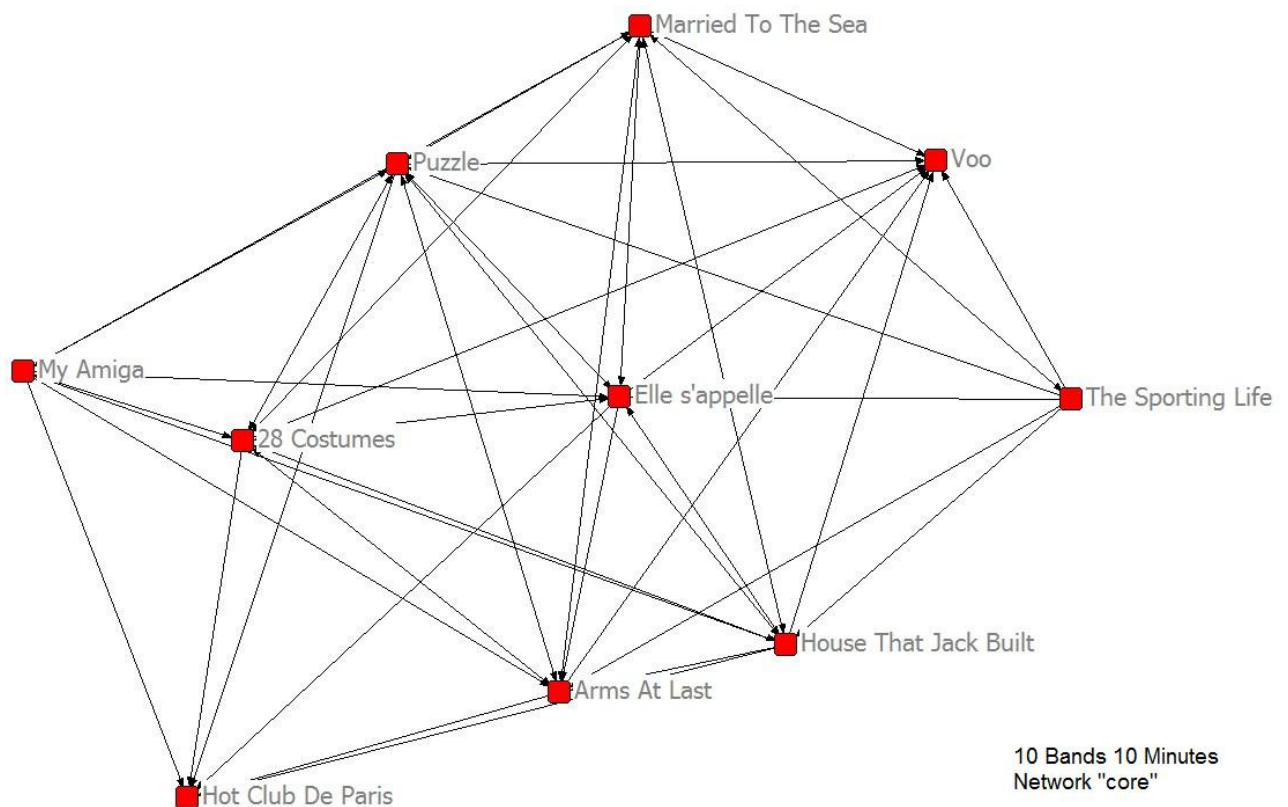


Figure 7.7 '10 Band 10 Minutes' network core (02 March 2009)

n=10

The cohesion of the network – the scene – is also indicated by the degree of participation. In order to measure participation in the event series, the number of shows in which each participating band or artist performed was considered. Only organising band Married to the Sea performed at all three events; however, the bands The Sporting Life, Puzzle, My Amiga and House that Jack Built performed on two occasions each (The Sporting Life at the first and second events, Puzzle at the first and third, while My Amiga and House that Jack Built at the second and third ones). The rest of the bands performed at only one of the shows during the time of the research. In terms of location, the bands participating two or three times were all based in Liverpool. Cross-checking this data with the network map, we can conclude that in the case of four of the bands, namely Married to the Sea, Puzzle, House that Jack Built and The Sporting Life, involvement in the event series (in the form of the frequency of participation) correlates with high online connectedness within the scene, and this also applies to the fifth band, My Amiga, if with a slightly smaller number of links (7).

The analysis of online presence and discourse has shown that traditional understandings of the scene apply in certain cases and in certain respects; nevertheless, the particularities of the online context entailed that the observations also produced counter-intuitive results, which underlines the importance of a flexible ethnographic study of new

media and society. In general terms, the degree of represented integration – i.e. interconnectedness – was more characteristic of those bands that performed together frequently and played many shows locally in general. In other words, the bands that were more visible online were also more visible locally. On the other hand, this visibility did not correlate in all instances with the degree of online activity – for instance, the frequency of online communication. Certain instances (the band Puzzle is an example) indicated that online visibility and online presence was to an extent independent from how active the band members were online. In very simple terms, one can be ‘talked about,’ i.e. be present in the discourse, and be constantly referred to, and therefore be an organic part of the scene and occupy a prominent position in the symbolic hierarchy even if they themselves are not the main ‘speakers’ within the scene’s discourse.

## **Discussion**

The chapter has demonstrated that connectivity is a central aspect of the online-and-offline space of music making: the connections within particular spaces belonging to a band, an event, a social networking site (what I termed intra-connectivity) and the connections among various entities such as bands, musicians, fans, promoters, venues and other locations, music press bodies, and so forth (inter-connectivity). As previous chapters indicated, the former characterises the online framing of offline events such as a single release or a performance on bands’ websites through (verbal, visual, multimedia) references, promotion, invitations, and preceding and follow-up online commentary. The present chapter has shown that it can also describe the deliberate linking of various websites and online content relating to the same band across platforms with the aim of making all related content as accessible as possible (e.g. a.P.A.t.T.). The latter, inter-connectivity, can describe bands listing each other as top friends, mentioning each other in blogs, and leaving encouraging comments on each other’s profile pages, or describe festival promotional material providing links to all participating bands’ MySpace pages. In other words, it points towards the closely-knit networks that we can refer to as music scenes, which also form part of broader, less clearly definable music networks.

I have used the network as an analytical concept, understanding it as the set of dynamic, enacted, negotiated, and represented connections between participants in music making, virtual and local spaces, and events. The concept of the network has enabled the

identification of a real, existing collaborative music community, as well as the description of individual differences and similarities among bands in terms of their online-and-offline social relationship structure. It has facilitated the description of both the complex layered structure and the dynamic of the aggregate of places, spaces, people, and relationships involved in music making. As Leyshon rightfully observes, the network concept is effective because it is a 'process-oriented approach,' but at the same time 'addresses the spatiality of such processes' (2001: 57). This can be understood as a critique of the 'virtual community' tradition, which emphasises location but not movement, identification with one group but not layered relationship structures, boundaries but not inward and outward connections.

An online network of friends may form a group through densely interconnected nodes (e.g. the 'core' indie rock network in the study), or constitute a more centralised group with incoming links leading to one dominant node (e.g. Hot Club de Paris). However, these structures only become meaningful when placed into the context of the creative output of the bands and the wider symbolic context of the music. This includes the symbolic bonds of genre; the symbolic connection to (i.e. affiliation with) particular, not necessarily local record labels and associated bands; the symbolic ties of taste; the set of industrial relationships within which they operate – including their relationship with a management (or lack of this), record label(s), promoters and venues; the attitudes towards their fan base, including the implied audience as well as the concrete relationship with fans; and finally, their relationship with other bands from the same local milieu. As the analyses indicated, differences and similarities can be described in terms of, firstly, musical style and genre; secondly, commercial success and career stage; and thirdly, individual aims, approach, and strategies.

Articulated similarities and correspondences along all three of the above aspects were observable among those bands I identified as part of the indie rock scene. The broader and more dynamic concept of the network has therefore informed the definition of the narrower and more static concept of the music scene. Based on the analysis of the indie core network, an on-and-offline network can be described as a scene if there is an enacted and represented coherence with regard to the following four aspects: firstly, genre aesthetics and ethics; secondly, locality; thirdly, discursive participation and identification; and fourthly, personal relationships. For example, symbolic boundaries were drawn by members of Married to the Sea between bands on the basis of musical genre on the one hand, and personal friendship on the other. Importantly, the symbolic boundaries did not result in the exclusivity of the scene, on the contrary: the organisation of the '10 Bands 10 Minutes' events was a deliberate attempt on the part of Married to the Sea – with the active support of the participating bands – to

facilitate a collaborative, mutually enjoyable environment for bands both within and outside those boundaries.

The meaningful characteristics of the network include the geographical distribution of connections and the extent to which the network is local. The connections are informative of routes taken as part of the activity of music making (e.g. concert tours, doing radio shows) as well as locations (e.g. the local bases of bands, record labels). They have drawn attention to the significance of movement, as well as belonging to a particular place. Geographical movement proved a determining factor with regard to, firstly, the creative-collaborative relationships formed with other musicians and artists; secondly, the relationship with fans (the establishment of a fan base); thirdly, the relationship with record labels. The latter, in a counterintuitive way, was sometimes an outcome of travelling and shared gigs with particular bands – in other words, relatively incidental events, as opposed to a deliberate strategy (e.g. approaching a record company, or a record company approaching the band). The meaningful characteristics, furthermore, include the mutuality and centralised nature of the links, which can be indicative of a band's attitude and aspirations, as well as their place in the local hierarchy.

Thinking in terms of temporality – regarding the online content as well as the career or the bands – has led to the identification of simultaneities as well as temporal discrepancies between the online and the offline. The former applies to instances where the online and the offline are inseparable and are informed by each other (e.g. events that are clearly signified online – see Chapter 4). The latter explains the conservative aspect of the online representation of the scene or networks. The temporality of the technological context itself influences representation and strategies, and is also the subject of reflection by users – typically involving (self-)ironic commentary. In more theoretical terms, the primary difference between the described online-and-offline networks from music-making networks before the Internet in its current stage is that the online context enables an unprecedented visibility and immediate accessibility of the network, enabling it to function as cultural resource and as a basis for identity as musician or band, as well as audience or fan, in novel ways.

## **Conclusion**

### **The music scene as an online-offline network**

The primary aim of the thesis has been to explore the relationship between online and offline music making in order to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between the Internet, place, and social and creative activity. I intended, firstly, to provide a valid theoretical-conceptual framework for the description of music making in a locally based environment that also takes place online through an empirically grounded rethinking of the concept of the music scene. This concept was to include the aspects of spatiality and temporality, as well as an understanding of the role and significance of place in online and offline music making practices. Secondly, I intended to provide a framework that enables the mapping of continuities and connectivities between online and offline spaces, and thus contribute to the deconstruction of what we can refer to as the online – offline dichotomy, implicit to which is a sense of loss of locality to globalising processes.

