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**POPULAR MUSIC AND THE PUBLIC
SPHERE: THE CASE OF PORTUGUESE
MUSIC JOURNALISM**

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Abstract

Music journalism has been acknowledged as an important space of mediation between artists and consumers. Journalists and critics have played an historical role in the creation of discourse on popular music and are acknowledged by the music industry as an important referent in promotion strategies. Research on the subject has been mostly focused either on the relationship between music journalism and the wider music industry in which it operates or on its status as a field of cultural production. Little consideration has been given to the role played by music journalists in articulating popular music with wider political, social and cultural concerns.

This thesis will examine the case-study of Portuguese popular music journalism. It will address its historical evolution and current status by taking into consideration some dimensions, namely, the wider institutional contexts that frame the status of music journalism and how they work upon it, the ideologies and values realised in journalistic discourse, the journalists' relationship to the music industry (as represented by record labels/companies and concert promotion companies) and issues of interactivity with readers. The thesis will draw on theories of the public sphere and, to a lesser extent, on Bourdieu's notions of field, capital and habitus to assess the possibilities for music journalism to create reasoned discourse on

popular music and, therefore, contribute to wider debates on the public sphere of culture.

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Introduction

In a feature article, covering the upcoming gig in Lisbon from veteran pop band *Supertramp* published last year in a music supplement, the introductory strapline read, “the market has been devolved to aged forty-somethings. The generation that buys a house and a car, also buys compilations – like Supertramp’s – and sells-out concerts, like Supertramp’s. This was one of the bands they listened to in their youth before they reached positions of power in record companies and in the mass media” (in *Y*, 19/4/2002). The article then went on to explain Supertramp’s success in terms of their appeal to the aforementioned generation and to the recent loss of impact from younger audiences on sales figures. While not much was said about their music, the article was implicitly dismissive, alluding to their “irritating perfectionism” and lack of novelty (*ibid.*). About one week later, journalist Pedro Rolo Duarte responded to the article in his editorial for *DNa*, the culture/lifestyle supplement for *Diário de Notícias*. The editorial, titled “I like Supertramp. Am I allowed to?”, cheered the perfectionism and lack of novelty as good reasons to attend the gig (and, indeed, to have enjoyed it as was the case for the writer). He criticised the music journalist for his conformity to the idea, common among music journalists, that the 1970s were if anything to be dismissed. Furthermore, he claimed that the journalist

was not atypical of “a vast majority of journalists who despise the creativity of popular music for the masses and are consumed by the idea of novelty.” He went on writing that “beyond this idea are an array of complexes and prejudices towards the music market which makes the critics nest in small cultural ghettos, ignoring and dismissing everything out of their universe” (in *DNa*, 27/4/2002).

The argument could be contextualised in many ways. It may be seen as a conflict of values between agents in the field of culture and entertainment where the position occupied by music journalists conflicts with the position occupied by entertainment/lifestyle journalists. Alternatively, it can be seen as a conflict between competing titles, one being more populist (*Diário de Notícias*), the other more elitist (*Público*). It may be regarded as a conflict of generations between one journalist who lived his youth in the 1970s and whose taste was informed by the music of that period and another who grew up in the 1980s when the soundscape was much different from the previous decade. Or it can be stated more simply as an argument between a journalist who likes Supertramp and one who does not. But what is striking about the argument is that it reveals how popular music (like all popular culture in general) can be a site of argument and struggle between different actors. Additionally, it highlights the ways in which the articulation of opinions about and stances towards popular music are wrapped up

with broader cultural and political concerns in such a way that it can inform the reader while stimulating critical discussion. Or to put it more straightforwardly, if popular music is just entertainment, then what are these people arguing about?

Elvis Costello is rumoured to have said that “talking about music is like dancing about architecture”. Yet popular music is the subject of passionate discussion in a variety of contexts. People talk about it over a pint when gathering with friends in the pub. We read about it in the newspapers, either in general or specialised titles and rant and rave over the writer’s judgements on our favourite band. Music fans discuss it on the web through bulletin boards and forums, where they are able to connect with those who share similar tastes and interests. However, discussing popular music is often dismissed and trivialised as a mundane activity. There is an underlying assumption that popular music is something not to be taken too seriously.

This dismissal of popular music as having no significance beyond its entertainment value, while being a general feature in contemporary culture, is definitely more visible in Portugal than in Britain. The British have long acknowledged popular music as a key element of their cultural identity and it is often incorporated into discussions of public affairs.¹ There is an underlying assumption that popular music is important to debates on British identity - as well as

on the nation's economics.² Not surprisingly, popular music has been embraced as an area of study in academic departments while receiving considerable attention in the media too. In Portugal, on the other hand, while popular music, either of the dominant Anglo-Saxon or of Portuguese origin, plays an important role in people's lives, it is still dismissed and misrepresented in many ways and in many different contexts, from media policies to academic programs. Significantly, it is absent from state policies on culture.

Amidst the media that cover popular music in Portugal, music journalism has generally been acknowledged as a small yet important referent in music trends. It is not an overstatement to claim that music journalism has been important to Portuguese culture. If the history of Portuguese popular culture over the last thirty years (following the 1974 coup that installed the first democratic government) has been one of enduring and evergrowing acceptance and integration of foreign cultural repertoires (especially Anglo-Saxon and, to a lesser extent, French), then music journalism has played an important role in this process by keeping readers informed about the latest trends, scenes and acts happening abroad. However, music journalism has also been an important referent in coverage of local and national artists for the national music industry and for the consumers. Often national acts have been brought to the fore, in an

¹ See, for instance, Street (1997).

² See, for instance, Frith (2002).

inversion of market trends, which underlines the journalists' ideological status as a watchdog for the national music industry. On the other hand, music journalism has been responsible for bringing certain areas of popular music into the public domain. The so-called "leftfield" which can also be mentioned as the alternative or the margins of popular music have received coverage in the specialised press more than in any other media.

Although music journalism has received some attention as a subject within popular music and media studies, little has been said about its importance beyond the acknowledged "gatekeeping" role. There has been serious considerations on the role of music journalism towards the music industry (Stratton, 1982; Negus, 1992; Forde, 2001b) and depictions of music journalism/criticism as a field of cultural production (Lindberg et al., 2000). There are good historical accounts on the evolution of music journalism (Frith, 1978/1981; Toynbee, 1993, Shuker, 1994). What seems to be absent though is an analysis of the importance of music journalism as a site for public reasoning about popular music. If the impact of popular music, like popular culture in general, is arguably a political issue, then the question arises, what has been the role of music journalism in the politics of popular music?

In this thesis, I will examine the evolution of Portuguese popular music journalism. I will start from the assumption that music

journalism is a site of cultural struggle which reflects tensions in the production and distribution of popular music. I will then explore the notion of public sphere, drawing from Habermas' model of the bourgeois public sphere and from subsequent approaches, to consider the role of journalists in mediating the industry and the public. This approach will be complemented with Bourdieu's notions of field, habitus and capital. The case-study will focus mainly on four publications: the weekly music newspaper, *Blitz*, and the arts/culture supplements from daily newspapers, *Público* and *Diário de Notícias*, and from the weekly broadsheet newspaper, *Expresso*. Although music journalism may comprise a vast array of publications which include musicians' magazines, niche titles and teen magazines, I have focused on those four titles following criteria of mass circulation and type of coverage. Not only do the aforementioned titles have significant sales' figures³ but they also present a serious coverage of the music market, including interviews, articles and reviews on latest releases. Although some of the titles are not solely devoted to popular music, I will focus my attention on coverage of that particular area since this thesis aims to uphold that if popular music is to be accorded its rightful status - as a significant

³ See circulation figures in Appendix II.

cultural form - it must not be treated simply as a form of entertainment.⁴

Emphasis will be placed on the historical context of its production and reception and also on the particular social and professional conditions of production which have influenced coverage of popular music. Following Curran's remarks that historical research is the "neglected grandparent" of media studies (1991b, p.27), such an approach will illuminate a consideration of journalism as a public sphere, that is, as a space where reasoning on public issues is made and citizens are informed and led to make informed decisions about what courses of action to adopt (Dahlgren, 1991). Nevertheless, the original incarnation of the public sphere was itself a subject of historic examination (Habermas, 1962/1989).

While certain works have considered culture as an area significant for the public sphere⁵ the emphasis on public sphere as a political arena has prevailed. My argument will be that certain realms of reasoned discussion are not political as such but cultural and that popular music may contribute to those cultural realms of discussion. Over the last two years, as this research was carried out, a deep crisis in the Portuguese music industry took place and was acknowledged by everyone. Record sales decreased due to the global

⁴ Although in the Portuguese context the term "popular music" mostly refers to local traditional folk music formats, I will use it according to the Anglo-Saxon lexicon.

⁵ See, for instance, Mitchell (1992) and McGuigan (1996).

crisis, arguably caused by the spread of piracy. Record companies were, in many cases, forced to limit their catalogue and became reluctant to sign local artists. In view of this, music journalists were compelled to address the matter. Given this situation, it appeared that a public sphere for debating issues on popular music was desirable. As one of the interviewees put it “one of the biggest problems that I see in the Portuguese music milieu is the lack of dialogue. There is the typical ‘backstage’ phenomena where one gets to know things through the most informal channels, over a few drinks or in conversations between journalists (or between journalists and concert promoters) at a live gig. But there is no real discussion of the problems.” While the public sphere of popular music cannot be confined to journalism, this is indeed an important site for public reasoning.

I will define three criteria for an assessment of popular music journalism as part of the public sphere:

1. *Inclusivity*: I will consider this in relation to areas of coverage (genres, styles) and for opportunities of voicing different actors (journalists, artists, professionals for the music industry, readers). Pluralism of opinions and contents is crucial for music journalism to be part of the public sphere.

2. *Reasoned discourse on popular music*: the use of emotional discourse in coverage of popular music and its reading against the

“intrusion of analysis” has been addressed previously (Stratton, 1982, 1983). While both types of discourse are arguably central to “good” music journalism, I will consider the latter as being more important for making music journalism a part of the public sphere.

3. *Autonomy towards the market*: while in the course of this research I will argue that music journalism cannot be fully autonomous from the music industry, I will argue that there are different levels of compromise in the relationship between the journalists and the record companies. Similarly, there are different levels of compromise towards the politics of the media group or the newspaper organisation. Such independence is a marker of the public sphere. Autonomy in relation to the market is realised when journalists are able to define their agenda according to a set of criteria they have themselves devised as opposed to an agenda imposed from outside either by the media group or the record companies and concert promoters.

On the course of this research I will consider the public sphere as both a space for reasoned debate on issues that are relevant to citizens and a space where the interests of those citizens are expressed in a democratic way. By reasoned discourse, I mean articulating the issue in evidence – popular music – through a type of discourse that privileges the objective conditions and contexts of

production to the subjective impressions inherent to most music criticism.

The abovementioned criteria will be central to my research. However, they will be applied to a set of dimensions which will frame our analysis. Firstly, in order to understand popular music journalism it is necessary to assess its status in the wider fields of culture and journalism from which it derives certain features. It is important to consider how this particular type of journalism is perceived by the actors who occupy a position within it (the music journalists) and by those related to it (newspaper editors, professionals from the music industry). Other features are equally important for an examination of popular music journalism. The relation between music journalism and other media, especially radio, is revelatory insofar as media group policies towards popular music are concerned. It also exposes how media with different status merge and how this affects music journalism. The challenge posed by IT is a recent issue and one which requires further research in media studies. Here, I will consider how music journalists see such a challenge bearing in mind its undeniable impact on journalistic practices. Crucially, the status of music journalism is also defined by how far music journalists (especially editors) take notions of public interest into consideration when defining an editorial line and how

they are equated with the personal tastes and the interests of the journalist.

The professional relationship between the journalists and the music industry as represented by the record companies and concert promoters is a key dimension for an examination of journalism as a public sphere as it raises questions of independence in relation to journalistic practices and values. Music journalism operates with values that are distinctive from those of the record companies but because they depend on the record companies for access to the information, such relationship becomes one of struggle over contents. Record companies want their acts to be promoted in the press while music journalists want to write about what is of interest to themselves and to the public. Furthermore, I ask how can music journalism still be part of the public sphere when the relationship between journalists and record companies always involves a certain level of compromise from the journalist?

While journalists' own accounts are important they have to be supplemented by some examination of the evolution in journalistic discourse on popular music. An historical account, which takes into consideration the different types of coverage and discourse, is important in assessing whether two crucial markers of the public sphere are met. These are inclusivity and the creation of reasoned discourse. By situating different types of coverage and discourse into

the different historical contexts (the music and general press and the music industry), one is able to grasp the conditions which make feasible the existence of a music journalism which is in line with the idea of public sphere. I wish to examine the extent to which those contexts create possibilities for the use of reasoned discourse and for the definition of inclusive and plural editorial lines in music journalism.

Finally, the issue of inclusivity led me to address another issue: interactivity in music journalism. Special attention will be given to online communication and the possibilities it raises for the making of new public spheres or as a complement to the existing ones. Online communication in forums and discussion groups allows the creation of new types of discourse whose legitimation rests on interest and participation, not on authority.

A brief outline of the thesis clarifies our approach to the aforementioned dimensions. In the first chapter, I will frame the subject of this research, first, by going through an examination of the main debates on the politics of popular music, second, by examining critically the body of work on popular music journalism. I will also consider certain key works on the sociology of journalism as a good point of entry for such an examination. Drawing critically from the literature review, I will propose an approach to Portuguese music journalism in line with the notion of public sphere.

In chapter two, I will present an historical account of Portuguese music journalism and compare it to the British and American cases on which there is more literature available. I will take four publications as the core of my empirical research.

In chapter three, I will give an account of the methodology used in the course of this research and why the choice of methods was the most suited to the aims of this research.

In chapter four, I will assess the status of Portuguese music journalism by taking into consideration the aforementioned issues: its relationship with other media, with special emphasis on synergies with radio; its relationship with the wider fields of culture and journalism; the challenge posed by new technologies; and the importance of personal taste in opposition to the importance of public interest in the definition of editorial lines.

In chapter five, I will consider the relationship between journalists and the music industry as represented by record labels and concert promotion companies with emphasis on the growing influence of press and media-officers in this relationship. Although press and media-officers do not have a direct, clear-cut influence on what is published in newspapers, the relationship is complex and requires serious examination. The management of this relationship by the journalist is crucial for the autonomy of music journalism and for its realisation as part of a public sphere.

In chapter six, I will consider three distinct periods of coverage of popular music – 1985-1988, 1992-1995 and 1999-2002 – to analyse the evolution in discourses. It will be argued that the different institutional contexts (the press and the music industry) were determining factors in the evolution from a type of ideological/militant journalism (1980s) to consumer guides - or music journalism centred around the idea of rendering a service to the consumer (mid-1990s onwards).

In chapter seven, the findings from the previous two chapters will be substantiated through a case-study of coverage of Portuguese music. Different models of music journalism developed since the 1980s will again be considered in order to contextualise the different ideologies and practices of music journalists towards Portuguese music and the crisis in the national music industry.

Chapter eight deals with the issue of interactivity and the contribution of IT to the public sphere of popular music through a case-study of an online forum launched by a music supplement. The contents and impacts of the forum will be assessed in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of interactivity in improving public discussion on issues regarding popular music.

In chapter nine, I will draw on the key findings from the previous chapters to fully evaluate the usefulness of public sphere theories to the history of Portuguese popular music journalism. I will

take into consideration the different notions of the public sphere from the model proposed by Habermas (1962/1989) to its subsequent revisions I will also consider how the notion has been treated in relation to other types of journalism. As popular music has been excluded from debates on the public sphere, I will pay attention to the way popular music has been devalued as entertainment in opposition to the “serious” consideration which of high culture and classical music are afforded.

By playing an important role of mediation between different interests, music journalism is simultaneously a site of struggle and a site where those struggles are articulated. This ambivalence both hampers and enacts music journalism’s status as a public sphere. Therefore, one needs to consider journalism as an institutional domain of mediation between artists and audiences to fully grasp the position of popular music in the realm of reasoned debate. Later in the chapter I will consider Bourdieu’s reflexive model as a necessary complement to the notion of public sphere.

Chapter One

Framing the subject: Popular music and popular music journalism

In this chapter, I will frame the subject of my research by taking into consideration its two dimensions: popular music and journalism. My purpose is, therefore, two-fold. First, I will draw on debates about popular music to consider how popular music has been articulated with wider issues in a way that suggests that over and above being mere entertainment, popular music can be taken as an important site of cultural struggle between social groups. I will then draw from literature on the broader sociology of journalism and on popular music journalism to evaluate how music journalism has been treated as a subject within journalism and media studies.

The politics of popular music: from Adorno to the globalisation debate

Before approaching the institutional domain of music journalism and the possibilities for its participation in the public sphere, one must consider the conditions in which popular music can be considered a political subject. As it will be stressed further ahead, popular music has been generally absent from debates on the public

sphere. However, there is an important body of work in the field of popular music studies which acknowledges and legitimates the importance of popular music as a site of cultural struggle. This body of work has been part of wider cultural debates and has been given an institutionalised status through the publishing of readers (Frith & Goodwin, 1990; Frith et al., 2001; Hesmondhalgh & Negus, 2002) among other key works that will be addressed. An examination of the debates on popular music is useful to consider how popular music has been articulated with wider issues in a way that suggests that over and above being mere entertainment, popular music can be a political matter. At the background of this examination are, therefore, two key questions: why is popular music political? And why being political it can be part of the public sphere?

The political relevance of popular music in certain historical contexts has been much commented upon and is now part of the history of popular culture and of social and political movements. There is agreement that popular music played a crucial role in the emergence of a self-contained, autonomous youth culture in the 1950s as popular music was central to youth's consumption practices (Frith 1978/1981). The importance that popular music had in the 1960s counter-culture movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-Vietnam War protests and the then emerging rock festivals (most notably in Woodstock and the Isle of Wight) has

been highlighted (Middleton & Muncie, 1982; Street, 2001). In that period the work of protest folk singers (Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs) was overtly political, addressing the dominant political and cultural values of the establishment. Later in the 1960s, the psychedelic movement in America and Britain disrupted social (as well as musical) conventions and widened the gap between the values of the generation in power and those of a powerless but otherwise creative and rebellious youth (Middleton & Muncie, 1982).

