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The gendered carnival of pop

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One of the ironies of popular music studies is that the music that is the most popular, in terms of contemporary chart success, is rarely discussed by academics writing in the field. In this article I want to suggest that this is because some forms of 'mainstream' chart pop music, and the discourse of the magazines that promote this type of music, pose a threat to the certainties of both gender and genre that underpin 'serious' popular music. The music I am concerned with here is that provided by 'boy bands' like Boyzone, Westlife or Five, and 'girl groups' like The Spice Girls, Atomic Kitten or Precious, as well as mixed-sex groups such as Steps, SClub7 and Hear'Say, and singers such as Britney Spears and Billie – music that is the mainstay of magazines such as the UK publications *Smash Hits*, *Top of the Pops* and *Live and Kicking*. I shall argue that this music, and the way of enjoying music promoted by the magazines that support it, can best be understood in terms of a carnivalesque disruption that challenges all stable ideas about what makes music good, and what popular music should be about. Furthermore, I shall argue that, just as this music is perhaps the only form of popular music to have a predominantly female audience, the threat that it poses is the threat of the feminine, and of female encroachment into what is still predominantly a male, and masculine, world.

To this end, I will argue that the development of particular types of popular music as a focus for academic study and serious enjoyment can be likened to the development of bourgeois society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. 'Pop' music, of the type I have described above, can be seen as the carnivalesque 'low other' that was a source of both horror and fascination to the emerging bourgeoisie (Stallybrass and White 1986, p. 202). I will begin by outlining my reasons for suggesting a resemblance between the establishment of 'serious' popular music genres and the development of bourgeois hegemony, before going on to explore the carnivalesque nature of 'pop' and the response of 'serious' popular music to this.

The concept of 'the bourgeois public sphere' is a useful starting point for discussion. The term derives from the work of Jürgen Habermas and describes a particular site of social intercourse that developed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and facilitated bourgeois hegemony in both politics and the arts. The coffee houses and spas that proliferated at this time were places of informed, critical discussion between the emerging bourgeoisie and sympathetic members of the aristocracy. They provided the impetus for the development of newspapers and journals, through which critical debate could be disseminated to a wider audience. They helped to construct the notion of a reasoned and informed public whose opinion was worthy of consideration. Through the institutions of the public sphere, informed public discussion, rather than royal decree or courtly practice, became the

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basis on which matters of taste and of politics could be decided. The public sphere could do this because it was independent of both church and state: it was not part of the institutions of high culture. The bourgeois public sphere constituted a challenge to the position of the court as the arbiter of taste and holder of political power (Habermas 1995).

Stallybrass and White describe the response of the emergent bourgeois society to 'low' culture as a mixture of revulsion and fascination – simultaneously a rejection of and a desire for the bodily in culture. They argue that the public sphere developed not only in opposition to aristocratic, high culture but also to the low culture of the circus, the carnival, and so on. It was as much about distancing bourgeois taste from plebeian taste, and sophisticated bourgeois cultural practices from the coarseness of the lower classes at play, as it was about challenging courtly privilege. It was about demonstrating distinctions by displaying civility and manners (Stallybrass and White 1986, p. 191). The importance of the public sphere is that it was neither high nor low. It avoided both the excesses of aristocratic dilettantism and the degradation of low revelry. The bourgeoisie was only able to obtain the successes it did against the aristocracy by defining itself in contradistinction to the 'low'. Yet members of the bourgeoisie always maintained a fascination with that which they were distancing themselves from. The circus, the carnival, the bodily, and sexual performance were constant sources of both dread and allure.

It almost goes without saying that the bourgeois public sphere was both male and masculine in its constitution. It was based on what are traditionally considered masculine values (reason, objectivity, the mind), and eschewed the traditionally feminine (emotion, the home, the body). As early as 1674, women were criticising the institution of the coffee house for excluding them (Habermas 1995, fn. 8). It was a realm from which women were excluded by both their position in society and their femininity. The public sphere was defined by masculinity – by values that since the time of the Ancient Greeks had been seen as the province of men (Lloyd 1984).