While along with some other authors (in particular Hesmondhalgh 2005), I identified certain limitations of the concept of the music scene, a grounded study of musicians' online and offline practices and discourse combined with the analytical and conceptual framework of the network has enabled me to redeem the concept. Studying music making activity within a network framework has led to the identification of the relational, spatial, and symbolic (relating to influences, genre, narratives) structure of music scenes. In addition, it has enabled the exploration of the structure of music making activity in cases where the application of the scene concept is more problematic. For example, a.P.A.t.T.'s activity took place in the same local environment as the 'indie core' group and there were several types of links between them, yet they were not integral to the group in the same manner as the rest of the bands. Yet network in itself would be unable to grasp the sense of community and identity that was captured by one of the musicians in the following way:



Yes, I think we are part of a scene that exists in Liverpool. I think the 'scene' resembles a group of friends (Not least because all involved are friends). They 'hang out' or do what they do together because they like similar things and can appreciate where each other is coming from. Beyond that, you don't hear people talking about 'the scene' as such. It's not something that is engineered for a purpose. I think it's more a case of lots of friendly likeminded people enjoying particularly productive or prolific musical periods in their lives/careers, but in the same place at the same time. As a result, Liverpool is a wonderful place to play music.

(Online interview with a member of Elle s'appelle, 16 December 2007)

In other words, network is a structurally oriented concept, while scene describes the subjective-collective content of this structure – participation, creative collaboration, aesthetic choices, articulated values, and identification linked to particular places and spaces. The two concepts are therefore complementary, and we require both in order to describe sociability and music making in online and offline spaces.

The combination of these two perspectives led to the formulation of the main argument that online (self-)presentation and interaction surrounding bands and music events are closely and complexly linked to offline events, places, and personal relationships, and vice versa. Local music 'scenes' must therefore be understood as both online and offline, and the temporal and spatial (self-)positioning of its participant in online space can only be understood with reference to offline places and temporal dynamics.

The analysis has shown that the concept of the scene can be meaningful in order to describe an on-and-offline music network in which there is an enacted, discursively expressed and represented coherence with regard to the following four aspects: genre aesthetics and ethics; locality; discursive participation and identification; and personal relationships. This is the grounded definition of the scene emerging from the ethnographic study. It is a definition that extends Leyshon's (2001) understanding of the musical scene as a network of creativity by also enabling to account for a variety of further functions besides creativity, such as community, as well as the distribution and consumption of music. Moreover, besides functions, it enables us to focus more on the content of relationships, as well as the nodes themselves in terms of sociability and identity. This latter focus is perhaps highlighted, but is not captured in an entirely satisfactory manner by the network concept in itself.

On the level of subjectivity, particular community-oriented identity expressions on the part of musicians and bands can be understood as the articulation of belonging to the scene. These include, firstly, taste references, such as verbal as and visual allusions to musical style

or genre (e.g. bands' chosen genre labels on MySpace; the emphasis on DIY artwork; the naming of influential artists); secondly, references to locality, including references to the city of Liverpool and particular elements associated with local culture; and finally, the emphasising of personal relationships and community (e.g. references to offline relationships and events such as parties, and using in-group language). Taste references, represented and enacted both online and offline, have both local and translocal connotations. Openly expressed affiliation with particular genres or styles (e.g. through the listing of artists in the 'Influences' section on MySpace) can on the one hand be understood as 'branching out' – in this sense, the aesthetic constitution of the scene is not only internal, but also external, integrating geographically distant or international characteristics and values. On the other hand, common external referential points also function as a symbolic bond among local bands, musicians and music fans. Events such as the Green Day tribute night or the Fugazi night, which involved primarily Liverpool-based indie rock bands, are manifestations of the collective celebration of taste-based bonds and genre-based aesthetics. As a further example, visual representations of locality can be present as elements of band and event images (e.g. Dookie poster); moreover, these may also function as prominent symbolic bonds within the network (the Dookie poster was used as a profile image for all bands participating in the tribute night).

In more general terms, the same elements of self-presentation can be simultaneously meaningful in local terms and as part of genre aesthetics (e.g. 28 Costumes' reliance on local friends' moral and material support, which can also be interpreted in the framework of rock ethics); as individual characteristics as well as bonds to a larger symbolic group; particular as well as general; in-group-focused as well as meaningful in the context of a broader, non-localised audience. These layers of meaning correspond to a 'layered' network, which incorporates several levels of interpretive and referential communities.

In response to the initial question of what exactly the locality of music is, i.e. what it is that is viewed by some to be threatened by global media, the following can be stated: locality is present in musicians' attitudes and values expressed through both offline and online means and enacted on the level of practices. It is an articulation of community traceable in the online discourse through the use of in-language and the references to a particular 'local knowledge.' It is also present in the tangible connections to place, such as the affiliation with particular local venues, local audiences, and local events – this can be a mix of attachment and ironic detachment. Locality includes the varying attitude to the canonised local popular culture heritage, which is also expressed online as part of bands'

self-presentation. Locality, moreover, is a concern with the local network of music making: musicians' proactive, creative support for each other, including attending each others' gigs; praising each other online; organising events together and commenting on these in detail online; articulating bonds in aesthetic terms; actively organising online supportive networks; mutually promoting each other's work and performances. Such practices were observable in my study in relation to all of the bands. This supportive – creative network, moreover, also includes other participants such as music enthusiasts, local promoters, and record label representatives. It is clear from the examples that the reinforcement of locality takes place both online and offline – the Internet therefore, instead of threatening local identity and community-orientation, provided additional means and additional platforms to articulate, enact, and even create such ties.

Furthermore, the local is never entirely local – the musical aesthetics that bound these bands together was international (for instance, the most ubiquitous common referential points were American alternative bands). The international thus became localised through the active and collective reinterpretation by local bands (e.g. through the tribute nights), and online media played an important part in this process of (re-)localisation. The same applies to local community-oriented attitudes, such as the emphasis on mutual assistance, DIY ethics, the overcoming of difficulties, which are also linked to the – translocal – ethics of rock music. These translocal values became localised by gaining meaning in the context of local bands, their audience, local events and the online commentary framing these. The levels of the local and the translocal thus become intertwined through virtuality.

The focus on connectivity provided by the network perspective is essential in mapping the levels of social, creative, and economic worlds – spaces and relationships – on which music making activity take place. On a theoretical level, it may be concluded that in addition to places i.e. geographical locations, connections and routes are as crucial aspects of understanding spatial situatedness and the subjective relations to space. Focusing on connectivity as well as place offers an opportunity to transcend the conceptual binarism of the online versus the offline (or virtual versus local). Instead, it enables us to understand the interrelationships among spaces of communication, socialisation, and economic, creative, and symbolic exchange.

In more particular terms, the concept of the music network as developed in the thesis has enabled the studying of meaningful connections of music making – that is, relationships that are personal, creative-collaborative, economic, and symbolic. This includes relationships

established online, such as invitation on the part of a venue for a band to perform; offline, such as the creative collaboration of musicians (e.g. in the form of a split 7-inch); and finally, both online and offline, such as the online establishment of a guest list for a performance. As the examples indicate, the relationships can be enacted between individual people, groups (e.g. bands), institutions (venues, record labels), and can make reference to offline places, as well as online spaces.

The network concept, moreover, is not only significant because it helps to transcend the binary conceptual framework of the online and the offline. Understood this way, it integrates empirical-based me-centred network concepts arising from the analysis of ‘virtual communities’ (e.g. Wellman and Frank 2001) and understandings focusing on personal music networks branching out from the individual milieu (Webb 2007) with the broader global network society theory of Castells (1996) on the one hand, and theories of Internet-based communication technology and society (e.g. Baym 2010) on the other. The network is better suited to analysing the dynamic nature of music making and music-related social groups than other popular concepts, including subculture, taste culture, milieu culture, neo-tribe, or style community. As both analytical and conceptual tool, the network enables the empirically grounded description of change (e.g. in relation to bands’ careers), as well as stability (e.g. in relation to cultural conservation, history, and heritage). The network, moreover, enables us to focus simultaneously on localities as well as translocal connections – places as well as routes. For this reason, it is particularly suitable for the description of society and creative activity in the age of Internet technology and global economic, political, social, and cultural interconnectedness.

While the concept of the scene implicitly focuses on unity and cohesion along the aspects of locality and musical style, the network also enables the exploration of disparities alongside cohesive elements. In the research, the concept applied as an analytical tool for the mapping of online friendship connections has led to the identification of relatively close and cohesive creative-social hubs. Placing the network maps into a broader online and offline context has moreover led to the identification of underlying individual similarities – bonds –, as well as discrepancies among participants (primarily bands). The analysis indicated that the meaningful structural differences and similarities between participants can be described in terms of, firstly, genre aesthetics and musical style; secondly, commercial success and career stage; and thirdly, individual approach, aims, and strategies. While similarities underscore the community aspect of music scenes, differences – for instance, in the types or locality of connections displayed online – can function as, firstly, the basis of the expression of

individual identity; and secondly, as indicators of (temporal) change within the network. For instance, if a band with relative success (such as Hot Club de Paris) plays a central role as referential point for a group of local bands that had not yet achieved equal success, this centrality may also be indicated by the lesser-known bands visibly listing the successful band as their MySpace friend. The successful band may not (or no longer) replicate this gesture. This scenario can suggest that the band had at one time also been an integral part of the close local network, but after achieving relative success, chose to 'rise above' this network and indicate this via their online displaying of connections.

### **Time and the music scene**

As the above example indicates, besides space as a network of connections, places and routes, temporal relations are of equal importance in the understanding of a scene, music network, and music making in general. This statement, moreover, applies to any structured set of creative-social activities and relationships, or any kind of meaningful social aggregation, in a local and/or online environment. The general idea that space itself is only meaningful with consideration of temporal relations, while apparent in broader theories (e.g. Harvey 1990, Castells 1996), has not been reflected in ethnographic studies to an equal extent.