Ten years after, the punk movement in Britain was celebrated in the British press and articulated by cultural theorists as another political moment in the history of pop, one expressing through its distinctive music and style a form of working-class resistance (Hebdige, 1979). In the 1980s a new rock conscience was to be seen when pop artists became engaged with social causes like famine in Africa (Band Aid and the Live Aid event), human rights (the Amnesty Tour, concert for Nelson Mandela), racism (Rock Against Racism) and the farm crisis in the USA (Farm Aid) (Street, 1986, 2001). Meanwhile, the spread of an alternative music industry diverted the politics of popular music from its social and cultural effects to the means by which it was produced. The significance of rap and hip-hop from the late 1980s through to the 1990s put the politics of popular music back on the street bringing issues of race

and geographical identities to the fore in cultural debates (Gilroy, 1993; Rose, 1994; Mitchell, 1996, Bennett, 2000). Recent debates concerning globalization and corporate power have included pop music on both sides of the equation, either as a source of resistance or as an instrument of corporate domination at a global scale (see McKay, 1998; Klein, 2000).

In a comprehensive and overarching account of the relationship between popular music and politics, Street (1986) examined the contexts in which popular music is political or, conversely, the contexts in which politics have incorporated popular music into their realm. He stresses how politics also come to the fore when people try to use or control pop or when taking into consideration the decision-making processes in the making, manufacturing and distribution of popular music. The aforementioned views have, therefore, to be complemented by a more in-depth examination of the main arguments that have placed popular music in the wider debates regarding the politics of popular culture.

A review of such theoretical approaches leads us to four main facets of the debate. First, a focus on the politics of the music industry where the determinants and constraints of music production are generally acknowledged to be more important in the creation of meaning than the contexts of reception (Hirsch, 1972/1990; Chapple

& Garofalo, 1977; Harker, 1980; Negus, 1992; Burnett, 1996; Toynbee, 2000). Second, a focus on reception where it is argued that audiences play, to a greater or lesser extent, an active role in the creation of meaning in popular music (Riesman, 1950/1990; Hebdige, 1979; Chambers, 1985; Willis, 1990; Grossberg, 1992; Rose, 1994). Third, a focus on geographical space as the main site where the politics of popular music are scrutinised (Finnegan, 1989; Cohen, 1991; Gilroy, 1993; Mitchell, 1996; Bennett, 2000). Finally, some works have emphasised, in even measures, both industry and audiences. This is the case with Adorno (1941/1990), Frith (1978/1981) and Street (1986).

Rather than being simply analytical, these divisions have framed ideological debates on popular music as both a form of popular culture and a medium in the post-war age. Many authors have expressed a concern that popular music (as popular culture in general) cannot be detached from specific ideological forces that have operated at certain times, and put an emphasis on the conditions of production. An attention to production and to its effects on audiences was first addressed in the work of Adorno who gave the first comprehensive analysis of popular music as a form of mass culture (1941/1990). He distinguishes popular music from serious music by developing the idea that meanings and patterns – both musical and lyrical - in popular music are “preset” in the way it is

produced. He refers to *standardization* as the process through which a popular song, from its overall form to details, is produced in order to be effortlessly recognised and enjoyed by its listeners. Standardization in popular music is, thus, a manipulation process in which the meanings are created before the act of listening, turning reception into a standardized reaction. Music meanings are conditioned, “pre-digested” and “heard for the listener” (ibid., p.306), which leaves little or no space for an individualized response.¹ For Adorno “popular music commands its own listening habits” (ibid., p.309). This has its consequences in the economy of the music industry as well. In order to keep the consumer constantly immersed within the music and distracted from the fact that music is standardized, the industry has to sweep the music market with new products. It is an endless cycle that serves the needs of the industry perfectly as well as being necessary in order to avoid boring the consumer. Finally, Adorno refers to popular music as a *social cement* as popular music’s specific rhythm and emotional patterns

¹ Adorno mentions *pseudo-individualization* as the desired effect generated by standardization: “By pseudo-individualization we mean endowing cultural mass-production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself. Standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line by doing their listening for them, as it were. Pseudo-individualization, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is already listened to for them, or ‘pre-digested’.” (ibid., p.308). The process of pseudo-individualization produces in the listener the illusion that he is free to create meaning from his listening experience, when, in fact, all consumption of popular music is passive as standardization leaves no space for active or creative consumption (ibid.).

enhance an adjustment to the mechanisms of everyday life and, thus, to the prevailing structures of power (ibid., p.312).²

Adorno's work is in line with most of the thinking of the Frankfurt School from which it emerged. The body of work that came out of this school expressed a general concern with the effects of mass culture and to how the new culture industries fitted the political forms of domination and mass control of both authoritarian (the Nazi regime in Germany) and liberal, capitalist societies (e.g. the United States where Adorno relocated in 1933 when the Nazi party seized power). There were important technological developments with the increasing popularity of recorded music and radio broadcasting that amounted to the commodification of popular music. These had a major impact in its production, distribution and consumption. Adorno saw these developments as posing a threat to the potential for political critique and emancipatory social change he saw in music and in culture in general (Negus, 1996). On his view, popular music contributed to social passivity and enhanced manipulation from authoritarian or capitalist states.

² Adorno distinguishes two forms of mass-behaviour towards music that arise from standardization: the "rhythmically obedient type" and the "emotional type" (ibid., p.313). The former one is based on the idea that the time unit of the music – the beat – creates obedience and prevents the listener from being distracted by "individualizing" aberrations. The "emotional type" is compared to a type of movie spectator, the one that seeks emotional release in Hollywood movies when he realises that wish-fulfillment in the characters is illusory. The same way, "the actual function of sentimental music lies rather in the temporary release given to the awareness that one has missed fulfilment" (ibid., p.313).

While Adorno gives, arguably, the first theoretical account on the politics of popular music, his was a negative view. Most post-Frankfurt School approaches have been critical of Adorno's theory, while maintaining deference to the inner quality of his work. The most obvious criticism is analytical: Adorno ignores music consumption as meaningful activity that pluralises the meaning of texts. Riesman (1950/1990) claimed there were two major types of listeners among teenagers: a *majority* which had indiscriminating tastes that could be easily identified with Adorno's passive consumers, and a minority group which adopted a critical and questioning attitude towards music. Their active, discriminating attitude could be seen in the use of "private language" to discuss their favourite artists and types of music and their dislike for "commercial" music (ibid.). In this sense, though most music consumption is passive, there is space for political struggle in the tastes of a minority that positions itself against the dominant taste.

The active role of audiences in constructing meanings from popular music was noticeable in the work of Becker (1963/1991) who first addressed the key importance of music in the making of subcultural identities. The formation of deviant, subcultural values in the context of a community of aspiring jazz musicians highlights the importance of music practices for social status drawing a line between deviant subcultures and the outside world. In Britain, the

cult figure of the pop singer was used to highlight the idea that a “younger generation”, as an active minority, was in opposition to the dominant social structure of the older generation (Hall & Whannel, 1964/1990). Rather than being constrained to a minority of young consumers, creative consumption was a property of the teenage culture, now well acknowledged through media and academic speech:

The audience will buy his records if they like his performances, and thus satisfy the provider’s need to keep sales high; but they will also regard the pop singer as a kind of model, an idealized image of success, a glamorized version of themselves. (ibid., p.29)

Yet, the authors were cautious enough not to lose sight with the role of the culture industry:

How necessary it is to view this phenomenon both from within and without teenage culture itself. And this consideration brings us back to one of the basic problems in popular culture – does the audience get what it likes (in which case, are those likes enough?) and needs (in which case, are the needs healthy ones?), or is it getting to like what it is given (in which case, perhaps tastes can be extended)? (ibid., p.37).

Through the 1970s many authors adopted a neo-Gramscian approach to popular music. This was partly due to the acknowledged impact of subcultural theory from the Birmingham Centre for

Contemporary Cultural Studies on popular music studies. At the core of this approach was Gramsci's idea of culture as a site of struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. Gramsci used the term hegemony to "refer to the way in which dominant groups in society through a process of 'intellectual and moral leadership' win the consent of the subordinate groups in society" (Storey, 1997, p.13). Hegemony is essentially rooted in class-struggle. It refers to the way in which certain aspects of subordinated classes reproduce the values of the dominant class, to how these values are modified according to the needs of the subordinate classes and to how the structures of the dominant ideology incorporate dissident values so that they will not constitute a threat to the status quo. Although ultimately having a political end, hegemony requires leadership in the cultural sphere. Hegemony is organised by a qualified group, an "élite of men of culture, who have the function of providing leadership of a cultural and general ideological nature" (in Storey, 1997, pp.125-126). That is the role of the *organic intellectuals* (Gramsci, 1947/1995; Bennett et al, 1981). Gramsci identified these *organic intellectuals* as individual agents while cultural studies theorists, drawing on authors like Althusser, have made the point that the term applies best to the "ideological state apparatuses" of which the mass media and the culture industries are a key element (Althusser, 1971; Hall & Jefferson, 1976).

Though Gramsci was aware of the inextricable link between political and cultural hegemony, he did not explore in depth how the cultural sphere could be a site of political struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. However his writings provided a key, inspiring framework for the study of popular culture. Cultural theorists used the formerly political concept of hegemony to explain the nature and politics of popular culture. Popular culture instead of being something static - either being the output of the culture industries or the meaning conveyed by active consumers - was seen as a site of resistance/consent for subordinate groups and incorporation for dominant groups. Popular culture is, therefore, neither imposed from above (as claimed by the Frankfurt School tradition) nor spontaneously created from below (as claimed by the culturalists in their romanticized view of the working-class) but the subject of negotiation between the two forces. A Neo-Gramscian theorist, Bennett has referred to popular culture as a “force field” (1986/1998, p.219) where contradictory pressures and tendencies are disputed:

The field of popular culture is structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony and by forms of opposition to this endeavour. As such, it consists not simply of an imposed mass culture that is coincident with dominant ideology, nor simply of spontaneously oppositional cultures, but is rather an area of negotiation between the two within which – in different particular types of popular culture – dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values and elements are ‘mixed’ in different permutations. (ibid., p.221)

In the first serious examination of the popular music industry, Frith (1978/1981) used a Neo-Gramscian approach to considerable extent when addressing the balance between the music industry and its audiences in the creation of meaning. He proposes the foundations for a sociology of rock music that succeeds in solving the contradictions and tensions that exist in popular music as medium and which are part of popular culture in general: between production and consumption; between authenticity and commodity; and between mass-consumption and individual/group experiences.

Rather than deducing the meaning of rock from the processes of its production and consumption, we have to try to make sense of rock’s production and consumption on the basis of what is at stake in these processes – the meanings that are produced and consumed. (ibid., p.11)

Contesting Adorno’s arguments, Frith claimed that the relation between the industry and the audiences was one of cultural and symbolic struggle. The industry exploited the audience and the

artists, but did not control the meaning of the music as youth makes different uses of its music experiences. Both groups fought for the control of cultural meaning and symbols. Contesting the musicology tradition that puts an emphasis on the music text, he argued that musical meaning, rather than being a matter of sounds and words, had to be understood in relation to culture and context, and especially to the wider spheres of leisure and entertainment:

The problematic issue that runs through the history of all forms of popular music since the development of industrial capitalism is the relationship between music as a means of popular expression and music as a means of making money. (ibid., p.38)

The Neo-Gramscian approach to the study of popular culture was further developed during the 1970s in the work from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. However the body of work which came to be known as subcultural theory (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1978; Hebdige, 1979) did, to a great extent, ignore popular music in the repertoire of practices and elements of style that shaped subcultural identities. However, Hebdige in his seminal work on subcultural style as a form of resistance (1979) used popular music as an element - among others - in the ensemble of stylistic traits that defined late seventies' British subcultures.

Hebdige situates subcultural style in the context of the struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. The originality of his work lies in the focus on style rather than practices as a form of symbolic mediation between youth subcultures and the dominant culture - which Hebdige defines as the *mainstream*. The struggle between the mainstream and these forms of subordinated culture is presented at a semiotic level. He draws from Barthes to argue that cultural hegemony is maintained through the use of signs that are universally accepted. Subcultural style comes as a coherent and often spectacular set of signs whose meanings escape those expressed at an hegemonic level. The relation between subcultural style and the dominant culture implies the concept of *bricolage* (Levi-Strauss). Hebdige uses the term to describe the way subcultures recontextualize objects from mass culture into their own ensemble, creating new meanings out of (though actually drawing from) dominant ones. Hebdige mentioned the punk and reggae music styles as playing a key role in the whole punk and rasta aesthetics. Punk music merged with style and dancing to signify noise and chaos. Such coherent, homological elements were disruptive towards the conventional ways of making music, dancing and dressing (Negus, 1996). Reggae as the musical form connected to Rastafarianism comes as a source of integration and assertion of black identity in the context of post-war Britain.

The term *articulation* developed by Hall (1981/1998) reflected the concern with the many possibilities which popular culture texts offer for the creation of meaning. Hall argues that cultural texts and practices are not inscribed with meaning, guaranteed once and for all by the intentions of production (in Storey, 1997).³ Cultural texts are, therefore, defined by Hall as a battlefield “where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost” (1981/1998, p.460). An emphasis on the possibilities for popular music to articulate disruptions in society could be seen in Chambers (1985). In a narrative account of popular music from the 1950s to the mid 1980s, Chambers claimed that popular music has been used to respond to and to articulate wider social and counter-cultural events and was central to audiences’ and listeners’ lives. He stressed that innovations in popular music resulted in cultural struggles where previous aesthetic criteria and judgements were challenged. Other post-Birmingham studies still invested popular music with the potential for empowerment and resistance although at a more micro-level than the broad world of pop/rock suggests (Wicke, 1990; Rose, 1994).

³ Hall cites the example of the popular press: “The language of the *Daily Mirror* is neither a pure construction of Fleet Street ‘newspeak’ nor it’s the language which its working-class readers actually speak. It is a highly complex species of linguistic *ventriloquism* in intricate with some elements of the directness and vivid particularity of working-class language. It cannot get by without preserving – in the ‘popular’. It

The split between audiences and production in theories of popular culture was an ideological one and no other period than the 1980s and the coming to power of conservative governments in Britain in America serves better to exemplify the competing discourses over the meaning of popular culture. McGuigan (1992) points out how the New Right's success which could be seen in Britain and other Western countries "had much to do with how it worked upon real conditions and desires, addressing ordinary people's material aspirations and stressing the sense of personal freedom and choice engendered by the market" (p.113). In face of this, "criticism became boring for some, and the moment arrived to revise radical wisdom" (idid., p.113). The effect of this on academic approaches was, according to some authors (Grossberg, 1992, McGuigan, 1992, Storey, 1997), a lack of criticism of the relation between texts/audiences and the larger contexts in which the texts were produced. Popular culture studies shifted to a celebration of texts (the post-structuralist approach) and reception (cultural populism).

Populist accounts (Fiske, 1989; Willis, 1990) celebrated the power of audiences - though little empirical research was done to sustain inclusive ideas of empowerment and resistance. While Fiske ignored popular music in his account of popular resistance, Willis'

wouldn't get very far unless it were capable of reshaping popular elements into a species of canned and neutralised demotic populism" (Hall, 1981/1998, p.461).

concept of *symbolic creativity* (1990, 1998) leaned on an array of elements, including popular music, from the ordinary, everyday life of the young, to assert the power of people in the struggle over meaning. *Symbolic creativity* relates to a set of expressions, signs and symbols through which individuals and groups seek creatively to establish their presence, identity and meaning:

Personal styles and choice of clothes; selective and active use of music, TV and magazines; decoration of bedrooms; the rituals of romance and subcultural styles; the style, banter and drama of friendship groups; music-making and dance. Nor are these pursuits and activities trivial or inconsequential. In conditions of late modernization and the widespread crisis of cultural values they can be crucial to the creation and sustenance of individual and group identities. (ibid., p.2)

Willis opposes the symbolic creativity of everyday life to the institutionalized forms of art that are dissociated from living contexts. The young, who feel strangers to those institutionalized art forms, create their own meanings in the more informal context of everyday life.⁴ He claims that symbolic creativity is located in the

⁴ This opposition has an historical background which saw the welfare state becoming the vehicle for the institutionalization of high culture instead of democratising culture. Willis argues that the persistence of this division created conditions for the emergence of arts movements that attempted at democratizing art by bringing it into the realm of common experience. However the relationship these new cultural formations bear to common culture is ambiguous. Being an alternative to "institutionalized" high art they locate themselves somewhere between "a very much debased version of elite culture or of mass culture passively consumed" (1998, p.549). They are often created to fulfil political agendas. Their search for the expanding of publics often draws them from creative cultural production.

culture of everyday life and somehow escapes the struggles between institutionalised and alternative notions of art. Consumption, rather than being seen as an exploitation of the working-class in the leisure sphere, is an active process whose play includes work (Willis, 1998). This symbolic work cannot, then, be separated from the expansion of commercial relations and from consumption. It is the ideology of consumption that creates conditions for informal cultures to "seek escape and alternatives in capitalist leisure consumption" (ibid., p.551). Willis criticizes the "crude Marxist" emphasis on cultural meanings being "preset" in commodities by stressing the importance of contexts, circumstances and, ultimately, of creative consumption. Youth culture is mostly based on the creative consumption of television, videos, music and magazines. This creative consumption rather than being at the end of the usual triplet of production, reproduction, reception, can also "be the start of a social process which results in its own more concrete productions, either of new forms or of recombined existing ones" (ibid., p.552).