At this point, I want to argue that parallels can be drawn in a number of ways between rock music culture as it developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the bourgeois public sphere. Just as the bourgeois public sphere was a starting point that facilitated the hegemony of bourgeois ideals and political power, rock culture served as the starting point for the hegemony within popular music discourse of particular ways of understanding and appreciating music. As Laing suggests:

> For more than two decades, popular music studies and the higher journalism of record and concert reviewing have been dominated by an all-embracing discursive pattern that has coiled itself around a single four letter word: rock. (Laing 1997, p. 116)

In the first instance, it must be stressed that the inherent masculinity of the bourgeois public sphere was mirrored by the masculinity of rock culture. Feminist writers of the time, like their counterparts of the seventeenth century, condemned the exclusionary masculinity of rock culture. Writers such as Mary Meade and Susie Hiwatt criticised the way that rock culture was masculine in terms of band membership and production, its lyrical content, and its political agenda. Women were marginalised by being denied a mind and reduced to their bodies:

> Seldom [in song lyrics] does one come across a mature, intelligent woman, or for that matter, a woman who is capable enough to hold a job. (Meade 1972, p. 175)

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They were sexualised and deemed incapable of handling the intellectual sophistication of the music:

> Frank Zappa laid it out when he said that men come to hear the music and chicks come for sex thrills. (Hiwatt 1971, p. 145)

If they tried to make music, they were treated as figures of fun:

> The very idea of a woman's rock band is looked upon as weird (. . .) a freak show good for a few giggles. (Meade 1972, p. 176)

In a world of sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll, women's role was to provide the sex. Just as the bourgeois public sphere functioned by excluding the feminine, rock culture as it developed in the 1960s and 1970s, despite its claims to revolutionary politics, worked in much the same way. It can, of course, be argued that music cultures have changed significantly since the early 1970s. However, as I will argue later in this paper, rock hegemony remains strong.

Secondly, just as the public sphere developed in distinction from the court, basing political practice on discussion rather than decree, rock music developed as distinct from Western art music. Its influences were the blues and jazz of African-American culture, the spirituality of Eastern religions, the culture of Native Americans. Its instruments were far removed from the orchestras of Western art music. Its musicians could rarely read music but learned their craft through imitating the blues guitarists of the past, and by solitary practice rather than through the formal institutionalised training associated with classical music. Musicians were proud of their self-taught status: classical training could stunt originality and creativity. Rock culture was a way of making 'serious' music that was free from the institutional and stylistic demands of art music.

This did not mean that it was understood by those who made it and those who enjoyed it as 'not art', however. Frith and Horne (1987) have documented the influence of the Art School on the development of British rock culture. Many of the influential musicians of this period, and their 1970s punk counterparts, were introduced, through their experience of Art School, to the avant-garde and the bohemian. In Frith and Horne's words: 'artistic self-consciousness started to feed into all aspects of pop' (p. 92). As pop became rock, eschewing art music practice most certainly did not mean eschewing *art.*

Moreover, like the bourgeois public sphere, rock culture was supported by sympathetic members of the art elite, whether this was Andy Warhol using rock music as part of his challenge within the field of high art (Cagle 1995), or musicologist Wilfred Mellers bringing the methods of high art criticism to bear on the music of the Beatles (Mellers 1973). So, although rock culture was not high culture, it *was* linked to the avant garde/bohemian internal critique of the high. As such, it was part of a tradition that, as Frith and Horne note, was distinctly anti-family. Frith and Horne (1987) argue that this does not mean that it was anti-woman (p. 90). I would argue, however, that it *was* anti-feminine. Most notable in the work of bohemian writers, but also apparent in the work of many rock musicians, were the assumptions that the private sphere of the home and domestic life was antithetical to masculine creativity, and that female sexuality was a temptation that could lure men from a properly masculine life (Cassady 1990).

It is important to note that the art sensibility of rock music culture meant that, like the emerging bourgeois culture of two centuries earlier, rock was at pains to

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distinguish itself from 'low culture'; in this case, the mass-produced, commercial popular music that was the youth music of the early 1960s. Rock distanced itself from the 'low' in a way that can be seen as very similar to the methods common within the bourgeois public sphere: by masculinising itself, and by introducing a particular way of enjoying music that eschewed the feminine, emotional and physical response of early 1960s pop fans in favour of cool, laid-back and thoughtful appreciation of the music. Where the public sphere had developed as a place of civility and manners, disinterested discussion and public debate, rock culture developed as a site of political and cultural discussion and debate that contrasted strongly to the simple, physical enjoyment of 'pop'. Although rock music was very different from Western art music, it *was* art.