Aspects of temporality in relation to music making include the simultaneities and temporal discrepancies within a music network in terms of, for example, the interlinkedness of bands' careers; local events such as a series of collective performances structuring the life-cycle of the scene; or the cycles of bands breaking up and new bands appearing, while other bands have a continuous presence at a relatively static career stage for several years. A complementary timeline is the development of media technology, and the simultaneities and discrepancies of practices relating to use of such technology. As an example, bands' self-presentation practices can bridge online and offline means of expressing (band) identity and image, establishing a kind of continuity (Elle s'appelle provided a good example). Changes in bands' online self-presentation can also be indicative of offline events and occurrences; on the other hand, at times the online representation and network structure of bands can remain relatively static in comparison with the offline course of events. This means the image projected online may not correspond to the offline career stage of a band (as a different example, the dynamics of online interaction, or rather the lack of it, around Liverpool Music Week did not do justice to the importance the event had for local participants). Finally, the

temporal dynamics of a local music network is at the same time also linked to the dynamics of the national or international music industries, and national or international trends and directions in musical aesthetics and practices.

On the level of theory, the temporal aspect is crucial in the understanding of the dynamics of the online and the offline. The research has shown that online discussion is often centred around offline events; it has also indicated that online occurrences frequently lead to offline ones, and influence the forming of meaningful on- and offline relationships of collaboration and exchange. The sense of stability – a crucial element of scenes – is created both through online and offline means, for instance, through recurring events, collective practices, and the consistent maintenance of symbolic representations.

Representations can be preserved longer online and are visible to a potentially larger audience. The analysis indicated that the representation of the past, and thus its continuation in the present through – at times critical or ironic – reflection is an important element in bands' self-definition, as well as the promotion of local events. The past was represented in the following forms: the creation of event 'histories' tied in with visual written-text references to local culture (Liverpool Music Week); the engagement with dominant chronotopic images and narratives integrating specific time with specific place (e.g. a.P.A.t.T.'s discussion of Liverpool music); the attempts to recontextualise these narratives; and the expressed attitudes to cultural heritage, whether celebratory or ironic. This finding also has implications for the significance of online technology in the presentation and preservation of cultural heritage, which should form the object of further scholarly enquiry.

### **Online communication and the music scene**

The research has also provided insight into the relationship of constantly evolving communication technology and the social and communal aspects of music making. The discourse analysis suggested that the particularities of online communication may have an effect on the establishment of discursive roles, and thus indirectly the hierarchical structure of interaction within a music network. Within the observed locally based network, boundaries between musician and fan were often unclear in online interaction. For this reason, I proposed thinking in terms of modes of communication, such as musician and fan modes, which are not fixed to particular individuals. The traditional role of the critic/reviewer is also challenged by the corresponding mode of communication, which is often assumed by both musicians and music fans online. Moreover, discursively expressed identities often become blurred online –

for instance, there is no clear distinction between band and band member as speaker on certain social networking platforms. The roles of addresser and the addressee are shifting, the audience is often only vaguely defined, and public versus private communication is increasingly replaced by what I termed the 'publicly private.' This is not solely a recent and Internet-based phenomenon, yet particular types of online media, including social networking sites, have facilitated the easy exchangeability of discursive roles. The relationship between the structural particularities of – constantly developing – communication technology and discursive hierarchies, however, requires further research.

Discursive practices of local referencing among bands and other scene participants that constitute the basis of a local community, such as the naming of mutual friends, acquaintances, creative partners, shared places, are also facilitated in several ways by online technology. The easiness of linking between webpages, the existence of pre-defined categories for the listing of influences, friends, similar pages, and so forth, helped to develop a culture of mutual recognition and proactive support in the case study. This, it is important to emphasise, is not an inherent function of these platforms, but dependent on usage. Usage, on the other hand, is informed by offline practices and a complex set of attitudes linked to the social and creative milieu. Online, the communication of community-orientation and the representation of a supportive local music network helps to create an environment which is at once an insider space – shared among the bands involved and their close audience – and projects the image of a cohesive scene to 'outsiders' – that is, listeners who do not necessarily attend shows regularly; newcomers previously unfamiliar with the bands; occasional visitors to the MySpace sites; industry representatives interested in the bands; or the music press. Notably, communication among bands/musicians is no less significant in this respect than band – audience communication.

Direct, meta-communicative references to online communication, along with the explicitly or implicitly expressed attitudes, tastes, and values, can explicitly be integrated into the self-presentation of a band. The Internet constitutes the referential context for the conscious, often playful use of online language, as well as the expressed attitudes to online communication technology (e.g. through meta-commentary and irony). These elements can play an important part both in the communication of individuality (as exemplified by band-specific language use and wordplay) and in the establishment of cohesive bonds (as indicated by in-group references and language usage).

In recent years, there has been an important shift in terms of Internet technologies in the direction of more explicit interlinkedness, the ubiquity of visible me-centred networks,

and ever-increasing interactivity. The shift can be seen in the spread of social networking sites and similar platforms that purposefully facilitate the creation of networks of simultaneously specialised and general, public and personal spaces. It is also characterised by an increasing emphasis on visibility and ‘nonymity’ (as opposed to anonymity), immediacy, and the interconnectedness of platforms (as opposed to structurally bounded ‘virtual communities’). Practices related to music making and consumption have had a crucial role in assisting this tendency. As an example, music-based profiles, applications, taste-based socialising practices, and fan groups have been a key catalyst in the rapid spreading of websites like MySpace, Bebo, even Facebook, and obviously, Last.fm. This is not a coincidence, since the desire to be visible and to make visible appears to be inherent to music scenes.

The shift in technology and usage requires a relevant shift in theoretical approach and research methodology. It also requires an increased focus on the study of music-related practices and the online-offline world. Understanding the socio-technological, discursive, symbolic, and representational structure of online-and-offline spaces of music making in terms of the network framework will hopefully assist these enquiries. Moreover, the proposed framework may also contribute to the continuing exploration of the new developments in the music – and creative – industries related to increasing online interconnectedness and visibility.

### **Directions for further research**

The thesis has shown that the study of music making practices in an online and offline environment contributes to an understanding of the ways the development of communication technologies, in particular the Internet, impacts upon the social and creative world that has created it. A remarkable conclusion is the role of music making itself in shaping our online-offline social world by continuously exploring and establishing new paths for the flow of ideas and creative products, as well as by transporting and recreating established patterns of creative collaboration in alternative technological contexts. It seems that Attali’s words indeed apply to the world of internetworking technologies: ‘Music is prophecy. Its styles and economic organisation are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code’ (1984: 11).

The research also contributes to the study of the relationship between place and music by showing how locality continues to be an entirely relevant aspect of musicians’ self-



definition and identity, as well as an important aspect in the perception of popular music. Moreover, it may also contribute to the understanding of the relationship of place and musical genre or style by showing how senses and meanings of locality in music, as well as the place- and route-boundness of music making practices, is intertwined with particular genre aesthetics and ethics. Finally, it may help to extend our understanding of the relationship between global media and a global industry and locally based creative practices.

The research project, however, also has necessary limitations, which I hereby summarise with the intention of providing directions for further enquiry. Firstly, as stated in the Introduction, the research project primarily focused on the practices and experience of musicians, and less so on the experience of music fans (similarly to the ethnographic studies of Ruth Finnegan and Sara Cohen reviewed in Chapter 1). On the one hand, the conclusions – the conceptualisation of the music scene as particular type of music network, the relationship between locality and online presence and representations – relate to various other participants in music making, such as music fans, event organisers, promoters. Furthermore, the analysis of online discourse and certain offline practices, such as participation at gigs, pointed towards the blurred boundaries between musicians and the audience. Fellow local bands, musicians characteristically formed an important part of the – intended and actual – audience, and through their active participation, which often took the shape of ‘fan’ mode communication, played a crucial part in the discursive establishment and maintenance of the local-online scene. In very simple terms, fans were to a large extent musicians, and musicians fans; and further roles, such as event organisation (Married to the Sea), networking facilitation (a.P.A.t.T.), or record publishing and distribution (Married to the Sea) were also fulfilled by musicians. On the other hand, the interviews were conducted with participants who were all active musicians, the members of bands regularly performing and recording in Liverpool at the time of the research. In order to complement and extend this, further enquiry could involve a more focused exploration of the articulated experience, online-offline practices, (semi-)private or public online communication and discourse of music fans who are not necessarily, or not primarily, active musicians. In the case of Liverpool, for instance, this would also include university students whose stay in the city is temporary, as well as music tourists. Such a focus could enhance our knowledge of the complex relationship between the representation and experience of place, time, and music.

A second issue regarding the research sample is my necessarily narrowed focus on the online spaces belonging to bands and music events, as opposed to the individual profiles and websites of musicians and other participants. Hodkinson (2007), for example, draws

important conclusions regarding scene activity by studying the individual online journals of members of the Goth subculture, which, while structurally representative of the individual, are at the same time used in order to maintain collective subcultural ties. The strategy of excluding individual MySpace or Facebook profiles was informed by the practice observed by some of the musicians, including the founding member of Elle s'appelle, to limit content relating to the band to the band profile(s) and utilise the individual profile for other uses, notably more personal communication as well as other artistic pursuits. Nevertheless, a study involving the exploration of discursive practices, content and representation on individual websites and profiles could possibly provide more information on the relationship between the online-and-offline music scene and identity, taste, articulation, communicative practices, and technology. In connection with this, it is important to reiterate the shifting nature of the online context, and the importance of technology in relation to online-offline communication. Regardless of the observed interconnectivity, MySpace structurally retains the format of individual or group spaces, where communication on one such space may still be maintained within symbolic boundaries, indicated by separate pages under separate URL addresses. On Facebook, in contrast, such boundaries barely exist as a result of its distinct communicative surface, in particular the common 'news feed' with individual status updates, links, comments, and so forth. A separation of band communication from individual communication is therefore much less easy to maintain here. The significance of this development with regard to music making and social groups remains to be explored in detail.

Thirdly, a broader issue is related to genre, locality, and the question of the possibility of generalisation – an important challenge in relation to any ethnography, which by nature focuses on a particular, typically local or localised environment. My research looked at bands based in the city of Liverpool, a city with a particularly significant popular music heritage, as well as further specificities, discussed in Chapter 3. Moreover, with the notable exception of a.P.A.t.T., the bands involved could all be grouped under the – however broad – genre category of indie rock in terms of musical style/aesthetics, ethics, and industry relationship (independence from major record labels). The specific results are therefore indicative of the online and offline presence and activity of indie bands in Liverpool. The research has nevertheless provided conceptual tools and relevant perspectives for the studying of the relationship between the city as a place and offline and online spaces of music making, independently of place and genre. The notions of the music scene and the music network, which integrate the focus on locality, genre, discourse, and interpersonal relationships, assist us in understanding the relationship of locality and music making in general. Chapter 7 in

particular has also indicated how it is possible study genre with a view to the structure of the online-offline music network. A desirable further direction therefore would be the conducting of comparative analyses looking at music networks of variety of music genres and styles, based in a variety of places.