Furthermore, Willis argues that symbolic creativity bridges the gap between production and consumption of popular music, something which is absent in more institutionalised art forms:

Most musical activity, then, begins as and from consumption, from the process of listening to music. But consumption itself is creation. The cultural meaning of Bros or Morrissey, house or hip-hop, Tiffany or Tracy Chapman isn't simply the result of record company sales campaigns, it depends too on consumer abilities to make value judgements, to talk knowledgeably and passionately about their genre tastes, to place music in their lives, to use commodities and symbols for their own imaginative purposes and to generate their own particular grounded aesthetics. (1990, p.60)

Some authors argued that populist readings lapsed into the same biased arguments of subcultural theory (Frith, 1991/1995, 1996; McGuigan, 1992; Fornas 1995; Thornton, 1995a). They generalised resistance to vague, taken-for-granted concepts such as *the people* as opposed to *the power-bloc* (Fornas, 1995) or reduced popular culture to a flat, undifferentiated cultural form (Thornton, 1995a). McGuigan (1992) talks of an “uncritical populist drift in cultural studies” (in Storey, 1997, p.203) which over powers the consumer and, by doing so, gives currency to the free-market philosophy of right-wing politics (McGuigan, 1992; Storey, 1997). It was also argued that cultural populism fostered the postmodern denial of value judgements and cultural worth due to its uncritical celebration of popular consumption, as what is “good” and what is “bad” is open to dispute and cultural hierarchies are ignored (Frith, 1991/1995, 1996; McGuigan, 1992). The point is that cultural populism has the double-edged effect of, simultaneously – and by

privileging consumption over production (in the sense that consumption *is* production) - denying the value and cultural worth of objects and asserting the superiority of popular taste, in a neat inversion of Adorno's elitist strand:

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the more celebratory the populist study, the more patronizing its tone, an effect, I think, of the explicit populist determination to deny (or reverse) the usual high/low cultural hierarchy. If one strand of the mass cultural critique was an indictment of low culture from the perspective of high art (as was certainly the case for Adorno), then to assert the value of the popular is also, necessarily, to query the superiority of high culture. (Frith, 1996, p.16)

Both McGuigan (1992) and Grossberg (1986/1990, 1992) claimed the need to translate the new hegemonies that emerged with the New Right's success in Britain (in the case of McGuigan) and Neo-Conservatism in America (in the case of Grossberg) into the study of popular culture. McGuigan suggested a closer dialogue between cultural studies and the political economy of culture, one which avoids a narrow concern with the interpretation of cultural texts and lays more emphasis on the material relations of power (Storey, 1997). Grossberg suggested a return to a neo-Gramscian approach, informed by the new postmodern context, in which the cultural critic finds new ways of articulating cultural phenomena,

such as rock music, into an oppositional politics “rather than dismissing them as conservative, selfish, merely entertainment, or consumerist” (1986/1990, p.123). Although recognising that the contexts of cultural production are too diverse to pin down easily and often difficult to talk about in a coherent way, Grossberg asserts the need to analyse events by reconstructing the network of relationships within which they are articulated, suggesting that the focus of analysis (the event) is preceded and articulated by, rather than disconnected from, its background (Grossberg, 1992).⁵

Some of the post-1970s’ subcultural theory approaches to popular music diverged from populism although they remained in line with the former Neo-Gramscian stance. It stressed the inevitability of *incorporation* as the dominant forces in the market co-opt subcultural resistance for consumption and profit (Frith, 1988; Grossberg, 1986/1990, 1992; Reynolds, 1990a; Storey, 1997). As Hebdige (1979) explained “youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must end by establishing new sets of conventions, by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones” (p.96). Or, as Hall (1981/1998) has put it, “today’s cultural breaks can be recuperated as a support to tomorrow’s dominant system of values and meanings” (p.463).

⁵ Or as Storey claims, to understand popular culture from a neo-Gramscian perspective, it “requires vigilance and attention to the details of the production, distribution and consumption of culture” (1997, p.129).

Both Frith (1988) and Grossberg (1986/1990) claimed the “sell-out” – and consequent death - of rock as the potential for rebellion within popular music was contained by the industry and incorporated into hegemonic discourse.⁶ Grossberg illustrates his argument with the example of popular music in the post-punk era. He argued that rock music, which was once a cultural force in the definition of youth, had, along with other forms of discourse, dismantled and undermined youth as a social category. Punk was a phenomenon which was determined by a period where traditional patterns of music production and consumption were saturated. What happened in its aftermath was a multiplication of styles based on differentiation rather than class or generation. Could they be resistant? Grossberg claims that style and culture were commodified and incorporated into hegemonic discourses through publicity, fashion and the media. Rock’n roll become another postmodern sign that “not only energises new possibilities within everyday life, it places that energy at the center of a life without meaning” (ibid., p.117). Cultural industries have, therefore, incorporated the

⁶ Storey uses the example of reggae music and rastafarian culture to illustrate the process of incorporation: “Bob Marley, for instance, had international success with songs articulating the values and beliefs of Rastafari. This success can be viewed in two ways. On one way it signals the expression of the message of his religious convictions to an enormous audience word-wide (...) On the other hand, the music has made and continues to make enormous profits for the music industry, promoters, Island Records, etc. What we have here is a paradox in which the anti-capitalist politics of Rastafari are being ‘articulated’ in the economic interests of capitalism: the music is lubricating the very system it seeks to condemn; and yet the music is an expression of an oppositional (religious) politics, and may produce certain political and cultural effects.” (Storey, 1997, p.127)

oppositional, anti-structure symbols and these have acquired a role of regulating youth in its transition to adulthood.

The relationship between rock and roll and youth has become contradictory. Rock and roll exists not within the rise of youth but rather at the cusp between the rise and the decline of a particular construction of youth, one that so privileges its transitional status as to reify and celebrate transitions. The rock and roll apparatus attacks the very conditions of its existence. (ibid., p.122)

Rock became a mere form of entertainment, aligned with many other leisure activities. In other cases there was scepticism from the media who claimed that rock was dead (Grossberg, 1986/1990; Reynolds, 1990a). Grossberg suggests that the emergence of new technologies turned rock music into just another moment within the larger ensemble of leisure activities that are offered to youth (1986/1990). Retreating into a more deterministic strand, after his earlier claim that the music industry did not control the meaning of music, Frith (1988) argues that “what music means and what we hear as authentic is already determined by the technological and economic conditions of its production” (p.130) and that “what is possible for us as consumers – what is available to us, what we can do with it – is a result of decisions made in production, made by musicians, entrepreneurs and corporate bureaucrats, made according to governments’ and lawyers rulings, in

response to technological opportunities.” (ibid., p.6). It is, therefore, suggested by subsequent authors that there is a complementary relationship between music as a commodity and music as a form of art expression (Frith, 1988; Stratton, 1982, 1983; Negus, 1995, 1996). Whereas previously Frith had suggested an even split of attention between industry and audiences (1978/1981), he now clearly advocated a shift to an emphasis on music production (1988).

Previous works had focused on the importance of the means and contexts of music production (Hirsch, 1972/1990; Peterson, 1976; Chapple & Garofalo, 1977) differentiating themselves from the celebratory tone in audience and subcultural studies. Such studies, namely Chapple and Garofalo’s were more in line with a negative view on the evolution of popular music as a cultural form, as they stressed the mechanisms of co-optation and control taken by the music industry. A focus on production, which was overlooked to a great extent throughout the 1980s - with the exceptions of Wallis & Malm (1984) and Street (1986) - was brought back to the fore in the 1990s, although with a more pluralist approach to the industries, institutions and practices that shape popular music (Negus, 1992; Manuel, 1993; Burnett, 1996; Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Toynbee, 2000).

In parallel with this new focus on music production, an interest in the local reception/production of popular music emerged and

developed through the 1990s. A large number of studies focused on how global style and genres were appropriated, recontextualized and recreated in local spaces (Finnegan, 1989; Cohen, 1991; Mitchell, 1996; Bennett, 2000). The local became the new site of struggle between the dominant and subordinate groups. Both Finnegan's work on amateur musicians in Milton Keynes (1989) and Cohen's study of unknown rock bands in Liverpool (1991) stress the importance of music consumption in the creation of cultural identities rooted in the local. Other studies devote attention to certain music forms (with particular attention to rap and hip-hop) and how they have been assimilated and particularised out of their original geographic context (Rose, 1994; Mitchell, 1996; Bennett, 2000).

Common to studies on the music industry and on the dynamics between the local and the global was the assumption that due to the global circulation of music texts and of the technologies which support them, the nation cannot be seen any longer as the main site of cultural struggle: "We can no longer sensibly define the international music market in nationalistic terms, with some countries (the USA, the UK) imposing their culture on others. This does not describe the cultural consequences of the few multinationals: whose culture do Sony-CBS and BMG-RCA represent?" (Frith, 1991 as quoted in Gebesmair, 2001, p.2). Indeed, it has been widely accepted that the regulation of the multinational

cultural industries is now beyond the escale of the nation-state: “This notion carries the acknowledgement of an uneven struggle between the democratisation of cultural commodities – the policies carried by the public institutions – and the overwhelming rise of other form of democratisation by means of market regulation, mediated by the products of mass culture.” (Mattelart, 1996/1998, pp.76-77). Instead “musical forms are increasingly being theorised as the result of a series of transforming stylistic practices and transnational human musical interactions” (Hesmondhalgh & Negus, 2002, p.8). The shift went from an implicit ethnocentric focus on the nation (mostly Britain and America) to an interest in the power relations between global styles, genres and scenes (world music, hip-hop, punk, heavy-metal) and their local manifestations.

Writings on the transnational/global music industry (Wallis & Malm, 1984; Burnett, 1996; Peterson, 2001; Gebesmair & Smudits, 2001) focus on the concentration in ownership and its consequences for the music industry as during the last twenty years a small number of major companies have taken control over distribution at a global scale. Market strategies, technology, professional organization, and law and regulation are at the forefront in determining tastes and modes of consumption (Peterson, 2001). Such studies present the music industry as central to discussions on globalisation (Gebesmair, 2001). On one side, the music industry deploys mass communication

technologies to reach the local markets in a way that would suggest an homogenisation of music consumption and practices. On the other hand, major companies have at their disposal a web of local subsidiaries and affiliated labels that recruit local artists and try to push them into the global market (Burnett, 1996; Gebesmair, 2001). Burnett (1996) claims that “music is perhaps the essential component in linking the different sectors of the global entertainment industry” (p.10) He mentions integration, concentration and internationalization as the three readily defined areas where the entertainment industry has undergone significant changes.

One underlined argument in most approaches whose emphasis is on production is that the mechanisms of power and control over music are crucial for an understanding of its politics:

The politics of popular music cannot be confined to its symbolic role, its ability to represent ideas and articulate identities. To identify the politics of popular music, we need to move from concern with the power *of* music to concern with power *over* music. (Street, 2001, p.252)

Street argues that approaches to globalisation have failed to acknowledge the importance of particular forms of political scrutiny and control which happen at a local or national level (Street, 1997). Indeed, he claims that “there is no unitary process of globalization,

and the extent of outside influence is dependent upon political structures and forces which are specific to national and local states.” (ibid. p.75).

Popular music journalism

The achievements made in academic discourse in situating discussion of popular music within wider cultural debates must be complemented by the proliferation of public sites within which reasoned debate is possible and accessible. If popular music can be the subject of reasoned debate then journalism has the potential to be a more effective public site for debating popular music than academia in the sense that it reaches more people. Indeed, popular music is covered in the general press, while also having its own niche, specialist titles. However, as a social construction, journalism is subject to constraints and determinants that shape its potential for reasoned discussion. As a profession, journalism is subject to pressures and demands that draw a line between the ideal and the possible. Any approach to the social impact of journalism must, therefore, take into account such a tension: between an ideal form of journalism, that meets and fulfills the needs and interests of the public, and the journalism that is possible due to the professional, economic and ideological contexts which exert a key influence upon

the information that is produced. Music journalism occupies a peculiar space within the field of journalism and therefore has to be analysed as a distinct type.

Literature on the sociology of journalism is an important entry point to an understanding of music journalism as it helps us in setting up the framework within which a fuller understanding of the way music journalism operates can be achieved. Key readings in a non-Portuguese context (Breed, 1955/1999; Tunstall, 1971; Schlesinger, 1987; Soloski, 1989/1999) form an important basis for an understanding of journalism as a profession. Within the Portuguese context, Correia's work on the evolution of journalism over the last decade (Correia, 1997) is a useful and inspiring reading and the only comprehensive account of the Portuguese case.

Research developed in the working context of the news organisations gives us a good insight into journalism as a profession, providing a detailed analysis of the practices and routines involved in the making of news (Tunstall, 1971; Schlesinger, 1987). The professional environment in which the journalist operates, the wider economic organisation to which the publication belongs, the constant demand for profit from sales and advertising, and the cultural background of the journalist all come to the fore as essential for understanding journalistic practices. Breed (1955/1997) mentions the organisational context (the staff room and the bureaucratic

organisation) as a key factor in the creation of professional ideologies that are crucial to the newsmaking process. Soloski (1989/1999) argues that the professional ideology of the journalist does not clash with the capitalist ideology of the media organisation. Although the professional ideology revolves around the idea of the journalist rendering a service to the public, the journalist is compelled into a sort of objectivity that reinforces the economic status quo of the media organisation. The newsmaking process is, therefore, determined partly by the professionalism of the journalist but also by the organisation to which he belongs. The control mechanisms taken by the news organization ensure that journalists are able to have some (limited) space for creativity in coverage while at the same time narrowing that space so that journalists do not stray from the interests of the news organisation. Correia (1997) argues that quality and originality of writing, imagination and creativity are traits of the journalists' autonomy but they do not pose a threat to the dominant patterns of press coverage.

Important to our approach to popular music journalism - although not necessarily applied in a clear-cut way to that specialised area of journalism - is the transition from a type of journalism concerned with informing its readership following notions of public interest to a journalism subservient to a commercial logic. Correia (1997.) argues that this happens when the content is transposed into

an equation in which the search for more audiences translates into more advertising and therefore more profit for the title. This equation is determined by new contexts of ownership in the press and the media in general. Until the mid-1980s most publications in Portugal were either owned by small but powerful economic groups (mostly banks) or state-owned. By the late 1980s, all of the press titles had been privatised but in the same period, there is also a movement towards the incorporation of press publications in large multimedia groups mostly based in Portugal but with strong participation of foreign capital. This marks the end of the so-called ideological press, which was openly engaged with the political forces of the time, and the *commercialisation* of press coverage (ibid.). Such changes have decreased the autonomy of the journalist to a great extent. Correia further argues that, in this context, those who rule are not the journalists (nor the audience/readers) as the journalist is subject to the power of media group ownership.

In this sense, there is also a shift from the notion of *public interest* to the increasing dominance of the idea of *interest of the public(s)* (Correia, 1997). *Public interest* is objectively defined through a set of criteria imposed from above while the *interests of the public* emphasises the attention the news receives regardless of its objective importance. Bourdieu (1996/1998) talks of the increasing displacement of the former by the later as the *commercial*

pole overlaps the *cultural pole*. In the search for maximum audiences and profit, press coverage tends to privilege what catches the attention of the public over what is considered important. He goes further to argue that the competition between media organisations in the context of the free-market instead of promoting innovation and originality favours uniformity.

Of particular interest here is the shift from culture as a public service to culture as subdued to the logics of the market (Santos, 1994; Correia, 1997). Santos mentions in this connection that “it is of major importance that we question the current tendency for the commodification of cultural objects in general” as art and culture have become “elements in the reproduction of capital at a large scale, in a situation of objective dependency towards the market” (1994, p.119). This has consequences for the public sphere of culture (Habermas, 1962/1989; McGuigan, 1996) as “to commodify the cultural space means to submit *publicity* – the ‘public sphere’ of meeting and debate – to the capitalist mode of an activity primarily devised and determined by the goal of profit” (Barata-Moura, 1995 in Correia, 1997, p.48).

Linked to the treatment of culture as a commodity, the increasing role of advertising and its effects in editorial strategies is equally important in tracing the evolution of journalism. While not much has been said of the influence of advertising on music

journalism, the influence of advertising in cultural and entertainment journalism has been considered (Lang, 1958/1970; Montalban, 1971). Montalban (1971) argues that the advertisers use the media as a form of pressure over the public and become an instrument of power over the information. Such was the case with movie criticism in Spain where the degrading pressure of advertising on arts' pages led to favourable reviews.

Other authors are eager to claim the importance of cultural and occupational values in cultural journalism (Curran, 2000; Tunstall, 2001). Tunstall (2001) defines cultural journalism as an occupational fragment with little power in the journalistic field but much power in the cultural sphere: "This is true of newspaper critics who cover the arts, film, music, and books. Within their employing newspapers they may play only a fairly peripheral role, but within the specific arts area they cover, these critics are collectively a potent media-occupational fragment" (ibid., p.20). Curran (2000) studied the "occupational fragment" of literary editors who are in charge of book reviews in the national press to conclude that they form a small but important peer-group who come from the same elite educational background and give precedence to much the same literary genres (Curran, 2000; Tunstall, 2001). Such approaches suggest that when it comes to cultural journalism, one cannot take for granted the idea that coverage of culture has been completely subdued to the logics of

the market. Instead, a serious analysis should consider the degree of autonomy achieved by critics and journalists and read it against the economic constraints of operating within a large organisation whose main purpose is to maximise audiences and make profit.

In the body of work produced by popular music studies, the importance of the press and of rock criticism, in particular, has been overlooked. Yet, we find some relevant contributions to the study of the popular music journalism in: chapters in studies concerning the popular music industry (Chapple & Garofalo, 1977; Frith, 1978/1981; Negus, 1992); chapters in comprehensive books on popular music (Chambers, 1985; Shuker, 1994; Negus, 1996); journal articles (Stratton, 1982; Théberge, 1991; Toynbee, 1993; Forde, 2001a); and non-academic books on popular music written by rock journalists (Reynolds, 1990a; Savage 1991). Recently, as this research was carried out, the first comprehensive academic reader on the popular music press was published (Jones, 2002).

A survey of writing on popular music journalism could have its contents divided in three intertwined approaches. One that traces the historical evolution of Anglo-Saxon rock journalism from a sociological perspective (Frith, 1978/1981; Toynbee, 1993; Shuker, 1994; Forde, 2001b). One that, either coupling with the historical perspective, or separately, puts its emphasis on the way rock journalism operates in relation to the music industry (Hirsch,

1972/1990; Chapple & Garofalo, 1977; Frith 1978/1981; Stratton, 1982; Savage, 1991; Negus, 1992; Forde, 2001a, 2001b). Finally, one that critically examines the specific problems that arise from the peculiar status of popular music journalism/criticism (Stratton, 1982; Frith, 1985, 1988; Breen, 1987; Reynolds, 1990b; Jones, 1993; Shuker, 1994; Lindberg et al, 2000; Fenster, 2002).