This is not to say that rock culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s was not physical music. Many writers have argued strongly that rock was sexual in both form and content. This was, however, the time of the 'sexual revolution' and the counterculture. Sexual behaviour could be intellectualised as a political or artistic act. Rock, therefore, was music for people with a mind as well as a body – people who politicised bodily pleasure.

'Pop' music of the late 1950s and early 1960s, by contrast, was seen by those who criticised it, and by many of those who made it, as mindless music appealing to the bodies of those who enjoyed it, not to their minds. It was music of adolescent sexuality, of youthful energy, and *only* that. An evening at the disco was even compared to working out at a gym (Blum 1966). Music was judged on whether it had a catchy tune, whether it had popular appeal, whether you could dance to it. Even television programmes such as *Juke Box Jury* did not ask if a record was good but rather if it would sell, if it would be popular. This was not music for intellectual contemplation, for discussion of value and worth.

> Can any pop music be considered in terms of quality and judged musically superior to any other, as one judges symphonies or concert arias? (*The Times*, 16 July 1966).

The advent of rock music changed all this. It changed it by introducing a mind to the music as well as a body. The lyrics to songs became less and less the love songs or novelty songs of the earlier era. Eric Burdon, lead singer of The Animals, summed it up well when he suggested that:

> Eventually I would like to reach the stage where I didn't have to write about love and kisses and all that stuff. I wish I could write about really ultimate things. That's where I think all of us want to go really. All the groups seem to be heading towards a kind of pop music that deals with ultimate things. (Burdon cited in Marks 1968, no page numbers)

Music was to have meaning. It had to deal with issues more serious than young love. It was to be about 'ultimate things'. Burdon's language suggests strongly that this shift was gendered. The music he is distancing himself from – the music of 'love and kisses' – clearly connotes the feminine sphere. Moreover, his use of the phrases 'all of us' and 'all the groups' refers directly to the, predominantly male, makers of rock music and culture.

This was not the only way music changed at this time, however. Stress was placed on the skill and virtuosity of musicians. Bands wrote and performed their own music, no longer relying on professional songwriters. Even the drugs of choice that influenced the music were changing their focus from the body to the mind – from the physical high of speed to the 'mind-expanding' psychedelics. 'Rock' was not just a form of music but a culture, a politics, a lifestyle, based on informed

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discussion, critical awareness and political challenge. As the bourgeois public sphere before it, rock music culture was distinct from the high, supported by sympathetic members of the elite, and defined in contradistinction to the low. And the low from which it distinguished itself was inextricably linked to the feminine.

Thirdly, as with the bourgeois public sphere, rock culture created its own spaces and its own infrastructure for the production and discussion of rock music. It developed its own sites of discourse in clubs and universities. Women were not physically excluded from the sites of rock music as they had largely been from the coffee houses of the eighteenth century. As early feminist writers point out, however, they were excluded from the intellectual involvement in those spaces. They were there to be the physical, and only the physical.[1] Rock, too, developed its own magazines and newspapers through which informed discussion of culture and politics could be spread to a wider audience. In the discourses that emerged from the sites of rock culture, rock was neither part of the staid institutions of Western art music nor was it part of the mindless, mass music that had preceded it.

The clubs and festivals that were the sites of rock music performance in the late 1960s and early 1970s were not the youth clubs, theatres and coffee bars of the late 1950s and early 1960s. They were distinct, separate, new. Television music changed. In the UK, where there had been *Juke Box Jury* there was now *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. The paternalistic and somewhat condescending presenter now became the knowledgeable member of rock culture. David Jacobs had given way to Bob Harris. The content of the programmes was different too. The emphasis shifted from what might be a 'hit', or what would be popular, to performance by little known, obscure bands that did not aim for chart success. Magazines changed, and new ones were produced. *Valentine*, with its love stories based on the hits of the day, gave way to US publications *Rolling Stone* and *Crawdaddy*, with their political and philosophical dimension. The news-oriented UK magazines, *New Musical Express (NME)* and *Melody Maker* began to change their style. The new music magazines were for discussion, opinion and critique. They were not so much about 'news', or 'stars', as forums for debate about what music was, and what music meant. Writers such as Meltzer could get their philosophy papers published as rock criticism (Meltzer 1992, p. 86). It was no longer enough for popular music to have a good beat. To be good it needed to be something that could be talked about. It had to have meaning – political or artistic. It had to have a tradition, a history, a philosophy behind it. It had to be about 'ultimate things'. It had to be very obviously not feminine.