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28 Costumes (2007) *Electrical Fever* [EP]. Liverpool: Invicta Hi-Fi

28 Costumes (2009) 'This Band Has Eaten All Our Money.' *This Band Has Eaten All Our Money* [single]. Liverpool: Rekordmeister a.P.A.t.T. (2008) *Black and White Mass*. Leicester: Pickled Egg Records a.P.A.t.T. (2008) *Black and White Mass*. Leicester: Pickled Egg Records

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Elle s'appelle (2007) 'Little Flame.' *Little Flame* [single]. London: Moshi Moshi Records

Elle s'appelle (2007) 'She Sells Sea Shells.' *Little Flame* [single]. London: Moshi Moshi Records

Gerry and the Pacemakers (1963) 'You'll Never Walk Alone.' *You'll Never Walk Alone* [single]. London: Columbia (EMI)

Green Day (1994) *Dookie*. USA: Reprise

Puzzle (2009) *Patterns We Left* [EP]. Wolverhampton: Lightingheart Records

Rodgers, Richard and Oscar Hammerstein II (1945) 'You'll Never Walk Alone.' Introduced in the musical *Carousel*. Broadway

Starr, Ringo (2008) 'Liverpool 8.' *Liverpool 8*. London: Parlophone (EMI)

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## **Films:**

*A Clockwork Orange* (1971) [Film] Director: Stanley Kubrick. UK and USA: Warner Bros.

*Awaydays* (2009) [Film] Director: Pat Holden. UK: Red Union Films

*Rushmore* (1998) [Film] Director: Wes Anderson. USA: Touchstone Pictures

*Nosferatu* (1922) [Film] Director: F. W. Murnau. Germany: Film Arts Guild

*Instrument* (1998) [Documentary] Director: Jem Cohen. USA: Dischord Records

## Appendix 1          Sample interview questions (online): a.P.A.t.T.

1. When and how did the band form? What (and whose) was the original idea or 'concept' if there is/was such? What are your main influences? What does the band name refer to and why did you choose this name?

Where are the band members from, and what are their backgrounds?

When did you start performing live, at what venues, with what bands? What helped you in this process (e.g. what kind of contacts)? How did this change later on?

2. With regard to recording and releasing records: why have you chosen the options you have (the particular labels you have worked with etc.)? What are your plans for the future in terms of recording and promoting/releasing recordings?

3. How do you 'design' live performances, sets, stage appearance? How often do you play in Liverpool, and how often elsewhere? How do you usually get gigs and how do you choose which venues to play? What are your future plans with regard to live performances? Do you usually discuss these plans with people outside the band, and if so, with whom?

You have been participating in various exciting events in Liverpool recently – please tell me more about some of these: where do the ideas come from, how do you plan and design performances; have you as a band organised some of these events?

Within the band, how do you organise different tasks, relating to performances/ recording/ maintaining communication with the audience, with the press etc.? Do you have a management/ other people who help you with specific tasks – if so, since when, and how did you get in touch with them?

What is your role in promoting the events you participate in?

5. Do you follow (and discuss) comments from people who listen to your music/go to your gigs (do you have a concept for this)? Through what channels do you get feedback, e.g. personal conversations, do you receive e-mails and do you reply to e-mails, do you read MySpace/Facebook comments? With regard to the latter two: what do people usually write about, and how does this help the band? Do you read reviews on websites e.g. blogs and if you do, do you find such information/feedback useful for the promotion of and/or the improvement of your music/performance? What else does? What kind of feedback, and from whom, do you find most useful? Do you exchange ideas and opinions with other bands and musicians, where, how - can you think of any particular examples?

How would you describe your audience? Do you/did you have a target audience in mind when writing/rehearsing the songs and putting up shows? Has this changed over time?

6. What methods do you use for promoting your music and shows? What have you found most successful, and why? Who decides on these?

You have various online platforms for your music, videos etc. – please tell me more about these: in what ways is online activity important to you? Who designs the websites/band profiles that you have made available, who produces the content (e.g. of the blog posts) etc.?

7. Do you view the band as part of a local, or any other music scene? Do you think there are any identifiable traits/aims/traditions of bands coming from and playing around Liverpool, or do you find such aspects irrelevant?

Do you find music-related events particular to Liverpool, such as the Liverpool Music Week or Sound City, important - and do you try to participate in such events?

In general, do you find Liverpool a good place to play music? Why or why not?

In your opinion, what is the most exciting thing happening in Liverpool at present in terms of music?

8. What projects are you currently involved in? What are the band's plans and goals for the future?

9. And finally: Who has answered these questions? One person or have you discussed them among the band?

## Appendix 2 Information Sheet and Consent Form

### Online Music Scenes and the City of Liverpool

*Version 1*  
*06-01-2009*

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. You are also encouraged to discuss this with your friends/fellow musicians. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

The topic of the research of which this empirical study forms part is online music scenes and the relationship between online and offline spaces of music making in Liverpool; more precisely, the ways Liverpool-based bands promote their music and maintain contact with their audience, fellow musicians etc. through the internet – for instance, via websites, weblogs or such social networking sites as *MySpace* and *Facebook*.

You have been chosen to participate in the study as you are member of a music group that is currently active and plays live frequently in the city of Liverpool; besides this, your band evidently makes use of the internet for the purposes of promoting your music and communicating with fans, friends, and other bands and artists.

It is important for you to know that participation is entirely voluntary, and you can decide to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

Participation involves taking part in interviews – conducted either online via email or offline, depending on your preference –, in which the questions will mainly focus on the music making and networking activity of the band, their biographies, careers and aspirations, their attitude to music making in the city of Liverpool, and their connections within and outside the city.

Besides the analysis of data collected through such interviews, the research will make use of network analysis of online connections (such as the network of “top friends” on MySpace), a discourse analysis of online texts and discussions relating to bands, musical events and music scenes related to the city of Liverpool, and offline observations of related events, mainly music performances. In view of the above, participation also involves making available the online data made public by the band (the content of MySpace and/or Facebook pages, individual websites, blogs etc.) for content/discourse analysis and network analysis.

If you agree to participate in the study, you have the right to specify what contents you agree to allow to be used in the study, and whether there you allow identification (as individual and/or as a group) or wish the data to remain anonymous. You will be asked to provide details of your preferences at the beginning of your participation in the study and also when the data have been collected. You will also have the opportunity to comment on the written paper that will be based on the analysis of the data collected during the course of the study.

The analysis of the data will form part of a PhD dissertation, which may also be published. If it is published, you will be informed about where it is accessible.

At any point in time, you may withdraw from the study without explanation. In this case, you may choose to allow the study to use the data collected up to that point or not to use any of the data at all.

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Emilia Barna ([e.barna@liv.ac.uk](mailto:e.barna@liv.ac.uk) +44 7 549350686) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the University of Liverpool Research Governance Officer on 0151 794 8290 ([ethics@liv.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@liv.ac.uk)). When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide

details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

With any further questions you can contact the Principal Investigator:

Emilia Barna

[e.barna@liv.ac.uk](mailto:e.barna@liv.ac.uk)

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Liverpool  
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## MODEL CONSENT FORM

**Title of Research Project:** Online Music Scenes and the City of Liverpool

**Researcher(s):** Emilia Barna

**Please  
initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 6 January 2009 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**The contact details of lead Researcher (Principal Investigator) are:**

Emilia Barna

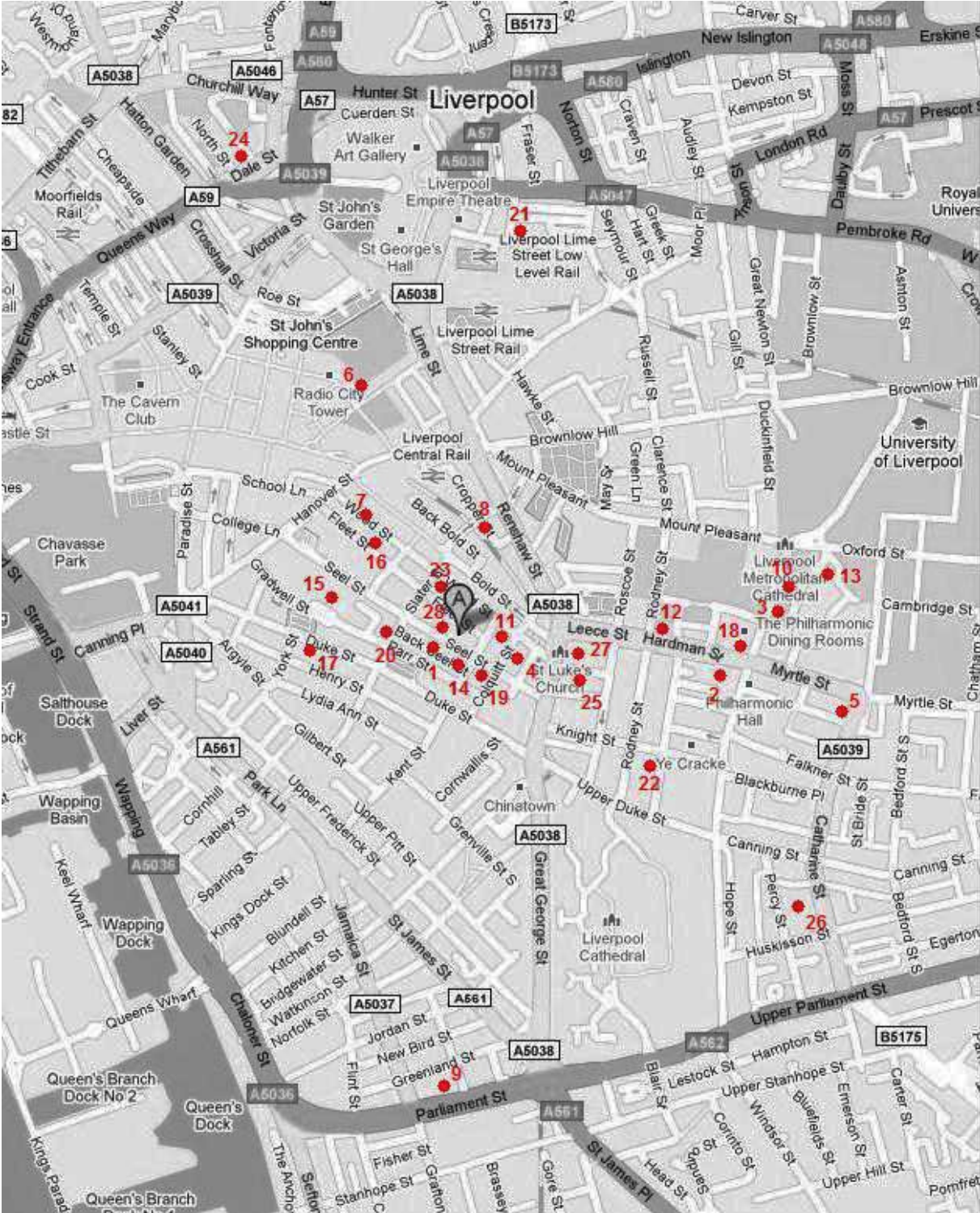
[e.barna@liv.ac.uk](mailto:e.barna@liv.ac.uk)