The term ‘popular music press’ covers a wide range of publications: fanzines, weekly newspapers, magazines, consumer guides, encyclopedias and dictionaries, and author books. Each one of the formats has its own divisions reflecting the segmentation of the music market. This is particularly well-documented in the music magazine market. From teen magazines such as *Smash Hits* and *Bravo*, to the ones, such as *Mojo* or *Wire*, that appeal to a more adult, discerning readership, there seems to be a magazine for every music consumer: *Kerrang!* is aimed at an heavy-metal audience, *Spin* is more directed towards an alternative rock audience, *Wire* is for those more in touch with new tendencies in the so-called “leftfield” of popular music, *Muzik* is for dance music and *Vibe* is for rap (just to mention a few clear-cut examples).

The music press is a well-established field, especially in Britain and America, where rock journalism has been recognised and upgraded to “a new level of seriousness” (Shuker, 1994). The publication of *The Penguin Book of Rock and Roll Writing* (Heylin,

1992) reflects, to a certain extent, the acceptance of pop music journalism and its canonisation in the cultural sphere. It recognised the body of work that stemmed from rock journalists, and of the publications that “made” their name, as markers of the value of popular music, as well as conferring status upon popular music within traditional culture hierarchies:

Critics (...) have been seminal to the elevation of rock music into, at least, ‘semi-legitimate’ art. This achievement was made possible by diverse alliances: the critics became spokesmen for musicians or trends, whose ambitions seemed ‘serious’, as well as for ‘progressive’ social forces (working-class youth, white trash, blacks), and now and then they received supports from agents in the established cultural fields. (Lindberg et al., 2000, p. xv)⁷

Among the many newspapers and magazines that made/make their name in the pop canon are *The New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker*, *Sounds*, *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*, *Crawdaddy*, *Spin*, *Uncut*, *Village Voice*, *The Face* and *Mojo*. From these publications came acknowledged names in music writing such as Greil Marcus, Lester Bangs, Robert Christgau, Nick Kent, Jon Savage, Nik Cohn, Charles Shaar Murray and Simon Reynolds.

The popular music press is, in fact, a very important site in which most tensions within popular culture can be scrutinised. Music journalists and rock critics are mediators between the music

consumer and the music industry. They belong to an industry (the press) and to an organisation (newspaper or magazine) whose primary concern is to sell. Their practices are tied to the politics of the publication, which obviously depend on the target-publics they are addressing. Yet, journalists and critics are also “professional rock fans” (Frith, 1978/1981), avid consumers of music, who struggle in detaching their passion for music from their duty to inform the readers. Their discursive positions, as Fenster argues, “are both as an audience members who are presumably *similar* to her readers, and as speakers from a position of expertise and authority that *differentiates them* from their readers” (2002, p.84). The ideological role of the critic is crucial, yet ambivalent:

By increasing the importance of the non-economic aspect of the music they stimulate ‘cultural’ discussion such as the relative aesthetic value of different pieces of music. This type of discussion decreases the awareness, on the part of the consumer, of the economic constraints under which record companies operate. To put it simply, the consumers become less aware of the record companies’ need under capitalism to sell product, records. (Stratton, 1983, p.295)⁸

⁷ See also Regev (1994).

⁸ Shuker (1994) comes up with a similar argument in this respect: “Both the press and critics (...) play an important ideological function. They distance popular music consumers from the fact that they are essentially purchasing an economic commodity, by stressing the product’s cultural significance (...) A sense of distance is thereby maintained, while at the same time the need of the industry to constantly sell new images, styles and product is met”. (p.97)

Frith sees the music papers and their writers as “almost completely dependent on the record business” (1978/1981, p.173). The press and the companies operate “in a very symbiotic relationship with the record industry. The blurring of the boundary between rock journalism and rock publicity is reflected in the continuous job mobility between the two: “Record company press departments recruit from the music papers, music papers employ ex-publicists; it is not even unusual for writers to do both jobs simultaneously’ (ibid., p.173). Negus (1992) stresses the strategies developed by press-officers in record companies to market their artists, especially the new ones. These strategies include spotting the right critic to cover the artist, establishing personal contact and socialising:

In a similar way to promotion staff, the press-officer is attempting to sensitise a journalistic community to an act (...) By the time the artist’s material is ready for release the press-officer will know who likes a particular artist and who might write the most interesting and influential feature or review (ibid., p.120).

The ambivalence is also seen in the dependency of the music press on advertising (Stratton, 1982; Frith, 1985; Savage, 1991; Jones, 1993; Murray, 2001; Fenster, 2002). Advertising secures economic viability as well as helping to maintain an established readership. In this sense, music magazines have become guides to

lifestyle and leisure consumption (Shuker, 1994; Arnold, 2001). In order to survive beyond reliance on sales, the music press needs advertising that firmly indicates their market orientation. Jones (1993) argues that, although music journalists have to reconcile the contradictory demands of informing their readers and delivering a large and demographically specific audience to advertisers, the relationship between advertising and positive reviews is more complex than it seems. This puts an emphasis on the relationships between the press and the wider music industry.

Both the music press and the record companies share the same interest in maintaining consumption (Frith, 1978/1981; Reynolds, 1990b; Negus, 1992; Toynbee, 1993). Most seem to agree that the power of the music press works on the strength of - not against - the music industry. In historical terms certain authors identify the late 1960s to early 1970s as an exception, when the golden age of rock writing (Gorman, 2001) established a model of partial autonomy. This turned, however, in the late 1970s/early 1980s, into a situation of almost total dependency and of blurring of boundaries between music writing and advertising. In this sense, the press agenda is determined by the industry's capacity to synchronise with dates of release (Frith, 1978/1981; Breen, 1987; Reynolds, 1990b; Savage, 1991; Negus, 1992; Toynbee, 1993; Shuker, 1994; Arnold, 2001).

Rock critics are also *gatekeepers of taste* (Hirsch, 1972/1990; Shuker, 1994). Though the influence of album reviews has to be scrutinised in relation to the wider context of the contents in a music publication, there is a general conviction that critics do influence record buyers. Such influence seems better measured in qualitative terms: “Rock critics don’t so much operate on the basis of some general aesthetic criteria, but rather through situating new product via constant appeal to referents, attempting to contextualize the particular text under consideration” (Shuker, 1994, p.93). Their influence is not just through the service they render to the consumer – that is, as a matter of advising the purchaser to make the best purchase - but goes further. By making constant appeal to referents (Fenster, 2002), rock critics establish a relationship with the readers that assumes a sharing of same cultural codes. Each music genre, style or scene has different codes featured (for instance, technical terms like “4/4 beat”, more abstract notions like “groove” or “noise”, that are more frequently used in certain genres or styles than in others) that facilitate the understanding of those who are *in the know* while it alienates those who are not familiar with such terminology. Rock reviews, thus, make specific demands as well as inform the readers’ knowledge.

Rock critics also express values that are beyond judging one record *good* or *bad*. More often than not, those value judgements are

entailed by and reproduce ideologies in popular music discourse (Toynbee, 1993; Fenster 2002): “Rock critics construct their own version of the traditional high/low culture split, usually around notions of artistic integrity, authenticity, and the nature of commercialism” (Shuker, 1994, p.93).⁹ Such discourses often implicitly allude to coded oppositions: artistic integrity translates as the opposition *independent/sell-out*, authenticity translates as *real/fake*, and the nature of commercialism, entailing the previous two, has many other possible translations (for instance, *underground/mainstream*, *leftfield/middle-of-the-road*). Such discourses reflect music journalism as a cultural practice (Toynbee, 1993; Forde 2001a). Rock critics and journalists’ practices should, therefore, be articulated with the symbolic value of taste and knowledge within the popular music field as such. Fenster (2002) argues that “rock criticism (...) often conceals the social hierarchies that underlie many of the accepted assumptions of rock music” (pp.88-89).

The power to establish discursive patterns can also be seen as a constraint, especially in the long-term. Fenster argues that the

⁹ This also has its negative effects: by making constant appeal to those referents, critics often create an hegemonic discourse over music styles, in which the values that are attributed to a certain music style are misleadingly placed within the evaluative criteria of other music styles. Fenster (2002) uses the example of the coverage of rap when it emerged in the early 1980s. He argues that “throughout the mid-1980s, rap was generally explained and judged with the assumed criteria of aesthetically and socially ‘important’ forms of rock music (...) Authenticity, innovation and successfully conforming to rock standards continued to be central themes in positive reviews of rap records” (p.86).

importance of critics and journalists as consumer guides and opinion-leaders is “continually subverted by the accessibility of evaluative discourse within different genre communities (e.g. the hip-hop community, the indie-rock community) and by the opportunity for non-critics to share musical opinions in everyday situations (e.g. to a friend in a concert) and in mediated communications (fanzines, websites, etc.)” (ibid., p.82).

The ideologies embedded in rock criticism also serve the function of detaching the press from the music industry (Stratton, 1982). Most of the aforementioned oppositions and the centrality of values such as authenticity and integrity are at odds with the nature of the music industry. The ideological discourse of popular music criticism generally empathises with both the artist and the reader in creating the perception of independence from the companies. Such demarcation is illusory, as Stratton further argues:

The music press operates to increase thought and discussion in the discourse which is ‘popular music’ (...) the result (...) is in appearance to make people more aware of the ‘problems’ of popular music whilst in reality aiding the mystification of fundamental tensions generated by the practice of capitalism as a mode of production. (ibid., p.270)

In order to survive as a profitable enterprise, the popular music press has, thus, to ground the tension between capitalism and artistry for the record-buying public. That is why the music press, while

being an outlet for the industry, defines itself in discourse in opposition to it (ibid.). Such tension is visible in rock criticism discourses, especially in the opposition, claimed by Stratton, between “emotion” and “the intrusion of analysis”:

I have suggested that the intensity of the emphasis on ‘emotion’ for defining quality is so great that it does not allow for the intrusion of analysis (...) I would suggest that it is possible to turn this phase around and suggest that it is the fear of the intrusion of analysis, indeed of capitalism, which demands the emphasis on emotion (ibid., p.281).

The point is that such criteria to judge what is good are generated in opposition to the values of the music industry, but are also thereby dependent upon it. They solve the problem, at the output end of the music industry, between music as art and music as commodity. By celebrating the ‘art’ (as the non-rational, emotional) in popular music, rock critics vest the commodity with the necessary credibility to be sold as such. They also create a false pop consciousness, as Stratton suggests:

The discourse of popular music is premised on the supposition that popular music is non-rational and, therefore, non-analysable (...) Popular music needs to be viewed in this way in capitalist society in order to be able to generate the continual flow of new product necessary to keep the industry functioning (1983, p.294).

At a more generic level, rock discourses have an ambivalent relation to the subject that they are meant to translate into words. Reynolds (1990a) claims that rock discourses put the dissensions and desires of creative moments in rock history (like punk or the counterculture), into a unity of alienation and aspiration and that “rock criticism always kills the things it loves, by transforming volatility into orthodoxy, jouissance into plaisir” (ibid., p.9). Breen (1987) claims that rock critics have betrayed the impulse of those who write music and of those who hear it as they have not been able to articulate the value and meaning of such impulse. He suggests a more inclusive approach in which all available criteria should be considered of equal importance. Forde (2001b) argues that “the social, the cultural, the historical, the formalistic, the textual and the epistemological are all positioned as being of equal importance as the musicological” (p.26) and that rock writers should consider not just music but also their profession (as defined by its conditions of production and development) as leading to a more reflexive approach to criticism.

If the relation to the industry has been considered (although in relatively limited depth, in most cases) in academic writing, very little is known about rock journalism and the effects of criticism on its readership. The impact of the music press is beyond estimation and consideration on this matter remains the product of theoretical

reflection rather than empirical evidence. Yet, there seems to be agreement that the measure of influence of the press is qualitative rather than quantitative. According to Frith (2001), “the printed media (...) have probably had the most influence on how people understand and talk about particular genres. But they are only ever read by a very small part of the music market” (pp.39-40). Yet, Frith had previously argued that “music papers are important even for those who don’t buy them” (1978/1981, p.165), alluding to the importance of readers as gatekeepers, opinion leaders and rock interpreters. Forde (2001b) reinforces this idea:

Of crucial importance here is the idea that the readers of the music press are a small, but culturally important grouping. They are the media and culturally-literate ‘opinion-leaders’ who occupy an important (and persuasive) sphere between the media and the wider public (they are the ‘experts’ others will turn to for advice on record purchases). (p.32)

As only a “selective” minority does actually read the music press, the importance of the critic lies, not so much in rendering music intelligible to the public, but in creating a selected, knowing community whose taste is above the ordinary pop consumer (Frith, 1996).

In qualitative terms, the segmentation of the newspaper/magazine market freezes the signifiers of subcultures,

allowing them to be learned and absorbed (Weinstein, 1991), yet they also tie those subcultures to the wider consumer sphere. It triggers cultural difference, while securing the construction of audiences as consumers (Shuker, 1994) - in the sense that fandom, conspicuous consumption and record collection does not differ (indeed, it is relatively homogenised) among different subcultures/audiences. It supplies readers with a wide range of information including news, feature articles, interviews, reviews and images.

There is some agreement that popular music journalism performs an important function, as rock critics help citizens to acquire a taste for popular music and to articulate their listening experience (Frith, 1978/1981). As argued by Lindberg et al.(2000):

In an increasingly global world where electronic media are taking over from the press, the critic's role as an intermediary or guide not only persists (...) but has even extended into new, popular cultural areas of the consumer society, providing these with experts whose task it is to cultivate a reflexive attitude, develop a language fit for the subject and pass judgements on behalf of their audience. (p.xv)

In this sense, rock criticism is not seen so much as that ambivalent yet essential part of the music industry whose purpose is to sell, but as a space where argument is possible. It helps to sell records but it also "educates" the citizen. Indeed, as Lindberg et al.,

further claim, criticism is connected to the growth of the press and to the ideal of “civilised conversation between equals” (ibid., p.xv).

While approaches to music journalism and criticism have taken into consideration key issues about journalism/criticism as a profession/occupation and as a cultural space, little has been said about how such space can operate as a sphere of mediation between the public and those institutions which have the power over music.

The Portuguese case

If research on popular music journalism generally constitutes a relatively small and sparse body of work, the issue becomes even more problematic in the Portuguese case since next to nothing has been written on its music journalism. Bearing in mind that most of the literature available on the subject stems from Anglo-Saxon sociology, cultural studies and journalism, the absence of academic studies on music journalism in Portugal can be attributed to three factors:

a) Visibility: popular music as a subject of cultural studies¹⁰ or sociology is absent in Portugal. Most academic research in popular music is rooted in ethnomusicology.

¹⁰ Cultural studies is not even a traditional area of studies in Portuguese universities..

b) Features of the market: while there is an important tradition of music journalism, there is no such thing as a popular music press in Portugal, at least, not in the same sense that there is a British music press.

c) National context: Portugal is, compared to Britain, a relatively peripheral market in the context of the global music industry.

The absence of popular music from academic programs is noticeable. Most academic research in popular music is rooted in ethnomusicology. There are three reasons for that. First, popular music bears a different meaning in the Portuguese lexicon. The Portuguese refer to “popular music” as traditional, folk music. This is the popular music that is studied in music departments in Portugal. Only recently, have there been some signs of interest in embracing popular music from a non-ethnocentric perspective with particular attention being given in sociology, anthropology and musicology departments to certain popular music formats such as *rap* and *hip-hop*.

Second, there is no such thing as a popular music press in Portugal, not in the same way as there is a competing, segmented and specialised British or American music press. Apart from a

weekly, specialised title, popular music journalism is confined to arts/culture supplements and some niche, small circulation titles.

Third, and stemming from the former two issues, Portugal is a relatively peripheral market in the context of the international music industry. The world sales figures for 2002 show that Portugal is a very small market, contributing with .5% (\$147 million) to the world sales in phonograms (IFPI, 2003). In the EU context, Portugal is far behind the dominant markets (Britain, Germany, France) and behind a group of countries that are similarly populated but with far more income per capita, like Denmark (\$169 million), Sweden (287), Belgium (233) and Austria (251) (*ibid.*).

Fourth, the globally dominant popular music forms are indigenous to Britain and America. This explains why most academic writing derives from Anglo-Saxon traditions (though it does not explain why next to nothing has been written in Portugal). In the Portuguese context it is estimated that close to seventy percent of the popular music that is purchased is sung in English and is produced either in Britain or America. This legitimates popular music as part of British and American popular culture while in the Portuguese context it has been considered an outcome of the globalisation process or suspiciously regarded by remaining left-wing ideologists as a product of cultural imperialism.

Yet, what is broadly defined as popular music is a part of people's lives in Portugal as it is anywhere else and the small space of music journalism has played an important role throughout the years in the creation of taste, patterns of consumption and in the assertion of youth cultures that have incorporated popular music as a key referent to their identities. Music journalism in Portugal has simultaneously responded and enacted the politics of the Portuguese music industry and while this is true of music journalism, in general (see Forde, 2001b), it has to be scrutinised through an historical analysis that considers the shifts in music journalism (in coverage, discourse, editorial line, titles available) and equates them with the shifts in music production, in the Portuguese context.

Conclusion

A review of the main approaches to popular music has shown us how popular music has been taken seriously by being articulated alongside broader cultural issues. It has been suggested that popular music plays an important role in the formation and articulation of identities. It has also been a site of struggle between cultural needs and economic interests; between dominant and subordinated groups in society; and between different agents (political powers, record companies, artists, fans, the media) competing for recognition and

legitimacy. Issues of class, race, age and space come to the fore when discussing popular music. To justify the politics of popular music, I have examined the sociological approaches to popular music to claim that more than mere entertainment, popular music can be a site of cultural struggle related to wider issues. In that sense, popular music is political.

Popular music matters because those struggles over meaning have consequences: in music production and reception, in what is available and what is rejected (by the industry and the consumer). Furthermore, I want to argue that the politics of popular music lie to a great extent in the fact that it is a mediated cultural form and that between the artists and the consumers are an array of actors (record companies, concert promoters, publicists, institutions, the media) whose power in deciding what music is available and appreciated has to be taken into account (see Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1993a).