In the fourth instance, just as the bourgeois, public sphere became the springboard for bourgeois political power and eventually bourgeois hegemony, the rock, public sphere led to a hegemonic way of enjoying music that other genres followed. Very few genres that have emerged since the early 1970s have adopted the complete 'rock' model where music was given artistic, political *and* philosophical status. However, with the exception of mainstream pop, all genres have adopted some of these criteria for judging music, for deciding what makes a band or a record good. Punk, for example, rejected 'rock' virtuosity but insisted on the political significance of the music whether it was as 'dole queue rock' or anarcho/situationist disruption. Disco had no credibility as a genre until it could be seen as linked to gay identity politics and discussed in terms of camp or body politics (Dyer 1992A).

This is something that persists in both academic and popular discussions of popular music. Regev refers to the 'rockization' of different musical forms, where

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genres such as folk took on rock musical patterns to produce new sub-genres (Regev 1994, p. 97). It is not only in musical form, however, that this 'musical colonialism' (Ibid., p. 97) exists. Despite claims that rock is dead (Frith 1988) or at least seriously ill (Grossberg 1994), the high art sensibilities and abhorrence of commercialism unmediated by artistic value persist across a range of musical genres. Dance music,[2] seemingly the most bodily of musical forms, has become an art form, played as part of installations in art galleries and discussed in terms of its complexity and intelligence:

> [Drum and Bass] It's an *intelligent* music made for a *discerning* audience. (Tod Terry, cited in *The Observer*, 11 April 1999, emphasis mine)

Other contemporary genres maintain this position. Alec Empire can list philosopher Giles Deleuze among his heroes in *NME* (5 August 2000), while Sizzla can discuss the politics of repatriation (*NME*, 2 September 2000), and Chuck Dee can declare that what is wrong with hip hop is that it has become 'hip pop' (*Touch*, November 1996). From the hardcore politics and music of straightedge to the complex artistry of trance, popular music, if it is to be treated seriously, must have an underlying philosophy, it must be something that can be discussed and debated in terms of politics, lifestyle, art. It must have a mind; the bodily in the music must be available for intellectualisation. This is a move that is intrinsically gendered: the feminine body must be under the control of the masculine mind.

Finally, just as the culture that developed from the bourgeois public sphere maintained a horrified fascination with the 'low', so the genres that have developed out of rock culture constantly relate to the 'pop' low in terms of a sexualised fascination and revulsion. Magazines such as *NME* and *Melody Maker* regularly feature reviews of 'pop' bands that one would imagine to fall outside of their remit. They invariably discuss, and condemn, them in highly sexualised terms that often link a liking for 'pop' music to hormonal changes in adolescent girls. For example, at a Peter Andre concert, there is an 'efflorescence of underage oestrogen' as the fans are driven by 'gusset-moistening lust' (*NME* 31 May 1997). In a recent television programme about 'teen idols', Desmond Morris claimed that, after a Beatles' concert, the menstrual cycles of young women fans would become synchronised (*Top 10 Teen Idols*, Channel 4, 3 February 2001). If young women like commercial pop music they must do so for purely physical reasons; the mind can play no part.

A similar pattern can be seen on the letters pages of music magazines where readers' criticisms are spelled out in what is often crudely sexualised, and sexist, terms. This is particularly true when the bands in question are women:

> Can no one see that the Spice Girls are a bunch of talentless slappers. (*NME*, 11 January 1997)
> [The Spice Girls] They're clearly just a collection of 'need to get famous any way I can' tarts. (*NME*, 11 January 1997).
> [Destiny's Child] All you have to do is dress like a prostitute, wear wet make up and an expression that says 'give it to me'. (*NME*, 17 February 2001)

The criticisms, 'slappers', 'tarts', etc., almost invariably relate to commercialised sex. This is not restricted to any particular genre. If you are a woman at the 'pop' end of the genre you will be insulted in sexualised terms. So, for example, Lil' Kim is described as a 'corporate whore' in *Hip Hop Connection* (September 2000). As Lees has argued, such terms are frequently used as a way of controlling the behaviour, sexual and otherwise, of young women (Lees 1993). In the case of women involved

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in commercial pop music, however, this terminology is particularly pertinent. To be a woman, in rock hegemony, is to be sexual. To be sexual and produce music that is purely commercial easily transforms into prostitution and commercial sex.