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**Appendix 3**      The most important locations of the observed indie rock scene in Liverpool (2007-2009)



Original map copyright: ©2009 Google – Map data ©2009 Tele Atlas

1. Alma de Cuba
2. Bumper
3. Casa
4. Chameleon
5. Caledonia
6. Clayton Square
7. Django's Riff
8. Egg Café
9. Elevator Studios (new building) incl. Leaf Café
10. Everyman
11. FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology)
12. Fly in the Loaf
13. Guild of Students
14. Heebie Jeebies
15. Kazimier
16. Korova (moved to Hope Street in October 2009)
17. Le Bateau
18. Magnet
19. Masque (formerly Barfly; incl. Bar, Theatre, Loft)
20. Mello Mello
21. O2 (formerly Carling) Academy
22. Pilgrim
23. Probe Records
24. Ship & Mitre
25. Static Gallery
26. St. Bride's Church
27. St. Luke's Church
28. Zanzibar

## Appendix 4

STYLE	Frequency
<b>Indie</b>	9
<b>Pop</b>	7
<b>Rock</b>	5
<b>Alternative</b>	4
<b>Punk</b>	3
<b>Pop punk</b>	3
Acoustic	2
New Wave	2
Powerpop	2
Ambient	1
Breakcore	1
Country	1
Experimental	1
Folk	1
Gothic	1
Hardcore	1
Jam Band	1
Melodramatic Popular Song	1
Metal	1
Other stuff	1
Post punk	1
Progressive	1
Psychedelic	1
Roots Music	1
Tropical	1
Zouk	1

Table 3.1 Stylistic labels and their frequencies on the MySpace profiles of bands participating in the '10 Bands 10 Minutes' events

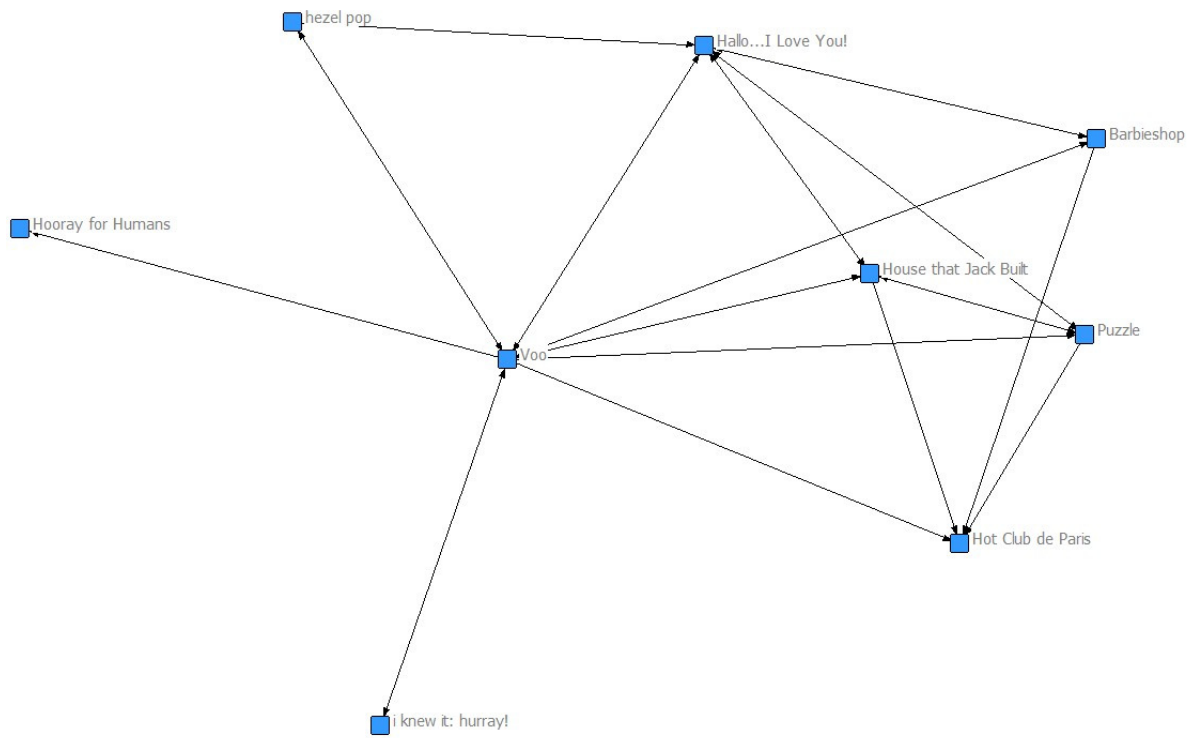
Notes:

Number of labels: N=57

Number of bands: n=22

The frequency of genre labels displayed by the participating bands on their profiles was calculated. The labels are all from the MySpace.com profiles of participating bands, except for one Facebook.com profile where a MySpace profile was unavailable (the relevant labels are 'Rock,' 'Metal,' 'Other stuff'). Most of the bands listed more than one label. One band which only had a profile on online radio and socialising site Last.fm was excluded as Last.fm tags are not (only) given by artists but can be assigned by any listener (the excluded tags are 'Indie,' 'Alternative,' 'Lo-fi,' 'Folk,' 'Indie rock'). A further participating band/artist was excluded as a corresponding website was not found. Two of the bands used the same label more than once ('Punk / Punk / Punk' and 'Rock / Rock / Country'): in these cases the label was considered as occurring once.