Popular music journalism occupies a peculiar space as an *occupational fragment* within the fields of journalism and culture (Bourdieu, 1996/1998; Tunstall, 2001). While the politics of popular music have been addressed in academic research, it is important to consider the extent to which the same happens in the wider public domain of journalistic discourse. Music journalism produces a different type of discourse - from the sociological - due to a set of determining features (economical, professional, organisational,

cultural) which act upon its output. Research on journalism is helpful in framing the constraints under which journalists operate. Most tend to agree that those constraints limit the journalists' autonomy to a great extent and that the evolution of journalism has reinforced the dependency of journalism on the logics of the free market.

However, the logics in the space of music journalism are not necessarily the same as in the broader journalistic field. While Bourdieu (1996/1998) has identified journalism as a weak field because of its subjection to market demands – or submission of the *intellectual to the market pole* – one has to take into account that the space of popular music journalism is shaped by the values of both the journalistic and the cultural fields. Following Tunstall's remark that newspaper critics enjoy a potent role in the cultural sphere (Tunstall, 2001), the space of music journalism must be scrutinised taking into consideration its relation to both the journalistic and the cultural fields. A full assessment of its autonomy and status must take on board such relation.

Music journalism is part of the journalistic and cultural fields and is also part of or, at least, related to the music industry. Both stances are determinant to the role of music journalism. Studies on popular music journalism have focused on its relationship with the music industry following the co-optation model (Chapple & Garofalo, 1977) or the opposition between art and commerce in

popular music (Stratton, 1982; Negus, 1992, 1995). An alternative model is an approach in terms with Bourdieu's sociology of taste (Frith, 1996; Lindberg et al., 2000). In general terms, the literature on popular music journalism follows the same path as the sociology of journalism by recognising the dependency of music journalism on wider economic constraints in which it operates.

Rather than assuming music journalism as being fully compromised with the interests of the industry or claiming its autonomous role of opinion-making and gatekeeping of taste, I will consider the case of Portuguese music journalism in order to assess the historical role of popular music journalism in the creation of reasoned discourse on popular music. I will do this in the context of Portugal partly because being a native of Portugal I have been quite familiar with the Portuguese case and partly because, although popular music matters and, indeed, has a huge impact in Portuguese culture, it remains a neglected area in social sciences. Like elsewhere, music journalism in Portugal assumes a mediating role between the artist and the audience but a full depiction of music journalism has to consider the professional and cultural constraints that determine its cultural status and its output. I will take into consideration those dimensions in order to develop my main purpose, that is to assess the role of music journalism in the making of public reasoning on popular music.

Chapter Two

The space of popular music journalism: historical analysis of the Anglo-Saxon and Portuguese cases

I intend, in this chapter, to undertake an historical analysis of Anglo-Saxon and Portuguese music journalisms.¹ Although my focus will be on the Portuguese case, the cases of Britain and America are a good point of entry for an adequate understanding of popular music journalism. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, because the British and American music press remain inspirational and have established the pattern for most popular music coverage elsewhere. Secondly, the British and American press have spawned a serious, if small, body of academic research, which is useful in framing an approach to the Portuguese case.

¹ Although the British and the American music press have developed in different ways and are distinctive, they are often approached as a single Anglo-Saxon press/criticism (see, for instance, Lindberg et al., 2000). I will use the term Anglo-Saxon when referring to the field/space of music journalism and make a division between British and America when considering the press.

The popular music press: a brief British and American account

The emergence of the music press as a unique publishing niche and the importance of the popular music critic as a specialist (Forde, 2001b) dates back to the mid-19th century (Lindberg et al, 2000; Forde, 2001b). However, most authors agree that the history of the modern music press can be traced from the launch of the *Melody Maker* (1926) onwards (Frith, 1978/1981; Negus, 1992; Toynbee, 1993; Shuker, 1994; Forde, 2001b). This is primarily because the *Melody Maker* was the first newspaper to be devoted solely to popular music. The launch in 1952 of the *New Musical Express* was also of crucial importance as it coincided with the expansion of the pop music market and established the popular music press as a competitive and segmented market which developed in tandem with the trends in the music industry. During this early period the music press was seen as a facet of the music industry as British music papers and record companies shared the same interests. Emphasis on news of new releases ensured that the press sustained the expanding record market (Frith, 1978/1981).

The emergence of a rock ideology in the music press in the mid-1960s had its grounds in the importance of the underground

press (Murray, 2001). Its portrayal of rock music as both a lifestyle and a political force inspired the emergence of the specialised press in America with titles like *Crawdaddy* (1966), *Creem* and especially *Rolling Stone* (1967) which had in common a “serious treatment of rock as a cultural form” (Frith, 1978/1981, p.169). Forde (2001b) mentions the period 1965-67 as the starting point of contemporary rock writing as individual writers (among them, Jon Landau, Greil Marcus, Robert Christgau, Lester Bangs, Hunter S. Thompson) came to prominence. Chambers (1985) argues that the growth of music journalism parallels the growth of music as a political force and that there was a double process of legitimation (cultural and professional) which was symbiotic. This critical explosion should be framed in the context of the emergence of New Journalism, which favoured more reflexive, in-depth analysis of popular music often merging it with literary writing. In professional terms, the movement meant a shift in power from editors to free-lancers and staff writers (Chambers, 1985; Forde 2001b). These factors contributed to the emergence of a rock ideology and to an acknowledged golden age of rock’n roll writing (1965-74) (Gorman, 2001).

In this context, music journalism became “serious” with the core of such publications, like *Melody Maker*, shifting from publicity to concert and rock reviews (Frith, 1978/1981). While the *NME* remained concerned with the effects of music on audiences (in what

could be seen as a more populist approach to music journalism), *Melody Maker* and *Rolling Stone* became the thinking fan's papers, more focused on the artists' intentions and skills (ibid.). This tendency established a sort of high/low culture demarcation in the music press in the 1970s (Toynbee, 1993).

In the late 1970s, fanzines played an important role in the emergence of British punk (Chambers, 1985; Toynbee, 1993; Forde, 2001b) and made their influence felt on the mainstream rock press (Laing, 1985; Savage, 1991). Many of the punk "ideologues" were, indeed, recruited from the fanzine niche market (Toynbee, 1993). This was, Forde (2001b) argues, a similar movement to the migration from the underground to the mainstream press in the US. Writers such as Nick Kent and Charles Shaar Murray are representative of this new generation of British rock writing. The influence of the music press (including fanzines and mainstream titles) around this time was out of proportion with its sales and - as with the making of the Sex Pistols - the press and punk culture became mutually reinforcing (Savage, 1991). Rather than subverting the mainstream press hegemony, fanzines' marginal discourses were co-opted by the mainstream press, which adopted the fanzines' anti-industry rhetoric (Laing, 1985; Forde, 2001b). For the first time, one could also see a coupling of the press and academia as late seventies subcultural theory (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979)

reinforced the press celebration of the punk subculture. It could be argued that both the academics and the press cooperated in a certain mystification of the British punk movement as authentic and resistant.

The years between 1979 and 1983 marked a period of decline in the music industry, which turned the niche, active music consumers who read the press, into an important target (Toynbee, 1993). The growing importance of the indie-pop niche during the 1980s triggered a third wave of stylistic innovation in rock writing (Forde, 2001b) from the mid to late 1980s. Among the acknowledged writers were Paul Morley, Ian Penman, Simon Reynolds and David Stubbs. This new wave was characterised by a stylistic coupling between music and academic writing (Toynbee, 1993; Forde, 2001b) as these writers introduced structuralist and post-structuralist approaches in their analysis (Forde, 2001b). As Toynbee (1993) argues, by the late 1980s, “young people’s reading about and listening to popular music was organised along much more rigid generic-discursive lines than earlier in the decade” (1993, p.292) as the quest for pop’s legitimacy splintered, leaving a huge gap between the inkies (*NME*, *MM*) and the glossies (*Smash Hits*, *Number One* and *Record Mirror*). However this third wave did not really break any new ground in rock writing (Toynbee, 1993; Jones, 1996; Forde, 2001b). Forde (2001b) claims that because the impact

of this third wave was more directed towards a niche readership, their agenda and aesthetic “was not to alter the general grounding of mainstream rock writing” (2001b, p.22). For Jones, “young writers dissecting a culture of margins surrounding a collapsed centre, (...) were destined for obscurity” (1996, p.7) as the influence of the traditional music press began to wane. Toynbee (1993) claims that the dominant features in their writing – didactic and correctional – were remarkably close to the model established by 1970s writers, like Charles Shaar Murray.

The early 1990s were marked by important changes in the music industry. The decline in sales of singles, the increase of television-broadcast pop on terrestrial and satellite forms and the constant turnover in music scenes favoured a more tight periodising of music coverage, which nurtured the new and killed off the old. Toynbee uses the press coverage in 1991 to illustrate this point. He claims that the ‘Madchester’ scene “was unceremoniously dumped, ‘shoegazing’ (...) was relegated, and ‘grunge’ inaugurated” (1993, p.297). These short-term cycles in music coverage, Toynbee argues, promote “high discursive productivity” (ibid., p.297):

The period (scene) receives a name. Then, at a point which often depends on imperatives appearing elsewhere in the industry-audience circuit, the order is perceived as unstable. Now journalists move quickly to initiate collapse, by roundly condemning previously paradigmatic artists/texts, and at the same time disciplining recalcitrant readers who cleave to the old order. (ibid., p.297)

Writers refer to a decline in the importance of music criticism from the 1980s onwards with this becoming still more pronounced in the 1990s (Frith, 1985; Arnold, 2001; Murray, 2001; Fenster, 2002). According to Frith (1985), the success of the music press happens “when the people buying music are the same as the people wanting to read about music are the same as the people music writers want to reach” (1985, p.126). This equation has changed with the rise of a new pop press (*Smash Hits*, *Record Mirror*), as well as the competition from television and radio, over music news, reviews and interviews (ibid.). Writer Gina Arnold (2001) claims that the spread of media outlets that cover popular music has made music coverage “sluggish and cliché-riddled” (2001, p.1). Saturation and over-repetition of stories which are more and more “manufactured by a publicist” (ibid.) have become a common feature in the music press. The growing competition between these media outlets have also made rock magazines more interested in achieving power through their capacity to make or break a band than in producing good, in-

depth rock writing (ibid.). Castaldo (2001) claims that “music is fragmenting in little self-sufficient worlds, that aren’t in need of critics” (2001, p.2) as it becomes more difficult for critics to “get out of the particular” (ibid.). According to Reynolds (1990b), “the music press has abandoned its pretensions of leading its readership or setting agendas, and contracted around the concept of ‘service’” (1990b, p.27).

A prevailing sense of nostalgia is notable in recent writing on music criticism/journalism (Heylin, 1992; Jones, 1996; Arnold, 2001; Gorman, 2001; Murray, 2001). The release of edited volumes comprising selected journalists’ writings (Heylin, 1992; Kureishi & Savage, 1995; Jones, 1996; Gorman, 2001; Hoskyns, 2003) and the recent creation of online archives of selected rock writings (www.rockcritics.com; www.rocksbackpages.com) ensures that the golden age of rock’n roll writing is canonised even if some (Kureishi & Savage; Jones) are more inclusive towards contemporary journalism. Heylin (1992) justifies the exclusion of then recent rock mags such as *Q*, *Vox* and *Select* from his collection as being a comment in the music press’ current status:

Rather than providing an opportunity on one of the half a dozen notable releases each month (can there really be more?), reviewers are asked to assess the results of two years in a rock artist's life in two hundred words. And for those whose lives are too full to even-read such bite-sized reviews, we have the star-rating system. If it gets a box it's got to be four stars – *capisce!* (1992, p.xii)

In the foreword to Gorman's recent, as-told-by-the-critics, account of the music press, Murray (2001) claims that the golden age of rock writing was fuelled by the sense of novelty and the lack of mediation that rock writers found at the time. The broadening scope of popular music around that time challenged music writers, initially from the underground press and later on mainstream titles, into finding appropriate frames to cover the cultural change, eventually creating a certain kind of writing that challenged the "stultifying, self-congratulatory and highly-privileged junior literary establishment" (2001, pp.11-12). The random factors that defined that period have now been successfully eliminated by the music and publishing industries through its marketing and research devices (ibid.).

Popular music journalism in Portugal

There is not such a thing as a popular music press in Portugal to the extent that this requires a stable number of specialised publications in popular music, each one targeting different readerships. Due to a relatively small market, serious coverage of popular music in the Portuguese press is limited to one weekly, specialised “inkie” newspaper and to the music and arts’ supplements in general newspapers. The history of Portuguese popular music journalism is itself a commentary upon the uncertainties which every publication has faced when launched. In a research piece on the history of the Portuguese music press, published in *Blitz*, journalist Nuno Galopim gave his piece the appropriate title “the quickest press in the world”, alluding to the short-term existence of most titles until (and, to a certain extent, after) the establishment of *Blitz* in the mid-1980s.

It is not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that we find the first attempts at a specialist publication in popular music: the first music magazine was launched in 1969. *Mundo da Canção* was primarily devoted to Celtic folk music and to the Portuguese protest folk singing that was an important source of opposition to the regime. Its stated aim was to struggle against *nacional*

*cançonetismo*² and to support the new protest singers that were exiled and whose work was censored by the dictatorial regime. It was an openly left-wing oriented publication. In its early years, *MC* managed to escape the censorship of the regime. However there was a backlash in 1973 when an issue featuring prominent protest singers on the front cover was revised by the censorship officers. From then on, *MC*'s publication became more erratic though the title managed to survive until 1985.

Another publication, *Memória do Elefante*, emerged in 1970 and became the first title in which news and analysis of popular music were combined. Its periodisation was uncertain due to economic difficulties and censorship. It marked out its position as a pioneering publication for the analysis of Anglo-Saxon music and covered artists as yet little known in Portugal like Frank Zappa, Yes, Magma, Bruce Springsteen and even Bob Dylan. Many articles were censored, either because they were considered “anti-regime” in ideological terms or simply because they were not intelligible to the censorship officers. Its distribution was limited to Porto, while, in Lisbon, copies were directly distributed at the universities by its editorial staff. Advertising was secured through informal contacts with music shops. In parallel with this title, the founders ran the first music supplement in a now-defunct daily newspaper, *Diário do*

² The dominant popular music form in Portugal during the dictatorial regime. *Nacional cançonetismo* was largely dismissed as conservative and cliché-ridden,

Norte. To establish the link with the original title, this supplement was titled *O Elefante* and was published weekly. After three years, *A Memória de Elefante* ceased publication due to political and editorial divergences among the staff.

By the late 1970s, *Musicalíssimo* emerged as the first media-group sustained title. It was the first coloured inkie with a regular fortnightly release. The most curious aspect of *Musicalíssimo* was that its writers were recruited from its readership, some of whom eventually became permanent members of staff. It lasted for only two years, though. A bigger achievement for the music press was the founding of the magazine *Música & Som*. This was the first truly general title covering a wide range of styles and movements, and offering an economically viable alternative to the British and American press. It was read by music fans who aimed to be informed about the latest events in popular music. With a staff of writers that succeeded in addressing the right readership (mostly a university crowd) and the best collaborators in the field, *Música & Som* was an obligatory reference point in popular music reading and was published during the course of twelve years. Among the contributors were later acknowledged journalists (Rui Monteiro, Luís Maio, João Govern, Miguel Esteves Cardoso) as well as professionals from the record industry. After a failed attempt in the late 1980s to update the title with the inclusion of video in the

after 1974 and the end of the regime.

editorial line, *Música & Som* ceased publication in 1989 due to the strong competition from weekly titles, *Blitz* and *Sete*.

The precursor to the emergence of *Blitz* was a music supplement called *Som 80* which was part of the extinct socialist daily newspaper, *Portugal Hoje*. *Som 80* was second only to *O Elefante* in pioneering the coverage of popular music in supplements from general titles. *Som 80* also inaugurated exclusivity over the publishing of articles from foreign, acknowledged titles. It regularly featured articles from *Rolling Stone* magazine. The awareness of the growing importance of a loyal readership was reinforced by the fact that *Som 80* boosted the sales of *Portugal Hoje* on Saturdays, when the supplement was included in the newspaper. According to Manuel Falcão, then editor of *Som 80*, the fact that sales tripled when *Portugal Hoje* included the music supplement, suggested the existence of a niche that could make viable the launch of a weekly music publication. He, therefore, proposed the launch of *Blitz* to the media group that published *Portugal Hoje* (CEIG).

Blitz

In 1984, the newspaper *Blitz* was launched in what became the most successful specialist publication for popular music. Its purpose was to cover the interests of an expanding youth culture whose

interest in music was not met by the then available press. *Blitz* was launched on a very tightly controlled budget where revenues covered the necessary costs and advertising was far less relevant than sales. The “staff” comprised of two writers, one graphic designer and three contributors (that soon expanded into half a dozen), all working part-time mostly as a weekend hobby. However, the contributors were among the most creditable of the time, many having had previous experience in former publications. Journalists and contributors like Rui Monteiro (who was, at the very beginning, with editor Manuel Falcão, the only permanent member of staff), António Duarte, Luís Pinheiro de Almeida, Luís Maio, Luís Peixoto, and acknowledged radio DJ, António Sérgio, were already familiar to the music milieu and gave credibility to *Blitz* in its early stages.

The design and layout was another important feature that defined the success and importance of *Blitz* from its early days. With a limited budget that did not allow for great technical ambitions, editor Manuel Falcão managed to choose some of the best photographers of the time. An awareness of the relevance of graphics and lay-out led to a judicious use of photography that was new to the Portuguese music press.

Although the content was vaguely defined as “non-mainstream”, most decisions regarding *Blitz*’s profile relied a great deal on intuition. Asked whether the title was addressing a pre-

defined niche readership, editor Manuel Falcão claimed that the creation of *Blitz* was “everything but scientific. No market surveys were made. It was ‘feeling’ pure and simple” (in interview). An emerging consciousness of the importance of lifestyles was crucial. *Blitz* talked about the trends and scenes in Lisbon and Porto’s nightlife, and it also covered certain niches that were excluded or misrepresented in the existing press such as the heavy-metal scene which had a strong and loyal but unacknowledged fan base in Portugal: “what happened was that there was a succession of niches that would amount to 12,000 to 13,000 readers every week” (ibid.). Stylistically it was more focused on the “leftfield”, underground scenes of the early to mid-1980s as well as paying attention to its Portuguese offshoots. The guidelines, only vaguely defined but clearly impressed upon the minds of staff and contributors were intended to negotiate a path between the mainstream and the marginal (the aesthetic line was, according to Falcão, everything “left of good mainstream pop music, e.g. the Eurythmics or Soft Cell”).