If women pop singers are not directly sexualised by the serious music press, they are discussed in unflattering terms in relation to their physical appearance, as the following readers' comments illustrate. Daphne and Celeste, for instance, are 'ugly':

> How can anyone as ugly as those two fucking fat c-s possibly judge anyone on how they look? (*NME*, 10 June 2000)
> What are those ugly mutant monkeys talking about? (*Melody Maker*, 31 May 2000)

The three women of the group Hear'Say are 'scary', described as:

> Scarier than the picture of Kylie smiling at the NME Carling Awards where it looks like the top half of her face has been botoxed rock solid. (*NME*, 10 March 2001)

The writer manages, thereby, to insult the appearance of four women in one letter. And Hilary from JJ72 provokes the following comment:

> Judging from last week's cover shot she was an extra in Jim Henson's 80s' Muppet Fest The Dark Crystal. (*NME*, 3 February 2001)

Rather than simply being ignored or marginalised, as one might expect from 'serious' music magazines, women who make successful 'pop' music are a source of fascination, and their music and performance are likened to prostitution, while their bodies are described as grotesque. They are the feminine, 'low' other by which rock (or other generic) music is defined.

I want, at this point, to suggest that this is because of the carnivalesque nature of commercial pop music. Carnival, in early modern times, was a time of legitimate illegitimacy. For a day, or a week, the traditional order could be overturned. It was a time when the world was turned upside down and this was depicted in many drawings and other representations of the time. Cities were shown floating in the sky, men dressed as women and women dressed as men. Races were run where the winner was the one who came last. Tableaux were enacted where the 'fool', or an animal, was a scholar or a cleric, or where the peasant was a lord. Subjects that were otherwise forbidden could now be brought to the fore. It was a time of crude humour. Sex and the body were central, status was undermined, and no one was safe from the rotten egg or the sexual advance. Linked, in many countries, to Lent, it was a time of feasting rather than fasting. Pigs were depicted running around ready roasted with a knife stuck in their back. It was party time and stood in direct contrast both to the restrictions of Lent and to the deprivations of everyday life (Burke 1978). Even the highly commercialised carnival of today, in Rio de Janeiro, for example, pays tribute to this as spectacle replaces the everyday, and norms of gender and sexuality are transgressed.

Pop and carnival are interlinked in many ways. In the first instance, pop is music of the body, and not only the sexual body. It is physical in its performance, in its representation, in the response it provokes and in its self-conscious 'mindlessness'. Of course, all music involves physical activity, whether in front of an audience or in a recording studio. The groups I am talking about here, however, often do not make the *music* in the sense of the instrumental part of the song: they are primarily singers and dancers, and rarely play instruments. In live performance, their bodies are exposed to view rather than protected by instruments. Instrumentation is provided by backing tapes. They move about. They are dancers. They

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cannot maintain a stationary position. They perspire. Their bodies become sweaty. They become breathless. The performance is defined by its physicality.

Similarly, the visual representations in the 'pop' music press are both more frequent and more revealing than in their 'genre' music counterparts. Whereas publications such as *Melody Maker*, *NME*, *Q* or *Select* often publish pictures of artists, these are often only of the head, or of the head and upper body covered by an instrument. By contrast, pictures of both men and women that appear in *Smash Hits*, *TOTP* or *Live and Kicking* are often full-figure, standing or lying with legs splayed. Clothes may be pulled aside to reveal a bodily adornment such as a navel ring or a tattoo (e.g. *Smash Hits*, 6 September 2000, p. 3); trousers may be lowered (e.g. *TV Hits*, March 2000, p. 28); or chests may be bared (e.g. *Smash Hits*, 28 June 2000).