## Appendix 5

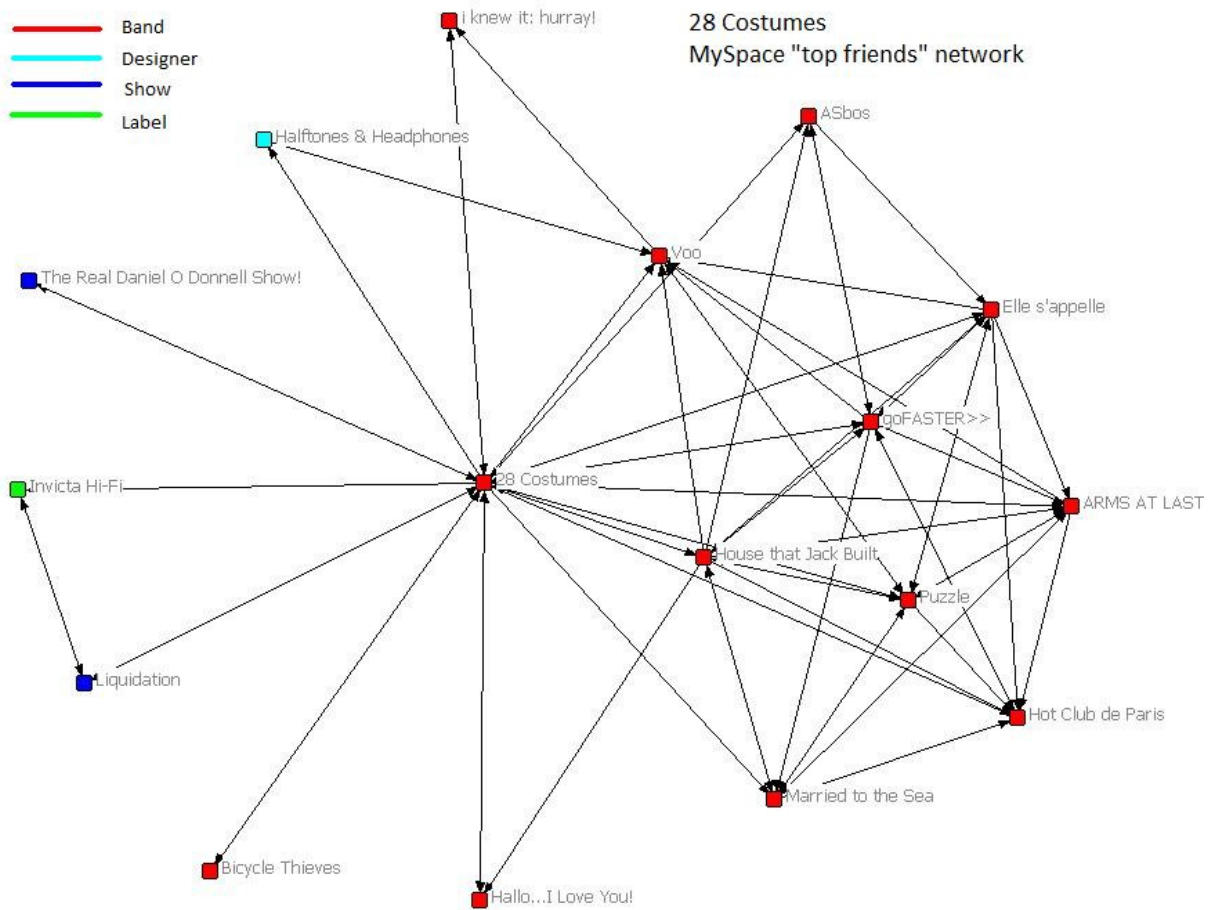


### 1 Voo - MySpace top friends

Date: 30 July 2009

Number of top friends: 8

Total number of friends: 2293

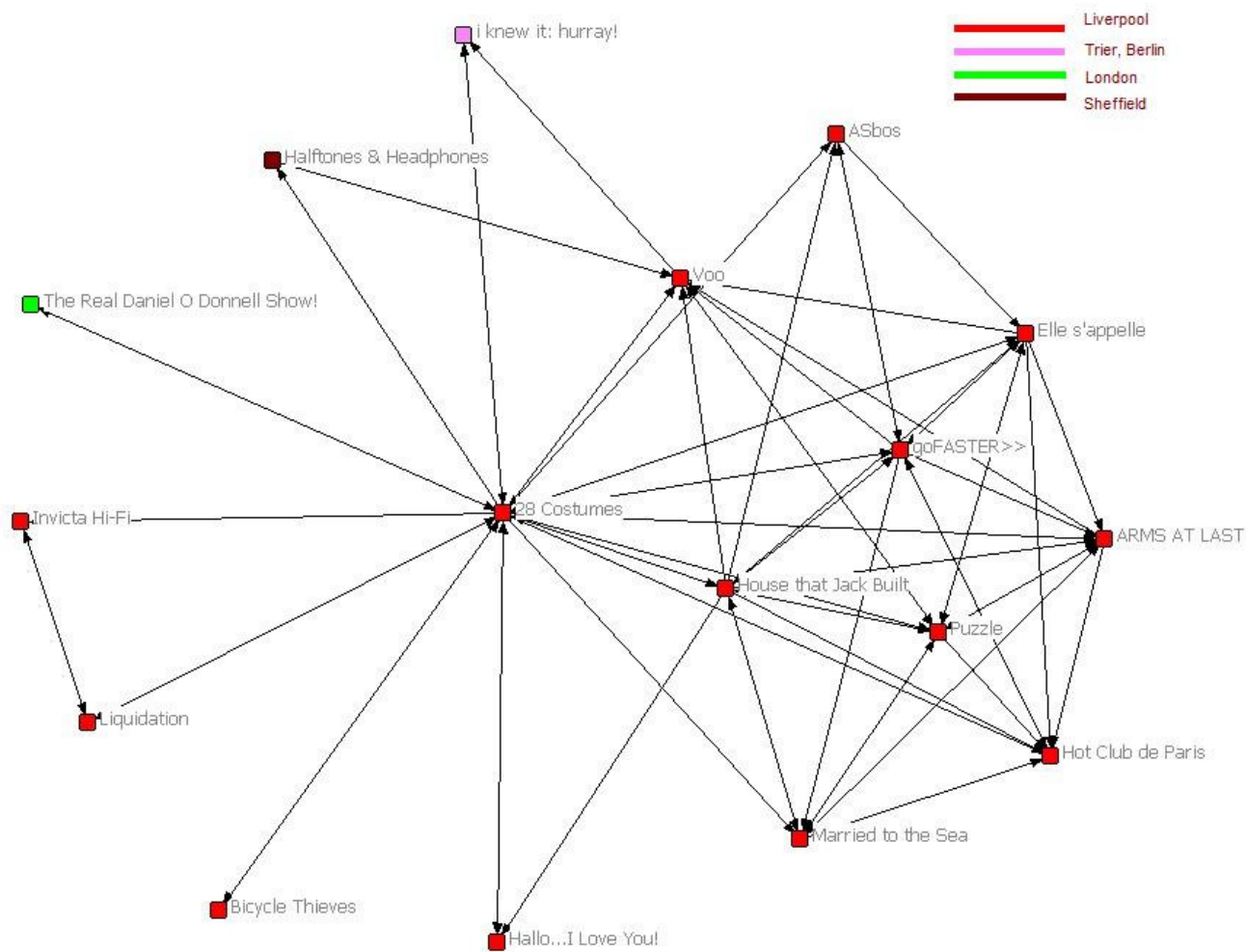


2.1 28 Costumes - MySpace top friends I (Types of entity)

Date: 23 February 2009

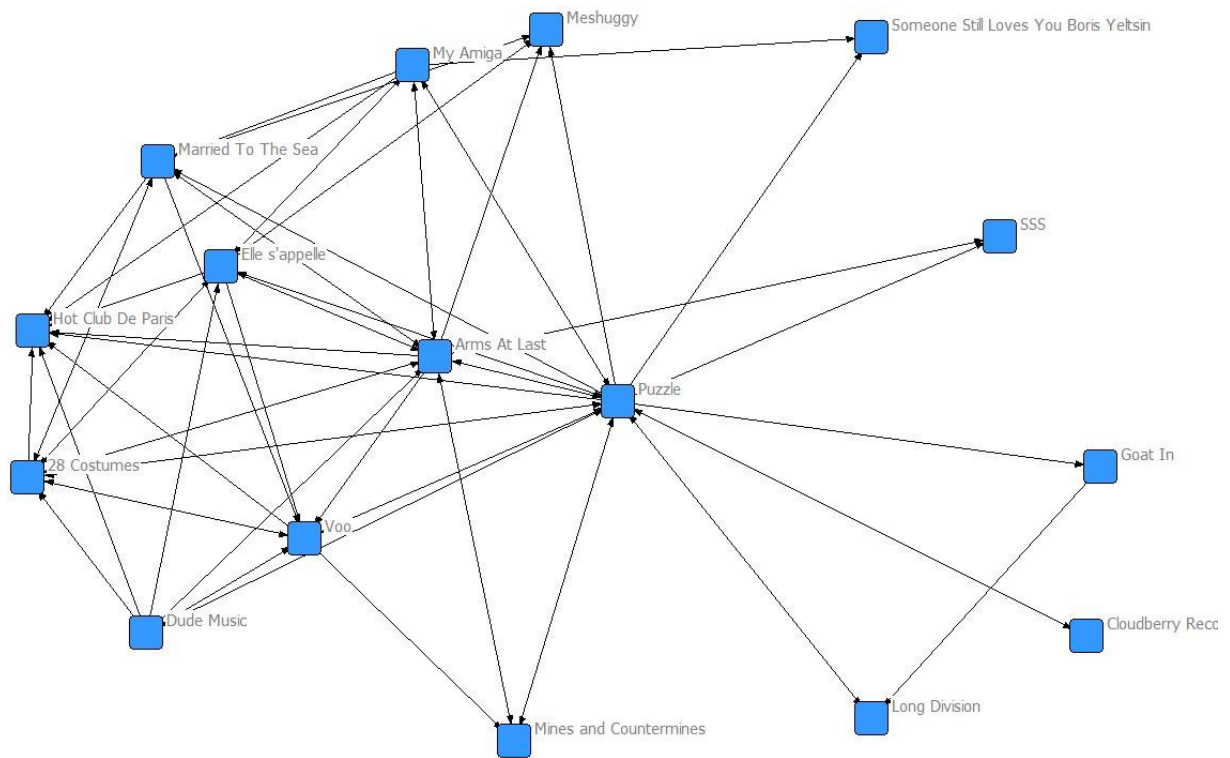
Number of top friends: 16

Total number of friends: 5538



2.2 28 Costumes – MySpace top friends II (Location)





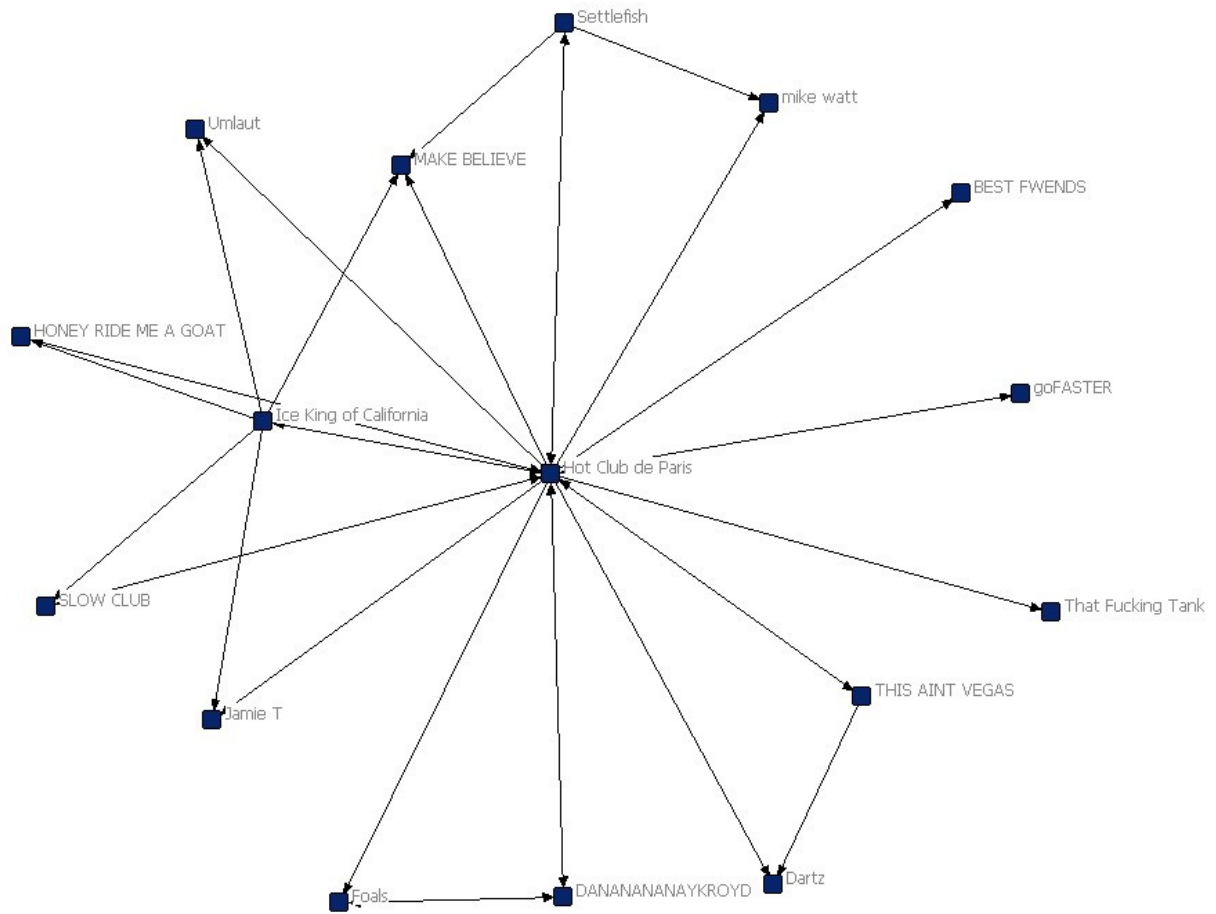
3 Puzzle – MySpace top friends

Date: 28 July 2008

Number of top friends: 16

Total number of friends: n/a\*

\*(1635 on 23 February 2009)