A key moment for *Blitz* was the creation of *Pregões & Declarações*. This was a readers’ page where short messages were published. There was a section for musicians’ recruitment and second-hand instruments but mostly the messages were trivia, sometimes expressing loyalty and fandom towards an

artist/style/subculture, often being derogatory about rival ones. The idea was imported from the French title *Libération* and became an instant success, attracting more readers and eventually boosting *Blitz* into its golden period in the late 1980s (when the readership peaked at 20,000). Surveys on readership conducted around this time showed the typical reader profile to be students aged between 15 and 25, mostly male and, mostly from Lisbon and Porto, yet with a curious, above-average, sales in the far less-populated interior. By this time *Blitz* had expanded its staff and the number of contributors, and from 16 pages totally devoted to popular music, it started to cover other areas like cinema, fashion and design, and bumped up its volume to a total of 28 pages in 1990. Advertising also increased during the same period. From the early stages when the revenues were dependent on sales and advertising was little to be seen, *Blitz* eventually became a key element in record companies' marketing strategies.

Acknowledging its success, the media group *Impresa* bought *Blitz* in 1992 and incorporated it into the sub-holding *Controljournal* which professionalised the staff board and secured, among other things, advanced technology in the use of colour and an established, permanent staff with long-term contracts (until 1992 contributions were paid apiece). *Blitz*'s growing status in the music industry culminated in 1995 with the creation of the *Blitz* awards (*Prémios*

Blitz), an annual, broadcasted event which acclaimed the year's national and international best artists and releases, in a format inspired by such award ceremonies as the MTV or the Mercury Music Prize. The 200-member jury team comprised professionals from the record and media industries.

As a consequence of the growing competition from IT and music supplements in daily titles, the future of *Blitz* is now uncertain. Acknowledged writers that eventually made their name in *Blitz* (Luís Maio, Miguel Francisco Cadete, Nuno Galopim, Vítor Belanciano) have been moving since the early 1990s to the music supplements where they find better contracts, leaving *Blitz* to a new staff of recently graduated journalists whose merits are yet to be proved. The legendary section, *Pregões & Declarações*, was recently dropped, reflecting the spread of online chats and forums which superseded interactivity in the printed press. Following a trend in the early 1990s which alienated readers through a tendency for over-analysis, the years after the change in ownership saw a noticeable move towards the mainstream in *Blitz*' editorial politics. At the same time *Blitz* tried to get a grip on a younger readership by aligning itself with teenage-oriented music markets such as *neo-punk* and *nu-metal*.

In spite of a much-commented decrease in sales, *Blitz* remains the most important title specialised in popular music. It managed to

succeed where previous publications had fallen short, either through lack of financial support or poor management.

Music and arts/culture supplements

Apart from *Blitz*, serious coverage of popular music in the mainstream press can be found in popular arts or specialised music supplements from general newspapers. In the absence of a competitive market, these supplements have filled an important gap and become increasingly important in cultivating or maintaining a readership on popular music. This is the case with the supplements in daily newspapers *Diário de Notícias* and *Público*, and the weekly broadsheet *Expresso*.

The importance of music coverage in popular arts and culture supplements can be framed by the following considerations.³ Firstly, they managed to recruit, mostly from *Blitz*, some of the most acknowledged journalists. Luís Maio, Miguel Francisco Cadete, Vítor Belanciano, Fernando Magalhães (all from *Público*) and Nuno Galopim (from *Diário de Notícias*) are acknowledged journalists who worked for *Blitz* and firmed their status as “opinion-makers” by moving to the major mainstream titles. Writing for the mainstream daily titles, music journalists see their work gaining more visibility.

³ For further approaches to arts/culture pages and supplements see, for instance, Breen (1987).

The supplements can be broadly placed within the title's culture section. They favour the creation of a community of readers who follow the taste/editorial line of the publication and praise the writing of a particular journalist/critic.

Secondly, this potentially broadens the readership by bringing coverage and criticism of popular music to the realm of the mainstream press. The editorial line towards music is equated, to some extent, with the wider politics of the title, and, to a greater extent, to the editorial line of the supplement. This has a double effect: it influences the music editor in determining an editorial line that is in line with the publication, but it also turns the attention of readers, formerly more interested in other contents (inside or outside the supplement), to the music features.

Thirdly, though editorial lines may be changed, coverage of popular music is backed-up by the overall performance of these titles in the market. Even considering the dependence on advertising which is also important in popular arts and culture supplements, editors tend to go with an editorial line that privileges personal taste more often than they uphold the duty of reaching all taste groups.

Bearing in mind the three above-mentioned factors that justify the relevance of popular arts supplements in the coverage of popular music, I consider, along with *Blitz*, the arts supplements from *Diário*

de Notícias, *Público*, and *Expresso* as cultural sites within journalism where popular music is covered seriously.

Pop/Rock, Sons, Y

The first incarnation of the music supplement in *Público* started in 1990 as *Pop/Rock*⁴, then the weekly music supplement of the newly born daily title. *Público* was launched in 1990 and established itself as one of the best-selling daily newspapers, addressing a degree-educated, “media-savvy”, urban, middle-class readership. Its first editor, Vicente Jorge Silva, was, prior to *Público*, an editor in culture and a movie critic for *Expresso*⁵ and has now made his name in both the arts and political spheres.⁶ From the start, the title has been equally demanding in both cultural and political coverage, carefully moving away from the drive towards cultural populism and liberal politics seen in other titles. Although a pluralist newspaper, with a range of contributors from both the left and right wings of the political spectrum, *Público*’s careful coverage of culture is mostly in line with an ingrained left-wing ideology.

Pop/Rock’s early format comprised of eight pages of news, feature interviews and reviews. Luís Maio became the first editor of

⁴ An early supplement called “Videodisco” only lasted for three months.

⁵ *Expresso* itself was one of the first acknowledged titles to feature serious coverage of culture, especially in its Saturday supplement, *A Revista*.

Pop/Rock. He had been a music journalist first in *Música & Som* and later in *Blitz*. The year prior to his appointment at *Pop/Rock*, he had ventured into music writing with his book on Portuguese pop band G.N.R. (Maio, 1989). He defined the editorial line as a compromise between what was in the market at that time and the personal tastes and interests of the staff: “If there was a release that was important in the context of the market, or there was some event that should be covered even it clashed with our interests, then we should make an effort to cover them. On the other side, obviously, we also covered what was interesting to us” (Luís Maio, interview).

The team, which comprised two journalists from the culture staff-room (Luís Maio and Fernando Magalhães) and one contributor (Jorge Dias), was recruited in view of this need to complement coverage of the mainstream market with coverage of more marginal artists. A certain degree of specialisation was required, with Jorge Dias covering mostly his main area, *alternative/independent rock*, and Fernando Magalhães covering *folk*, *world* and *electronica*. However the margin allowed for personal tastes was combined with a need for flexibility in the areas covered. Thus, there was a demand for adaptability in the sense that, according to Maio, since *Pop/Rock* was part of a daily newspaper with a broad remit, “someone who is

⁶ After leaving *Público*, Vicente Jorge Silva has had an experience in cinema in directing the movie “Porto Santo”. He has recently been elected as a deputy for the Socialist Party, giving away his long-time profession of journalist.

specialised in *world music* must also be able to do coverage of a rock concert” (ibid.).

For the next seven years, *Pop/Rock* became notable for its serious coverage of popular music, eventually evolving extending to twelve pages, addressing current issues in the music industry beyond the music per se. Attention to the emerging *world music* market and the rise to prominence of the American underground scene (with *grunge* and, later, *new-punk*), that eventually led to its incorporation into the mainstream, were central in *Pop/Rock*'s agenda. A concern with the state of the Portuguese market was noticeable with two-page feature articles analysing trends and phenomena. Coverage of Portuguese artists was regular but cautious, often featuring more than one artist or band in a feature article, often privileging trends over artists. *Pop/Rock* was less concerned with making or breaking new artists than with explaining them in a broader framework. During 1995, the supplement devoted the back page to “the best Portuguese albums of all time”, each issue featuring one album that was analysed in three different sections: relevant data, text on the making of the record and review framed by the current context (has it aged well? Is it still good?). This feature defined *Pop/Rock*'s stance towards Portuguese music: on the one hand canonising it, on the other, distancing itself from it by dispensing critical judgement.

The compiled features were published in a book later the following year.

Pop/Rock's writing style was pedagogic, distant, consciously displaying journalistic objectivity rather than drawing heavily upon subjective judgement. The reviews were carefully managed in order to strike a compromise between factual information about the artists and the importance of critical judgement. When *Pop/Rock* inaugurated the "zero to ten" rating scale in music journalism in Portugal, it became quite clear that value judgements tended to be reserved for the rating scale rather than being displayed in the review itself. The review selection reflected the editorial compromise between market relevance and the personal interest (of the critic). The team responsible for the supplement was given the authority to choose which releases to review with the condition that the mainstream should not be neglected.

By the time it was redesigned and turned into *Sons* (October 1997), *Pop/Rock* had added a few features to its original format. A readers' column became a regular feature on page two, next to short news bulletin devoted to the Portuguese market. There was another column that introduced new, unsigned Portuguese acts. The coverage reflected the changes in the market where a shift of interest from alternative rock to the new dance music offshoots (*trip-hop*, *jungle*, *drum'n bass*) was noticeable both in features and in record reviews.

The change to *Sons* was made with the inclusion of record reviews on jazz and classical music as well as some layout improvements such as the inclusion of framing boxes, full-use of colour and bigger-size pictures.

In late 2000, the specialised music supplement was dropped and in its place emerged *Y*, an arts supplement that included not only popular music, but cinema, theatre and television. Significantly, the music pages excluded jazz and classical music (which were transferred to the Saturday supplement). This shift was preceded by much argument that stretched beyond the cultural pages' staff to the newspaper's editors. Shifting between the ideological strand and the pragmatism of reaching its target-readership, staff and editors discussed the redefinition of the supplements and how to solve, in the best way, the standing oppositions between high and low culture coverage.

At the time, *Público* had three supplements: apart from *Sons*, there was *Artes & Ócios*, devoted to cinema, theatre and television, and *Leituras*, devoted to literature. The need for a redefinition of supplements was triggered by a relative failure from *Artes & Ócios* to reach the desired target. In light of this, the need to merge the different areas covered led to endless ideological discussions during staff meetings on how to manage the high/low culture conflict: "there was a wide debate... Some people stood for a single, large

supplement, others stood for daily, specialised supplements. There was an ideological position that maintained that culture should not be divided into sections but should be common, which is a tendency nowadays (...) but we had not been managing it properly up until then” (José Manuel Fernandes, interview). Such a division was mostly seen in music coverage where the merging of jazz/classical music with popular music in one supplement has never been fully realised (though it existed for a while in *Sons*).

In order to address these problems, an ambitious market study was carried out with the purpose of finding the best way to cluster the different publics into two new supplements: “We understood that, for instance, it was easier to find a cluster of readers that would read literature, and listen to jazz and classical music rather than pop” (ibid.). What came out was a compromise position which created two new supplements whose contents both merged and divided areas: *Y*, the new Friday supplement, covered popular music, performing arts (cinema, theatre, dance) and television. *Mil Folhas* became the new Saturday supplement, covering literature, classical and jazz music. Nevertheless, these changes were not made without regard for the advertising opportunities. In fact, advertising was among the considerations that led to the creation of the new supplements and it was an important element when measuring their success:

We were careful enough to try to understand how advertising, which is essential to finance these supplements, would work (...) We noticed that the advertising market for arts and culture adapted very well to the two supplements and, indeed, increased for the last year and a half, as we managed to create a specific advertising market within each supplement. (ibid.)

Y established a new pattern of hybrid coverage, by deliberately mixing cinema, theatre, dance, television and popular music into one supplement, with no particular, fixed order of presentation. The cover feature is either a new, movie or record, release. The 24 to 32-page format addresses the three areas in a transversal manner ensuring that movie pages' readers will come across the pages devoted to popular music and vice-versa. As the co-editor mentioned, "*Y* is not a cinema, nor a music supplement, nor even a cinema and music supplement. It is an entertainment supplement where boundaries are blurred" (Vasco Câmara, interview). However, the hybrid format is as much a product of the layout and graphic design as of content crossover. The former principle that the boundaries between music and image are blurred and the increasingly multi-textual nature of the performing arts is assumed and seen in *Y* as much as elsewhere. Such a principle is more a part of the title's own aesthetic than an intrinsic element of the cultural events that are covered.

In its format, *Y* has two pages featuring short news bulletins. These cover music, television, cinema and theatre, both national and international. There is a small section titled *profile*, which is devoted, every week, to a celebrity, usually with a large picture supplementing a 150-word text. There are about 12 to 18 pages featuring articles on cinema, theatre, dance, television and popular music. When considered relevant, coverage of a movie also includes a text on the soundtrack, partially supporting the abovementioned idea of content-crossover. Record reviews are either included in feature articles on new releases, or compiled in a single page. The space here is very limited and most texts are limited to 150-words. There are pages that feature music, cinema and theatre agendas for the next week, usually with a certain event highlighted.

Stylistically, *Y* has subverted traditional patterns in the Portuguese “inkie” press by, arguably, for the first time, giving as much attention to the graphic style as to the content. Both text and pictures are organised in a playful way that does not necessarily make it easier reading but definitely makes it more aesthetically appealing. The playfulness is seen in the use of large, coloured pictures, large computer-designed illustrations, different size fonts in titles and straplines, and more up-to-date details like titles and straplines innovatively displayed.

In music coverage, *Y* marked a departure from the concern with the Portuguese music industry (as in *Pop/Rock* and *Sons*) and brought *dance* and *electronica* to the forefront. Feature articles on the industry were dropped, in favour of a glossy coverage of mainstream artists and a celebration of “leftfield” *dance/electronica* artists. Coverage of *folk/world* has diminished to a considerable extent while *alternative rock* has fluctuated in line with the turnover of journalists specialised in the area. The objective tone adopted by *Pop/Rock* was replaced by a more subjective approach, favouring personal impressions over detached explanation. The new editorial line has been vaguely justified with a certain idea of modernity that is found in the homology between contents and the layout style: “There is this idea of the future as linked to the diversity of electronic music that is absolutely inevitable. I think that even the aesthetics of the supplement reflect such an idea.” (Tiago Luz Pedro, interview).

The demise of a certain historical consciousness, that was seen in *Pop/Rock* and *Sons*, is another feature in *Y* that is recognised by the staff: “Fernando Magalhães used to cover and review re-issues where he would come up with interesting stories about older records. It was very oriented to the past but it certainly would give you a certain knowledge which is absent in *Y*.” (ibid.)

DN+

The second publication that I consider in our study is *DN+*. *DN+* is the Saturday arts/entertainment supplement in *Diário de Notícias*, another best-selling daily newspaper.⁷ Since the launch of *Público* in 1990, both titles have been addressing a similar readership. Like *Público*, *Diário de Notícias* addresses a middle-class, urban readership. The differences are more aptly framed ideologically than in terms of readership. *Diário de Notícias* is generally seen as more populist and liberal, while *Público* is considered more elitist (as it demands a well-cultivated readership) and pluralist (as it gives space for a wider range of opinions). A visible effect of such ideologies is that *Público* gives more space to culture on the front page than *Diário de Notícias*. That includes the arts/cultural supplements: while in *Público* the supplements' headlines are featured on the front page, in *Diário de Notícias*, *DN+* editor Nuno Galopim has been struggling to give more visibility to the supplement features on the front page.

The arts supplement in *Diário de Notícias* does, somewhat, reflect the more populist approach of the title. *DN+* was launched in January 1998 and, though it covers cinema and DVD (thus, being generically an arts supplement), it is mostly a music supplement with

⁷ *Diário de Notícias* was launched in 1865 and is the oldest Portuguese newspaper in circulation.

at least ten out of its sixteen pages devoted to music, including jazz and classical. Popular music is the main area covered, though, often making the cover and more than half of the contents, while cinema usually does not fill more than three pages. The cover feature often includes article, interview, album plus back-catalogue review, and fills over three pages of the supplement. The contents are organised in a more traditional format than they are in *Y*. Central articles are sometimes complemented with a column dedicated to lost albums which is in some way related to the artist featured in the main article. The third page features on the right side an editorial where comments are made usually regarding the music industry. The choice of contents in *DN+* is more in touch with mainstream taste. This is particularly the case with record reviews. In general terms, the central features are on mainstream artists while more “leftfield” areas such as *alternative pop/rock* and *dance/electronica* usually have one page coverage each in the mid-pages. Record reviews follow a similar format to *Y*: on feature articles they are featured in a separate box usually on a 300, up to 400-word text. Usually, there is a record review page with short, 150-200 word, reviews on new releases and an up to 800 word feature review, filling a column.

Although broadly defined as generalist, the editorial line in *DN+* differs from *Y* in two ways. First, by a stronger coverage of mainstream at the expense of alternative genres. Second, by giving

considerably more attention to Portuguese artists and to the Portuguese music industry in general. Coverage of mainstream artists is strongly supported by the editor, who advocates a more inclusive coverage of the mainstream in opposition to the alternative, niche markets: “Attention is paid to the mainstream market features, so that the readers who are not fond of alternative genres – the craze of the music press – see their interests reflected in the pages of the supplement” (Nuno Galopim, interview).

With this inclusive politics, *DN+* is a supplement with a clearly defined editorial line, which is based on a compromise between different taste publics and age groups:

Besides this market awareness, we try to ensure that the interests of the diverse readership are covered. Sixteen pages are enough to cover the interest of the jazz, American indie-pop, electronica and Portuguese music fan (ibid.).