Furthermore, pictures in 'genre' music magazines are rarely simply about display. They are almost invariably linked to a more intellectual pursuit: they accompany interviews, reviews, or 'news' items. In 'pop' magazines this is not necessarily the case. Pictures may accompany articles but they do not have to. There is invariably a 'photo section' with few, if any, of those featured being mentioned elsewhere in the magazine. Pictures in pop magazines stand alone: they are there to be looked at, not to illustrate more serious commentary.

It is not only the performers that are involved in the physicality of pop, however. A constant image of fans of this type of music is of a girl or young woman, screaming, out of control, totally absorbed in the bodily experience. And the image that is reproduced time and time again is not usually of *one* girl but of a heaving, screaming 'mass' of femininity (Garratt 1990; Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs 1992). 'Pop' music of this type is about losing control; surrendering the rational mind to the body and the emotions. It is here that we can get some clue as to the (horrified) fascination in which such music is held by the 'serious' music press. From time to time it is argued in the music press and elsewhere that popular music *should* be about *jouissance*, and that rock criticism, both popular and academic, serves to render it mere *plaisir* (Reynolds 1990): the excitement of the music is lost in the intellectualisation of it. However, in the young women screaming and swooning at the sight of their favourite pop star, we get the epitome of the *jouissance* of 'pop'. We see what music appreciation could be like if we eschewed the mind. Yet, because of the art sensibilities that are an intrinsic part of rock hegemony, it is only by distancing music from this sort of bodily response that it can be taken seriously.

It is not only in its emphasis on the body, however, that pop music can be seen as carnivalesque. Pop music, as it is discussed in magazines like *Smash Hits*, is about the humorous undermining of established hierarchies. It simultaneously constructs a 'star' system and undermines the very system it constructs. This undermining is done in a variety of ways. In the first instance, stars featured in magazines such as *Smash Hits* are rarely afforded the dignity of their full name. For the most part they are identified by the group to which they belong. Articles and photographs refer simply to Darren Savage Garden, Lee 911, Shane Westlife, Paul 7, and so on (*Smash Hits*, 15 November 2000). This serves to take away their individual identity, and make them simply part of a collectivity rather than a person, or an artist, in their own right. And art demands an artist. It makes it difficult, therefore, to take them seriously. Others are renamed by the magazines. It was in teenage music magazines, for example, that the Spice Girls first became Ginger, Sporty, Scary, Posh and Baby. It is in *Smash Hits* that Christina Aguilera becomes Christina

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AquaLibra (*Smash Hits*, 9 August 2000) and Mariah Carey becomes Scary Mary or Mazza (*Smash Hits*, 17 November 1999).

Moreover, the irreverent names are accompanied by irreverent questions. *Smash Hits* asks the sort of questions that you will not find in the more serious magazines. 'Embarrassing moments' are a common theme, where stars talk about when they first learned about the 'birds and the bees' (*TV Hits*, November 2000), or how their trousers fell down in public (*TV Hits*, March 2000). Alternatively they may be asked about the mundane, everyday, bodily aspects of their lives: 'How much is a loaf of bread?' (*TOTP*, December 1996); 'How long does it take you to change a nappy?' (*TOTP*, January 1997), and so on. They may be given quizzes to see if, as with Mark Owen, they are 'still in touch with the real world' (*TOTP*, December 1996), or, as with 'Darren Savage Garden', if they are really as their name suggests: 'How savage is Darren?' (*Smash Hits*, 4 October 2000). So, people may be famous, successful and popular, but they cannot escape from the mundane and the everyday. They are not allowed to 'get above themselves', or to put on airs. There is even a regular feature in *Smash Hits* called 'Yowser look at those trousers', where stars are mocked for fashion gaffes and readers are encouraged to write in with examples of famous people in embarrassing outfits (see, for example, *Smash Hits*, 15 November 2000, p. 7, where 'AJ Backstreet' is shown wearing 'hideous trousers').

Moreover, this humorous undermining of status is not restricted to 'pop' stars. Eminem, discussed in *NME* as 'the greatest all-American pop anti-hero since Kurt Cobain' (*NME*, 12 August 2000), is 'a birrova naughty boy' in *Smash Hits* (9 August 2000). His unquestioned status as an 'artist' is further undermined by his being criticised for his 'strong language' and questioned about his responsibility to impressionable fans (*TOTP*, October 2000).