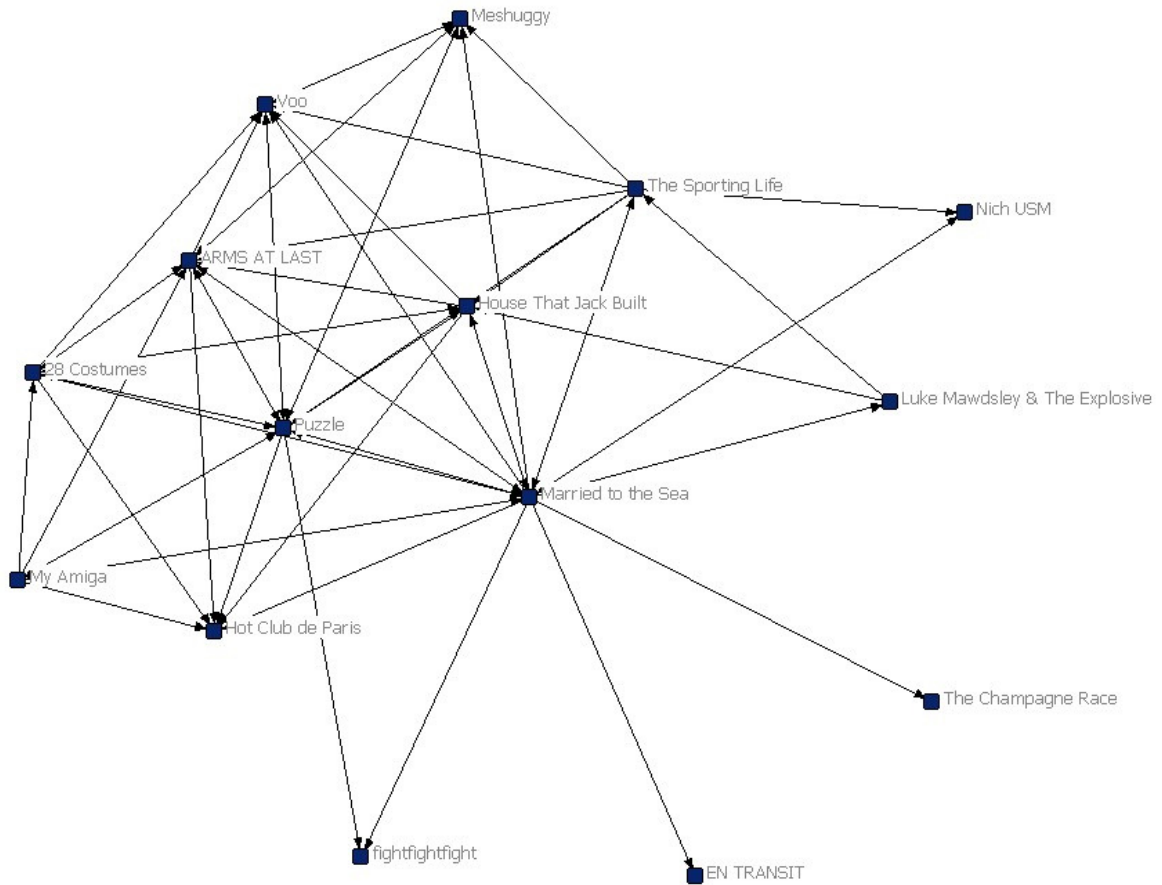
4 Hot Club de Paris – MySpace top friends

Date: 18 March 2009

Number of top friends: 15

Total number of friends: 20047





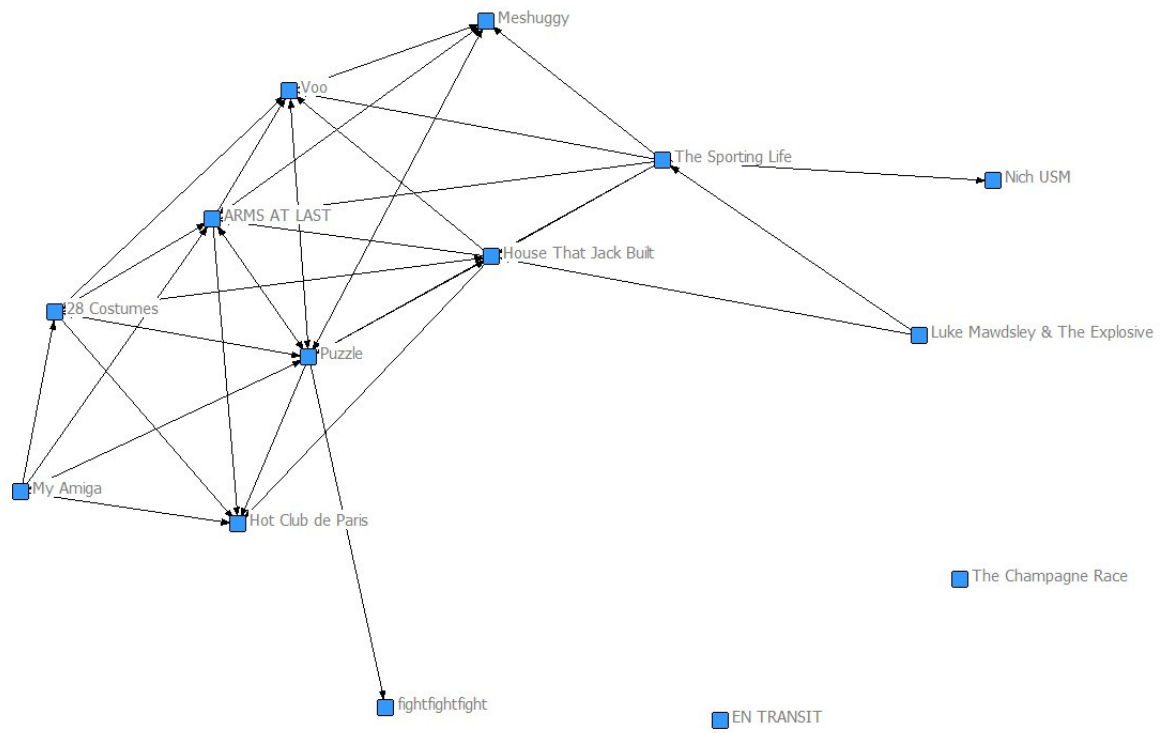
### 5.1 Married to the Sea – MySpace top friends I