An awareness of the wider profile of the title means that *DN+* addresses older readers and not only the young music consumer:

If the average reader (of the title) goes from 25 to 55 years old, then I do not want any of the readers to throw away the supplement when they see it, nor to write for a young readership that thinks that the supplement is just for their age group (ibid.).

Coverage of Portuguese music is seen as a “good cause” by the editor. *DN+* has given constant attention to new Portuguese artists and, arguably, played a key part in the making of such names as *The Gift* and *Silence 4*. Each month, there is a review of demo-tapes from unsigned Portuguese artists. In his editorial, journalist Nuno Galopim usually addresses issues regarding the music industry from a national perspective. In the annual polls for best album, the list of Portuguese albums is given prominence and features ten releases, whereas in *Y* it is limited to five. Galopim clearly sees such an option in ideological terms:

It is of crucial importance that at the end of the year, more scrutiny is focused on Portuguese music because it is the first cog in a bigger industry that includes journalists, photographers, musicians, producers, sound technicians, label managers, concert promoters, retailers and, then, the public (ibid.).

In this sense, *DN+* follows the line developed over the years in *Pop/Rock* and (to a lesser extent) in *Sons*. The layout reflects less the importance of graphic design and more the editorial line. Pages are sequenced usually so that some continuity between issues is assured. Features mostly follow a rigid pattern of text or question/answer interview plus review. In contrast to *Y*, it sacrifices graphic style for content.

A Revista and Cartaz

Finally I consider two supplements, *A Revista* and *Cartaz* from the weekly title *Expresso* as other sites where there is serious coverage of popular music is made. *Expresso* has established itself since its launch in 1973 as the best-selling mainstream weekly title. An attention to culture in its coverage was acknowledged especially in the impact of its culture supplement *A Revista* throughout the 1980s. This was a supplement that mixed the cultural agenda, including cinema, theatre, music and book reviews, with longer pieces on current social and cultural issues. In the early nineties, *Cartaz* was launched as a supplement devoted exclusively to cultural events. This allowed coverage of popular music to stretch beyond album reviews to include interviews and an agenda with feature articles on the most important events.

The importance of *A Revista* and *Cartaz* in the context of popular music journalism is essentially identified with the work developed over the years by two popular music critics, João Lisboa and Ricardo Saló, although journalist Jorge Lima Alves has also been a regular contributor. Both Lisboa and Saló have established a reputation in rock criticism that is only matched by a few other journalists. The former has seen his work acknowledged with the publication of a selection of interviews and articles formerly

published in *Cartaz* (Lisboa, 1998). The reason is that whereas in other titles, popular music criticism can be seen as a fragment in the wider space of music journalism, in *A Revista* and *Cartaz*, the weekly reviews by Lisboa and Saló are the centre of the popular music pages. Both Lisboa and Saló are generally acknowledged as “opinion-makers”, critics whose weekly reviews had an impact in the creation of taste and in the sales figures of record releases.

However, though album reviews are central, they have been losing influence due to a shortage of space in the supplement’s pages. Recent changes in the editorial line has brought more space to areas which have traditionally been covered to a lesser extent such as theatre, dance and art exhibits at the expense of the more central ones such as music and movies.

Conclusion

The historical account of the Anglo-Saxon and Portuguese music journalisms reflects the gap between a central and a peripheral music industry. In Britain and America, the field of popular music journalism and criticism has been established for a long time through a competing number of publications specialised in different areas and genres and addressing different niche readerships (Lindberg et al., 2000, Forde, 2001b). The historical importance of music journalism and criticism is also reflected in the publishing of selected articles and books. Acknowledged writers like Lester Bangs, Nick Kent, Jon Savage and Greil Marcus – among others - have published their writings ensuring that the so-called golden age of rock writing is canonized and given a credibility and status more in line with higher cultural forms than with those of popular/low culture. The gap between the British/American and Portuguese cases is also reflected in the availability and major influence of British and American titles in Portugal.

In Portugal, music journalism is better described as a cultural and professional space within the broader field of journalism. In spite of such limitations, popular music journalism has its own history and its own importance in the context of the small scale Portuguese music market. Although popular music is

covered in most culture/entertainment sections in general publications, there is not a fully realised integration of popular music with wider issues and debates as seen in Britain. Serious coverage of popular music happens in the only specialised title, *Blitz*, and in music and arts/entertainment supplements from general titles.

In qualitative terms, music journalism in Portugal differs from the British case. While in Britain, coverage of popular music shifts between specialised titles - typical of a competitive and segmented market - and regular coverage given in broadsheet papers (a marker of popular music in the public sphere?), the Portuguese case fits somewhere between these two formats: music supplements and large music sections in culture/entertainment supplements complement a weekly, specialised title in coverage of popular music.

There is convergence between the Portuguese and the British and American cases in what comes as an irreversible trend in music journalism: its historical shift from reflective journalism/coverage to consumer guides or from music journalism's function of forming citizens to rendering a service to the consumer. Significantly, in spite of the huge time gap in the evolution of both cases (in terms of emergence, acknowledgement from the industry, establishment of rock critics as opinion-makers), the gap is far narrower in the acknowledgement of such historical shift. Although in Britain and America, the music press had been segmented for a

long time and the pressures from the commercial pole (Bourdieu, 1996/1998) were far stronger, it was by the late 1980s that authors started to talk about the decline in the importance of rock criticism with the turn of the music press into consumer guides (Frith, 1985; Reynolds, 1990b). Such shift has been addressed with more emphasis in recent times, though (Arnold, 2001; Murray, 2001; Fenster, 2002; Hoskyns, 2003). In Portuguese music journalism, a similar trend was most noticeable, first, with the incorporation of its main specialist title in a large media group (1992) and, second, and more recently, with the resort of music coverage in arts/culture supplements into a rigid interview/review format and the eschewing of reflection and research pieces. Such trend in the Portuguese context will be further examined when we consider the discourses and ideologies in Portuguese music journalism (chapters five and six).

Chapter Three

Methodology

Since this research is focused on a particular cultural and professional space it is clear that a qualitative approach is needed. Portuguese popular music journalism is a relatively small space but its significance must be assessed in the context of the small scale of the Portuguese music industry. Since I assume that Portuguese music journalism has played an important role in the national music industry regardless of the number of agents that worked within it, I privileged significance over frequency in my approach to the subject.

My choice of methods is based not only on the scope of the subject but also on the type of information required. I used a two-fold methodological approach. On one hand, emphasis on semi-directed interviews, as seen on chapters four, five and seven allowed me to understand the space of music journalism from the subject's point of view (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1988/1992). That is the former and current music journalists and their subcategories of editors, critics, staff-journalists and contributors; and those whose work is related to and has an effect upon the output of music journalism: press and media-officers in record and concert promotion companies, label managers, record retailers/distributors and mainstream newspaper editors. On the other

hand, content analysis of discourse and coverage of popular music (as seen in chapter six), usefully complements the subjects' point of view, either confirming or casting doubt upon the set of practices and ideologies revealed in the interviews.

Exploratory interviews were crucial for two reasons. First, they provided me with information on the actors' practices: what do journalists do, who do they relate to in their professional practices, how is the journalistic space organised. This information led to a comprehensive understanding of the way music journalism as a professional space operates. Second, they gave me a first insight into the journalists' ideologies and views on the journalistic space and on the music industry. As professional (and broader) ideologies in music journalism were central to this research, these interviews were an important methodological procedure to understand the journalists' perceptions of their own work and the wider space (the publication, the music industry) in which they operate. Data from these interviews formed the basis of a broad understanding of the subject and allowed me to identify the key issues around which to organise the subsequent research. They were organised around a set of themes around which the interviewees were free to expand.

Semi-directed interviews allowed me to grasp with more detail the complex relationships between the actors as well as providing me with a fuller understanding of their viewpoints on a number of

issues. These semi-directed interviews enabled a greater degree of interactivity between the researcher and interviewee with the researcher posing questions or expressing views while also reacting to the answers of the interviewee. As well as providing for interactivity, this method was also flexible insofar as the information gathered in one interview, especially answers which expressed controversial but firm points of view, would trigger questions in subsequent ones. This procedure led me to the finding that journalists tend to be as critical about their own space as about the industry. It is important to stress here that the conclusions drawn from the interviews were the result of the interaction process where the researcher's own frameworks and perspectives did shape the subsequent interpretation and treatment of the interviewee's replies (see Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1988/1992).

Although semi-directed interviews were central to this research, they posed some problems for the researcher. There was a risk involved in relying too heavily on the interviewees and although I generally took their comments at face-value, I knew that some of the issues were delicate and were likely to be evaded. For instance, I knew that I would not hear press-officers mention that their work was manipulative just as I was unlikely to hear journalists saying that the record companies and the concert promoters influenced their work. I knew that although journalists differed over whether they

should be considered as a part of the music industry, I would have to take a few detours to come to a conclusion. Journalists would dismiss the idea that they were involved in promotion, while press-officers would refute any suggestion that they were PRs. In these instances, I would have to find other means to form and support my own assessment. I found that if journalists were willing to address such delicate issues it would be in one of two ways: either by claiming that these were other journalists'/titles' problems; or by addressing it as a general problem without particularising. When a significant number of interviewees tended to agree on one idea (for instance, that the record companies had developed more subtle ways of influencing the journalists), the argument was validated.

Journalists were also dismissive about their ideological role, partly because they found ideology too strong a word. There was a clash between the researcher and the journalists' framework, especially because ideology has a broader meaning in the British academic lexicon than in the Portuguese – where it remains confined to its political dimension. Professional and taste ideologies were operative notions which were addressed in interviews but had to be validated through inference rather than drawn from the journalists' discourse. However, when it comes to ascertaining the different ideologies in music journalism, the interviews had to be complemented by some content analysis of the press. Ideologies

towards the music industry, Portuguese music and the public, which were crucial to this research, would not be taken into account if they were not represented in the papers.

While semi-directed interviews and content analysis of texts in the press were the core of the methodology developed in my research, other methods were used in different sections. For the chapter on online forums, two different questionnaires were sent by e-mail to the participants in *Forum Sons*. The aim was to ascertain the profile of the participants, the sense they made of their participation in the forum and their opinion on its contents. Again, this approach was complemented with a content analysis of discourses in the forum.

There were some points at which quantitative analysis was required to ground the qualitative approach. This was the case with the survey of threads in the forum for discussion. Over a period of one week, the threads posted were counted and then divided by content to determine the frequency of each type of content (see “contents of the forum” in chapter eight).

The final set of methods used is always a compromise between our aims and the constraints found during the field-work. Although it was my intention to observe directly editorial meetings for these publications, this was only possible in one publication (*Y*). While *DN+* does not have staff meetings – editor, Nuno Galopim, centrally

coordinates operations communicating his decisions individually to each member of staff. In contrast, at *Expresso* the music critics are given total freedom to choose which albums to review. In the case of *Blitz*, I was initially given permission to attend one of the weekly staff meetings but such permission was retracted on the day of the meeting. Later I heard from one of its staff journalists that staff meetings were no longer taking place due to the tensions and arguments that they gave rise to. *Blitz*' much-touted internal disputes over the editorial line may have been central in their refusal to allow me to attend. Attending one staff meeting in *Y* was not very useful because I was not able to compare them to others.

Finally, the use of case-studies to illustrate my thesis can be understood as both a choice of subject and a methodological choice. I use Portuguese popular music journalism as a case-study to examine the possibilities for a public sphere on popular music. In chapter seven, I analyse the practices and ideologies of Portuguese music journalists using them as a case-study to illustrate the role of music journalism towards the music industry. I adopt the working premise that the way that these relationships functioned serve as a marker by which to determine the extent to which music journalism was in line with the idea of the public sphere. In chapter eight, I use *Forum Sons* as a case-study through which to examine the role of

interactive forums in online publications in the making of a public sphere for popular music.

Exploratory interviews and questionnaires

These constituted important methodological points of entry to my research. Exploratory interviews with three editors in music publications were conducted. This was a preliminary approach designed to produce a broad understanding of music journalism as a profession and as a cultural space. Interviews were carried out in November 2001 in Lisbon. They were planned a couple of weeks in advance by phone or by e-mail and were conducted and recorded either in the journalists' office or in the staff-room. Later they were transcribed and analysed using a simple thematic content analysis. Key issues in music journalism as a profession were isolated and given special attention in what became the semi-directed interviews. Less relevant points were left out.

An exploratory questionnaire was sent by e-mail to a core group of 20 participants in *Forum Sons* of which 10 were returned completed. The questionnaire was divided into two sets of questions, the first concerning participation in the forum, the second concerning the participants' opinions of its contents. Some social and economic data were also collected. This questionnaire allowed me to ascertain

the profile and motivations of the participants in the forum. The fact that I was known to the core group of participants in the forum, for contributing to discussions now and then, was very useful to get a satisfactory number of replies. The aim and intentions of the questionnaire were made clear in a message posted on the forum. I asked for permission to send the questionnaire via e-mail to the participants' private addresses (which were available through the forum profiles option). The questionnaire was sent to the 20 participants who consented to this.

Semi-directed interviews

After analysing the exploratory interviews, I organised a semi-directed guide which was used as a template for the in-depth interviews with music journalists. Another guide, constructed for interviews with press and media-officers, was organised during the same period. The choice of interviewees was determined partly by their position and partly randomly. It was important to have quite a representative sample from the titles used in this research and of the different positions occupied by journalists and press-officers. In the end, thirty interviews were conducted among current and former journalists, editors, critics, label managers, concert promoters and press and media-officers. Most interviews were conducted in Lisbon between December 2001 and May 2002.

Although the list of questions posed to the journalists varied according to the interviewee, there were certain areas that were common to all interviews. These were:

1. Professional experience
2. Editorial line
3. Autonomy of the journalist
4. Influence of personal taste in editorial line
5. Influence of public interest in editorial line.
6. Relationship with record companies and concert promoters
7. Coverage of Portuguese music
8. Use of sources
9. Impact of IT
10. Importance attributed to music journalism.

Different areas were covered in the interviews with press and media-officers:

1. Importance of PR/journalist nexus
2. Features of relationship (daily contact, sending of new releases, commissions for gigs abroad).
3. Importance of knowing who is who in music journalism
4. Conflicts and its management.

Interviews were carried out either in the interviewee's professional space (staff room or office) or in a nearby café and were recorded using a micro-tape recorder. The interviewees were always informed about my research intentions and consented to have the conversation recorded. Although the guide was always useful to make sure the main areas were covered, the interviews did very often turn into open-ended conversations as my interviewees were allowed to expand upon their answers and bring forth new issues relevant for my research. I found it quite productive that the direction which the interviews took was quite often determined by the answers given although on certain occasions both journalists and press-officers would indulge in talking about things that strayed quite significantly from the areas of interest. More often than not however the answer would trigger a new question or topic or determine the next issue to cover.

The duration of interviews was between 60 to 90 minutes depending on the interviewees' own predisposition to expand on each topic. On some occasions the 90 minutes mark was exceeded as was the case with *DN+* editor, Nuno Galopim, whose two interviews each lasted for about two hours. On one occasion, one interview was shortened to 40 minutes as my interviewee, former Pop/Rock and Sons editor Luís Maio, started to shorten his answers halfway

through the interview, showing his unwillingness to fully cooperate. On some occasions some important information came to light only after the interview was over and the tape recorder was switched off. Off-the-record comments from journalists were always something to look out for. For instance, in one of those moments, one journalist told me that one of his competing titles already had its upcoming four issues' front covers arranged – to indicate how the labels and concert promoters set the agenda for that title. In general terms, it was a very satisfactory set of interviews as journalists and press-officers were generally keen to talking about their profession.

Interviews were later transcribed and subjected to a thematic content analysis (Bardin, 1977/1991). Themes were organised around the topics defined in the semi-directed guide. A cursory overview of the material led me to isolate some general themes (for instance, the status of music journalism, the definition of editorial line, the relative importance of personal taste on the one hand and public interest on the other, journalists' relationships with record labels and concert promoters, and ideologies towards Portuguese music). These themes were subsequently analysed by taking into account the subdimensions within each theme. Relevant quotes that illustrated or reinforced the findings from the analysis of press coverage were quoted where they supported or sustained the argument, as seen in chapters four to seven.

E-mail questionnaire

To complement the information collected previously through the exploratory questionnaire, another set of questions was sent to the forum participants - including the lurkers. Questions concerned their music consumption habits, their uses of the web as a source of information on music and their uses of the forum. The questionnaire was sent to the same 20 participants from the previous survey, on April 2001. I had 12 replies.

Content analysis of the press

In parallel with conducting interviews, the use of documental analysis was essential for both contributing to the overall understanding of the evolution of music journalism in Portugal and for sustaining the findings from the interviews. For the analysis of documents the national press archive in Lisbon was used. A selection of the most important titles in the history of Portuguese music journalism was analysed, including *Mundo da Canção*, *Música & Som*, *Blitz*, *Sete*, *Pop/Rock*, *Sons*, *Y* (the last three being supplements from *Público*), *DN+* (supplement from *Diário de Notícias*), *A Revista* and *Cartaz* (both supplements from *Expresso*). This sample allowed me first to trace the evolution in music

coverage and in the editorial policies in those publications since their emergence. There was some basic descriptive analysis involved as I tried to define patterns in the contents for each title at different periods. As there was not any detailed historical account of the Portuguese music press, this analysis was crucial for my own account in chapter two.

This sample also allowed me to isolate the three different periods in music coverage as defined in chapter six. For this purpose, relevant articles and features were photocopied at the archive. Another selection was made from those three periods by searching for two types of contents:

a) Patterns of discourse (objective/subjective, ideological, emotional, playful).

b) Coverage that was in line with public reasoning on popular music (e.g. issues related to the music industry, national and global culture, articulation of popular music with social and cultural contexts).

Quotes that illustrated my findings on the evolution in music coverage were used in the argument developed in chapter six.

Content analysis of the press was pursued at different times from September 2001 until the final stages of this research.

Content analysis of forum of discussion

This involved three stages. In the first stage, I defined the features of the forum (number of messages and threads, number of participants, profile in terms of age, education, occupation and gender) through a count during the period from July 2001 to May 2002. In the second stage, the forum contents were divided and counted on a weekly basis. In the third stage, my own regular use of the forum as a lurker allowed me to save to disk a good survey of information which I found relevant for my research. Different types of contents and a sample of the most enduring discussions since the forum emerged in 1999 were used as a survey in my approach to the forum as developed through chapter eight.