It is not only stars who are undermined, however. The whole system of categorising music falls by the wayside when we look at these magazines. Almost any genre of music can be featured as long as it is from the commercially successful part of the genre. Oasis or the Verve are welcome, as are Mary J. Blige, Sisqo and Lil' Kim. What is more, they are not segregated into discrete categories such as *NME*'s 'On the Decks' dance music section. Genre boundaries have no place for the girls and young women who make up the bulk of the readership for these magazines. In a recent *Smash Hits* poll (1996), for example, the Spice Girls came second in the 'soul music' category. It seems unlikely that they would have been considered in this category anywhere else. It could, of course, simply be that the voters did not understand the categorisation, or did not know what the genre 'soul' meant. I prefer, however, to think that they simply refused to be bounded by established categories. If someone is the best, they are the best in every category: boundaries cease to have meaning. This approach is mirrored in the magazines themselves, where pop, indie, soul, hip hop, even nu-metal bands are featured.

The carnivalesque therefore appears in pop magazines and pop music through the way in which they are concerned primarily with the physical, eschewing the mind. It appears through the humour and lack of respect that undermine existing hierarchies of stardom and of genre. Most of all, however, it appears in the way these magazines and performers 'turn the world upside down'. They turn the world upside down by placing the needs and desires of young women to the fore in a society that is still geared to the needs and desires of adult men.

The main role of the 'pop star' is to entertain. Dyer has argued that:

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> Entertainment offers us the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something that we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and may be realised. (Dyer 1992B, p. 18)

If they are to be successful, entertainers must meet the needs, the dreams and the fantasies of a better life that entertainment gives us. This means that pop stars, with a target audience of girls and young women, must put girls and young women centre stage, must focus on *their* needs rather than on the needs of the performer or of musical credibility. They must understand what is missing from the day-to-day lives of young women and provide it in fantasy form.

We must remember, however, that carnival was a time of legitimate illegitimacy. The world could only be turned on its head at specific times of the year. The challenge of carnival was controlled by the temporal limits that were placed on it. It could not pose a real threat to the social order. In fact the freedom of carnival could be seen as a way of maintaining social order by giving people a safety valve that helped them cope with the pressures of day-to-day hard work and deprivation.

A similar role can be seen for the carnivalesque of 'pop'. It, too, is temporally bounded, seen only as a fitting taste for *very* young women. The pleasures of 'pop' are something that we must learn to grow out of. After all, as everyone knows:

> When you reach 12 years old, you should begin to grow out of pop pap music. (Jerry Pounds, *NME*, 14 January 1996)

It is not simply the music that women are expected to grow out of, however. As Cheryl Cline puts it:

> For an adult woman to admit, in mixed company, to a crush on a rock star is to overstep the bounds of proper [adult] feminine behaviour (. . .). To as much as mention Bruce Springsteen's biceps is to leave yourself open to charges of immaturity, bad taste, political incorrectness and general mush-mindedness. (Cline 1992, p. 70)

It is not only the music that must be left behind, but the physical, the sexual, in the music. The feminine in music must be abandoned as women grow up. It is only permissible for girls and young women.

Pop music provides a brief taste of freedom for young women – a time when they are placed at centre stage, when the world is turned upside down. It is a time when they can let themselves go, enjoy the bodily pleasures of music and experience the *jouissance* of pop. It is the commercial nature of pop music that means that those who produce the music must take young women's pleasures seriously, and must give them what they want. As the target audience, for both the music itself and the magazines that support it, young women's needs and desires are of prime importance. This is something, however, that does not last: they must put it behind them as they grow up. The carnivalesque of pop can provide no real challenge to the masculine world of popular music until it becomes acceptable not to grow out of 'pop pap music', but to carry its pleasures with us into adult life.

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth Wilson suggests that the ambition of the female bohemian 'was not to be a ''Great Artist but to be a Great Artist's Mistress''' (Wilson 1982, cited in Frith and Horne 1987, p. 92).
2. Straw notes, too, that dance music culture associates the commercial with the feminine (Straw 1995), a point also made by Thornton (1995).

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