Date: 18 March 2009

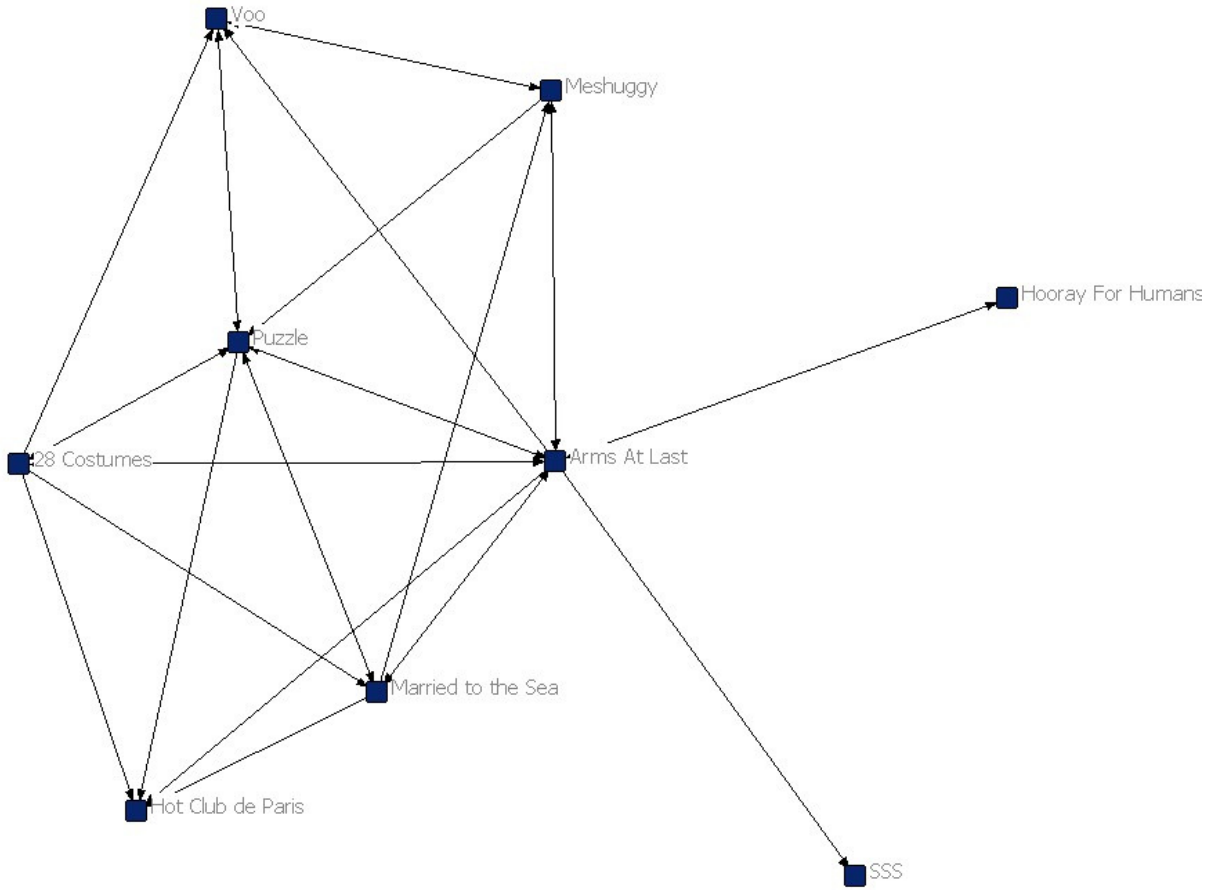
Number of top friends: 16\*

Total number of friends: 2859

\* 2 individual profiles omitted from network map



## 5.2 Married to the Sea (Without centre node)

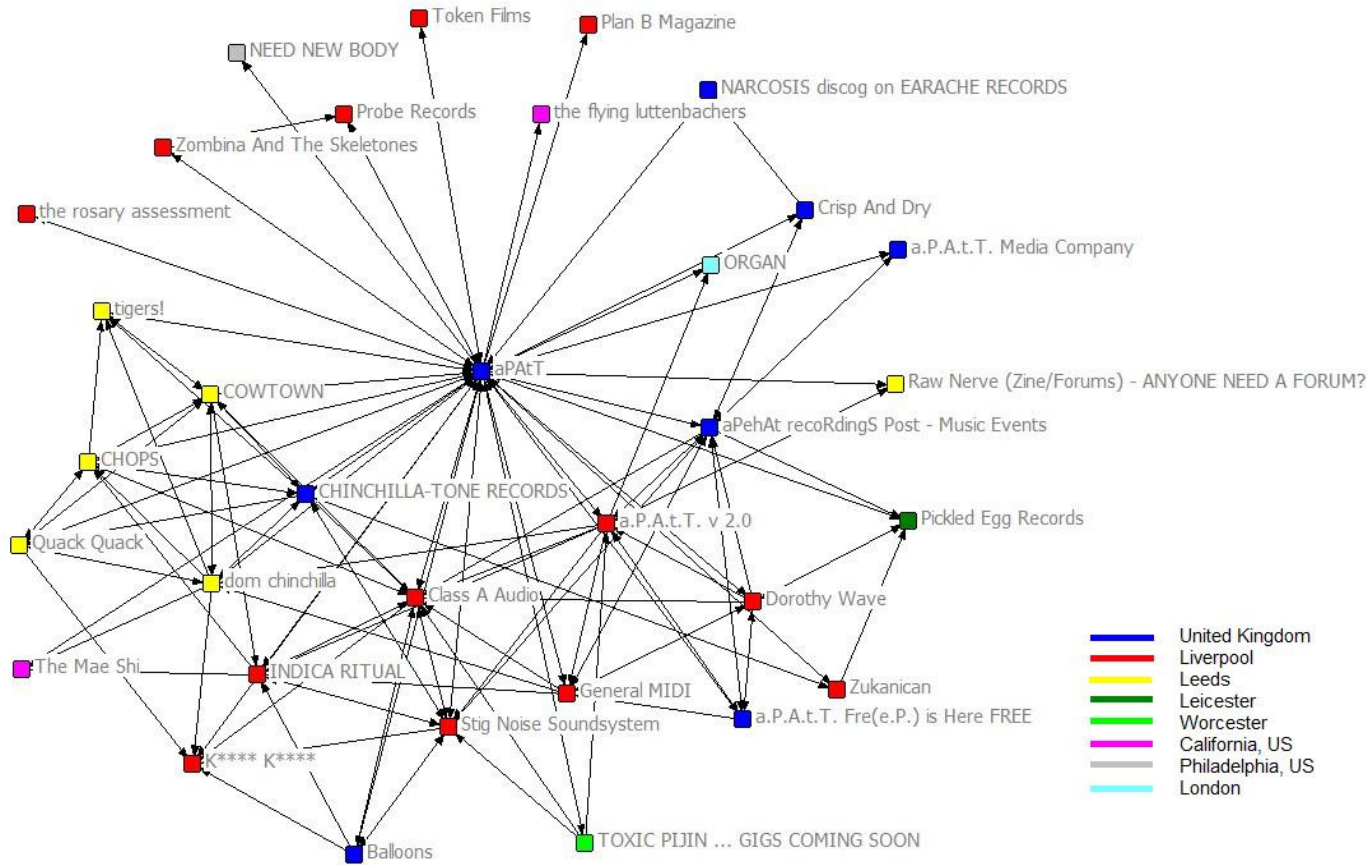


6 Arms At Last – MySpace top friends

Date: 25 February 2009

Number of top friends: 8

Total number of friends: 2048

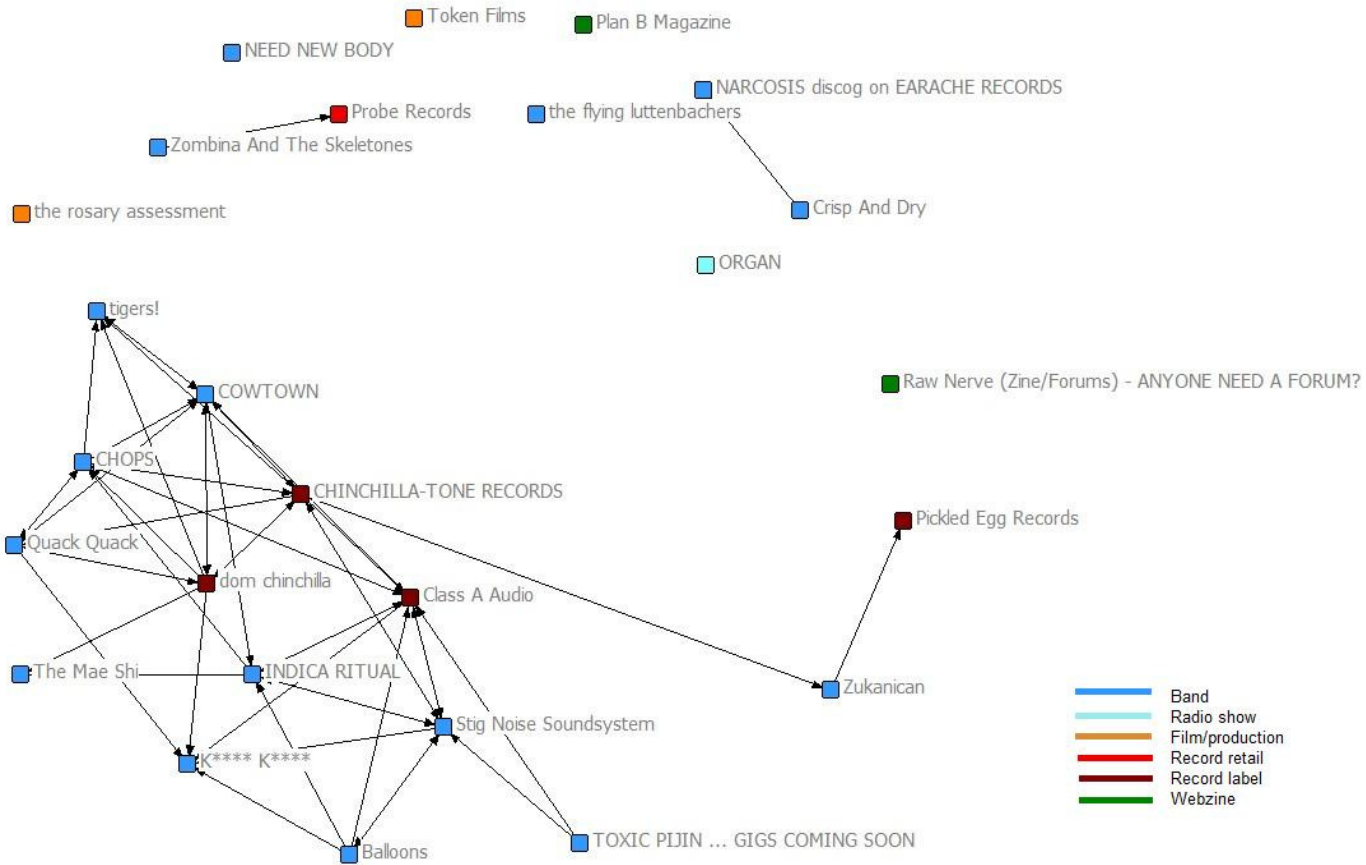


6.1 a.P.A.t.T. – MySpace top friends (Location)

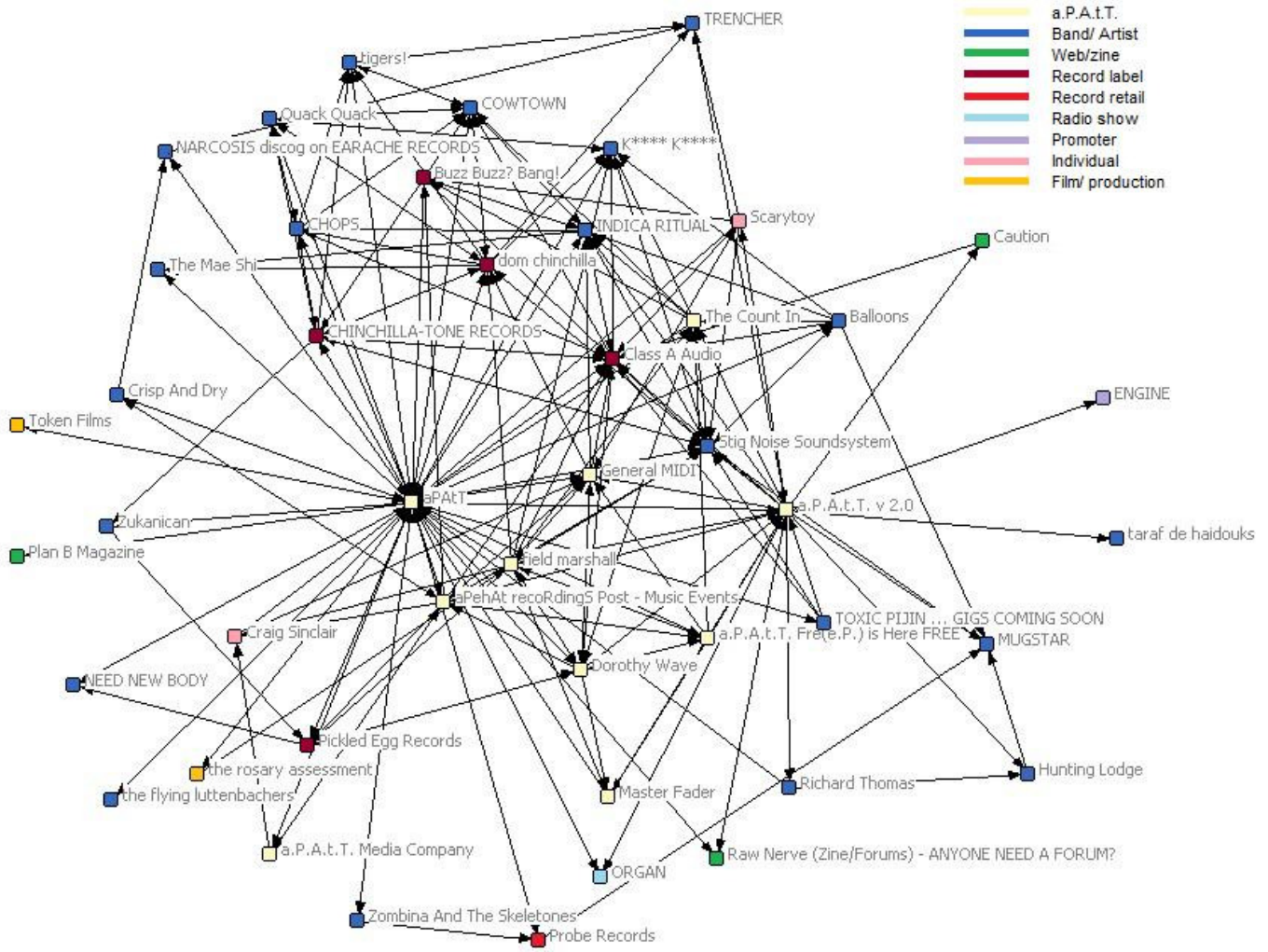
Date: 28 July 2008

Number of top friends: 32

Total number of friends: 4661



6.2 a.P.A.t.T. – MySpace top friends III (Without central node and other a.P.A.t.T. profiles)



6.3 a.P.A.t.T. – MySpace top friends IV (Including top friends of all a.P.A.t.T. MySpace profiles)