Additional information and methods

In addition to the main methodological procedures used in this research, there were some further steps taken to ensure that gaps were filled and arguments reinforced. I developed more informal contacts with some journalists and got back to them through e-mail to request further information. This exchange of e-mails was very helpful as it made more clear some ideas and arguments that were incomplete. I also sent other sets of questions to some journalists via e-mail to fill gaps that emerged as I was writing up my findings. E-

mail was an important, though not crucial, device in bridging the spatial gap between the place which was the focus of my research (Lisbon) and the place where I was pursuing this doctorate (Stirling).

Additional research was carried out by phone. Phone interviews were undertaken either when I was not able to interview a key journalist during a stay in Portugal or when some additional information or interviewee was required to fill the gaps that were emerging during the writing up process. On these occasions, I contacted the journalist by phone or e-mail and asked to book a phone interview. Three interviews were done in such conditions. They were recorded – with the consent of the interviewee – on microtape with a microphone plugged in.

Finally, specific data such as statistics and figures related to journalism and to the Portuguese music industry were obtained through a formal, though plain-talking and helpful institutional contact. Record sales and market share figures were obtained through A.F.P., the organisation which represents the major record companies in Portugal. Circulation figures for the titles used for this research were obtained through the marketing and sales departments from each publication. In both cases, the contact was reached by phone and the data sent by e-mail.

Chapter Four

The status of popular music journalism

“This is basically a work of consultation like that seen in *Proteste*.¹

The same way that *Proteste* assesses the quality of consumer goods, we assess the quality of popular music” (former editor, arts/culture supplement).

The particular features of Portuguese music journalism raise the problem of status for its professionals – the music journalists and critics. Music journalists walk a tightrope between the personal (taste, interests) and the professional (duty towards readers, the title to which they work for and, less explicitly, the music industry). The professional ideology of the music journalist often conflicts with the constraints of the larger organisation (the publication and the media group) in which he/she operates. Portuguese music journalism is characterised by a very limited number of titles. Yet, the relatively small scale of music journalism in Portugal has created conditions for the emergence of a number of writers that are acknowledged by the readers and who have acquired

a status as “opinion-makers”. Music journalism has created its own status over the years on the strength of its relation to the wider fields of culture, music and journalism. The status of music journalism has to be seen in the light of the position occupied by popular music in the hierarchies of culture and music, and in the way the press in its editorial policies incorporates such hierarchies.

In this chapter, I will address the status of music journalism by taking into consideration some dimensions. Drawing from the data collected in semi-directed interviews with journalists, I will consider its position within the fields of culture and journalism and its relation to other media. I will also look at the ambivalent status that music journalists seem to enjoy as “opinion-makers” with a responsibility towards the readers and as players in the music industry. In this sense, attention will be paid to the criteria that guide journalists (and editors, in particular) in the definition of an editorial line.

Music journalism, radio and television

There has been a general conviction within the music industry that music journalism remains the most autonomous and unspoiled link of all the media that devote attention to popular music in Portugal. While music radio has been debased by the increasing dominance of the playlists and the disappearance of “author

¹ *Proteste* is a consumer’s magazine.

programs”², and while Portuguese television has excluded popular music from its prime-time slots, leaving music broadcasting to satellite channels like *SIC Radical* and *Sol Musica*, print journalism has remained a gatekeeper of taste.³ The peculiar status of music journalism is acknowledged within the music industry:

I think that the press has changed less over the years than radio and television; and I am glad of that because both radio and television have changed for the worse. They have evolved into a onedimensional attitude in which what matters are *shares*. The music itself is an instrument where one takes the minimum risks possible. And while this has been noticeable for the last three to four years in radio and television, the press did not go through that radical change... (manager, major record company)

When it comes to the press, there is still a margin for personal taste (...) The fact that we are profitable gives us more freedom because 50 to 60% of our advertising does not come from the labels, so their influence is smaller (compared to radio) (former editor, weekly music title).

The importance of music journalism has been acknowledged in the much-touted devotion of Portuguese audiences to foreign artists with a cult appeal. Pop acts like Lamb, the Tindersticks, Morphine, dEUS, Gotan Project, who were relative commercial failures in most markets, have achieved significant cult status in Portugal which

² Direct translation from the expression “programas de autor” which refers to those radio programs that are centred in the figure of the DJ.

³ See Hirsch (1972/1990) and Shuker (1994).

translates into chart appearances and sell-out gigs. Arguably, it is understood that press coverage has contributed to some extent to the making of such phenomena.

When questioned about the influence their work has had on the success of such artists in Portugal, journalists tend to downplay their own role attributing it instead to the influence of other sources like radio, or simply to the fact that the music of such artists appealed to a certain Portuguese collective soul.⁴ The influence of the press is seen, either as working in complement with other media, or as operating at a small scale in niche markets in association with small retailers and minor audiences.

I don't mean to say that the press does not contribute to those cults but I don't think it is enough to make a gig sell-out. I think the impact of the press is important but relatively tiny; it works more in informing an elite which, in its turn, has the capacity to influence people who would like to belong to that elite (former editor, arts/culture supplement).

⁴ As mentioned by one of the journalists, “what I notice about those cults is that the Portuguese music consumer is usually fascinated by a certain pop music which is close to fado and to feelings of sadness and nostalgia” (journalist, arts/culture supplement).

There are journalists that have some influence in the sales of small retail shops. I do remember some years ago, Ricardo Saló would write about a record that was available in *Contraverso*⁵ and the record would eventually sell-out the same day (label manager, former journalist).

We have the case of António Freitas who has been covering heavy-metal for many years and has written for *Blitz*, been a DJ in *Antena 3* and published a specialised magazine and we know that when it comes to heavy-metal his opinion reigns (editor, weekly music newspaper).

While most journalists seem to agree that the press is only influential on a small scale (or as another journalist suggested, “a review of a Britney Spears album is totally irrelevant to its sales but a review on Lamb or the Magnetic Fields can be very important”), some believe that the press can both create, per se, such phenomena and have a lasting influence upon the trends of the industry. Some journalists suggest that the importance of music journalism is underestimated by the journalists, in general: “Maria João & Mário Laginha were album of the year here in 1999. In the two weeks after the poll was published, the record went from 8,000 copies sold to reach silver status.⁶ This is a great satisfaction!” (editor, arts/culture supplement). There is a broad conviction among some journalists that the press contributes to the success of certain artists:

⁵ A music retail/distribution shop specialised in the “leftfield” market.

⁶ Up to 10,000 copies sold.

I do believe that the press has the opportunity to make such phenomena (...) The case of Lamb, for instance, who were praised in the press (*Blitz*, *DN+*, *Y*) proves it. Ben Harper was a phenomenon created by us more than anyone else. (editor, weekly music newspaper)

The press is an important reference for music fans and it works in conjunction with other mediums in the creation of certain phenomena at a national level. The impact of music journalism is not exerted in isolation but is complemented by other mediums such as radio, advertising and concert promotion:

I don't believe that a journalist alone can make a difference; usually it is when a consensus is formed around certain artists that those phenomena happen (...) *Gotan Project* had good feedback in the press, got airplay in one or two key radio stations and then came for a gig in the right place, Lux.⁷ (label manager, former contributor)

The case of *XFM*⁸, to which I will return later, is emblematic of the ongoing synergy between the press and radio. Broadcasting in Lisbon and Porto between 1993 and 1997, *XFM* created a cult audience drawn from the aforementioned "elite" of music press readers: young, urban, graduate, middle-class, media-savvy music

⁷ A club in Lisbon which is very trendy among dance/electonica audiences.

⁸ Radio station specialised in left-field pop music which, in spite of its acknowledged cult status, was closed due to lack of advertising. Its slogan, "to a vast minority", resounded in the context of mid-1990s but, in the end, it was its, excessively exclusive appeal to a minority that alienated advertisers and made the station unprofitable.

fans. Among its contributors were journalists from the press, who would give the music that they had praised in their weekly reviews most airplay. This synergy has continued after the demise of *XF*M with the emergence of private radio station *Voxx* and, to a lesser extent, the publicly funded *Antena 3*. Both have arguably filled the void left by *XF*M in alternative music broadcasting. Indeed, some journalists/contributors are recruited from radio stations on the strength of their acknowledged work as DJs. Many others make the opposite move, as radio stations often invite well-respected journalists to anchor programs: Nuno Galopim, Isilda Sanches (both from *DN+*), Ricardo Saló (*Expresso*), Rui Portulez (*Y*), Rui Monteiro and Pedro Gonçalves (both from *Blitz*) are among the journalists that, while having an acknowledged status as writers for the press, have been regular DJs in music radio. This naturally encourages a synergy between the press and the radio in the making of certain phenomena.

Synergies with radio

As the field of popular music has traditionally favoured the intermingling between the press and radio, recent trends in concentration of mass media ownership is an important factor which

reinforces such synergies while changing their features.⁹ With the incorporation of most media of national proportion in large economic groups from the mid-1980s onwards, the flux between the press and the radio was now partly framed by their belonging to the same economic group:¹⁰

The first time I worked for *Diário de Notícias* it was by invitation from Nuno Galopim. I was at *XFM* then, so was Nuno Galopim, *DN* belonged to Lusomundo, so did *XFM* and, at the time, there was a favourable context for the integration of people into different business within the group. (contributor, arts/culture supplement)

The movement of professionals between press and radio is not exclusively determined by a new economic order in which media groups searched for synergies between the different parts of their business. More traditional and informal social contact between professionals remains a key factor in the understanding of “recruitment policies”: “the second time, however, there was no institutional link... There was an invitation made at a personal level by Nuno Galopim (...) which I accepted” (ibid.). The examples show how the synergy between radio and press reflect editorial strategies that consider professional criteria (competence, status of the journalist/contributor) alongside institutional advantages (belonging to the same group) without necessarily matching these

⁹ See Sánchez-Tabernero (1993) and Burnett (1996).

criteria. The point here is that the impact of music journalism comes partly in the strength of the synergetic effect of the professional mobility between the press and the radio. That synergetic effect is sustained in equal measures by media groups' policies and by the status of the journalists within the milieu. Although media groups have increasingly been using synergetic policies between their media assets, informality in a small-scale space still matters for the development of such synergies.

The challenge of IT

The impact of IT is generally acknowledged by journalists as posing a threat to their status, especially in relation to its role of opinion-making. Some journalists point out how the influence of music journalism tends to wane with the use of the web as a source of information. The impact of IT on music journalism is three-fold. First, it makes news available more quickly thus rendering brief news in the press obsolete. For instance, *Y* has often been criticised for having its first two pages filled with short news (though it merges music with the other areas covered by the supplement). The interest of these pages to the general public is questionable since most of the news is available on web sites throughout the week.

¹⁰ See the main Portuguese media groups in Appendix III.

Second, the web has arguably contributed to a more segmented, time-managed and ready-made type of journalism in the press. Not only is the net making information on popular music (as on anything else) more easily accessible and digestible but it is forcing music coverage in the press to become similarly fractured. The immediacy of the net and its impact on the time management of music titles should, according to some journalists, lead the journalists/editors to a reassessment of its editorial policies:

With the internet so accessible nowadays, any music title has serious problems in keeping itself up-to-date. The surplus value of a (music) newspaper today is, then, not as a source of information, nor as a sort of reference bible in which you find the latest news, but more in its critical, analytical approach. (contributor, weekly newspaper)

Third, the net has brought greater diversity of information on popular music, something that cannot be achieved in the printed press in a small-scale music industry like the Portuguese. The pleasure of discovering something new (an artist or release) and bringing it to public knowledge tends to disappear as most information is available on the web.

Some 10 to 15 years ago, I would be thrilled by a new release, I would write about it trying to catch the reader's attention, explaining why it was important and so on and that would trigger interest in the act (...) That is something that is missing now, that pleasure in searching for the rare object. Nowadays, just by pressing a key, all the information is available for you (...) it is much easier for everybody to form his/her own opinion without the mediation of the rock critic. (popular music critic, arts/culture supplement)

In this context the role of the music journalist as opinion-maker is at risk because "active" music consumers have other sources available to form and shape opinions. While in the past it would be easy for certain journalists and rock critics to create allegiances with their readers who would get to know about less visible artists, recent times have seen a dismissal of the status of music journalists as opinion-makers.

The challenge of IT is also seen in terms of the incorporation of the web in the journalists' professional practices. The effect of the web as a source of information is ambivalent. On the one hand, it makes access to information easier for journalists and, therefore, it facilitates their work. On the other hand, there is a risk of the journalist relying too much on the web and not considering other sources. In general terms, it has been pointed out that dependency on the web as a source of information, homogenises the information to a worrying level:

The press publishes information that was found in a web site and that is not confirmed. That is very dangerous because then the information available is the same everywhere! We read the same information in fifty different sites, whether they are French, Portuguese, Spanish, English or American! (journalist, weekly music title)

Some journalists are eager to criticise the tendency of other journalists to replace traditional sources in favour of the web. In chapter seven, this argument will be further explored when I consider the impact of IT on coverage of Portuguese music.

Music journalism and the fields of journalism and culture

There has been, in the Portuguese context, an historical exclusion of popular music from wider debates within the public sphere of culture. Music journalism is relatively devalued within both the fields of journalism and culture and quite obviously within the fragment of cultural journalism. As a consequence and in spite of their recognition by the music industry and by a loyal readership, music journalists are reluctant to perceive themselves as being influential on market trends. Most seem to agree that music journalism remains the “poor relative” in the press: “music is usually seen as your own thing, as something that is irrelevant (...) and not worthy of attention” (former contributor, arts/culture supplement).

At the core of this undervaluation are the traditional cultural hierarchies and how they become visible the Portuguese context.¹¹

While popular music is, as elsewhere, a multi-million euro industry whose importance as an entertainment industry is, arguably, only rivalled by football, it occupies a low status in the culture hierarchy.

This is something which is spelled out by the music journalists:

Popular music is seen in Portugal not as culture but as a whim, an artifice, or as a pure, easily discarded form of entertainment. The state of the music press reflects, to a great extent, the little importance that popular music has for the Portuguese. In Britain one breathes pop. In Portugal, popular music stands for culture as playing marbles stands for sport. (journalist, weekly music title)

While its impact on the masses is far bigger than that of other more-valued cultural areas like literature, classical and jazz music and, arguably, cinema, popular music is not regarded with the same level of seriousness as these other forms. This sort of disregard has been widely experienced by journalists:

¹¹ See Santos (1988).

I do remember quite well when I was writing for *O Independente*¹² the music was the last thing to consider when an editing decision had to be taken. It had little space, the reviews would be included or excluded regardless of their importance and depending on the amount of space left by advertising (former contributor, arts/culture supplement)

Coverage of popular music suffers from a double misrecognition: firstly, a relative devaluation of culture in the general features; secondly, a refusal to regard popular music as culture. When it comes to the first case, we find different strategies in the various titles. While *Público* has traditionally brought culture to the front page, including a draw of attention to the two cultural supplements (*Y* and *Mil Folhas*), in *Diário de Notícias* the arts/culture supplement is neglected and seldom shown on the front page. It is also not available in the title's website.

Q – Why is *DN+* so devalued by the editors?

A – It's something that has to do with the title's profile, I mean *Diário de Notícias* is addressed to a wide middle-ground readership. If *DN+* has an *electronica* act on the cover, I doubt that it will appeal to most of our readership (...) And the main purpose of the cover is to sell the newspaper. (executive editor, *Diário de Notícias*)

The executive editor director is oblivious to the fact that *DN+* rarely has an *electronica* act on the cover. However, the main issue

here is that *Diário de Notícias* is read by a broad readership that cannot be identified with an interest in the arts/culture supplements. Furthermore, the editors usually prefer to bring the other Saturday supplement, *DNa*,¹³ to the front page, not because it appeals to that wide, comprehensive readership but because it is “a supplement that allows us to catch some readers from *Público*, e.g. a more graduate, intellectual readership” (ibid.). *DN+* is secondary in this strategy.

In *Público*, however, there is a conscious attention to culture which is embedded in its tradition (*Público* was launched by journalists from *Expresso*'s supplement *A Revista*, a groundbreaking title in cultural journalism) and in its own target readership broadly defined as younger, more educated and more demanding than that of *Diário de Notícias*: “I would like to think that the main ideology in *Público* is exigence. This can have the reverse effect which is such exigence turning into excessive elitism”. (editor, *Público*). *Y* reflects the strategies of *Público* but also the concerns that arise from addressing a more selected readership: “*Y* like *Público* is addressed to certain elites (...) maybe elite is not the right term... but definitely to some niches or sectors” (executive editor, daily newspaper).

Editorial attitudes to culture in the press are thus ambivalent. While *Diário de Notícias*, like most of the daily press tends to leave culture playing second fiddle, usually bringing

¹² Portuguese weekly newspaper.

¹³ A culture and lifestyle supplement.

politics, social affairs or sport to the front page, *Público* proudly presents itself as a culturally demanding newspaper which is regarded by many, not without some dismissal, as elitist and “intellectual”. Coverage of popular music in *Y* is coherent with the elitism and more niche-oriented appeal of *Público*. There is a homology between *Público*’s “demanding” coverage of culture and the aesthetic ideology of *Y* with its depreciation of popular movies - the hugely successful French movie *Amélie* was notoriously dismissed by the supplement when it was praised almost elsewhere in the Portuguese press - and excessive attention to the niche-market of “leftfield” dance music and electronica. *DN+*, on the other hand, is more in line with the popular taste.

Coverage of popular music is affected directly by the perception of its place within the context of broader cultural concerns and indirectly by the status given to culture in society as a whole. In *Cartaz*, the editorial line has recently changed towards an equal share of space for each cultural format. This can either be determined by politically correct notions of cultural democracy or, otherwise, by the traditional higher status of the fine arts (painting, classical music) which leads to a representation in the press that is disproportionate to its impact. In any of the cases, popular music seems (more than cinema) to be the most affected section, the one

where the amount of coverage is in inverse proportion to its real significance.

There was over the last months a reformulation. There were two – eventually three – privileged areas: cinema, music and, to a less extent, books; then there were the art exhibits, theatre, dance, etc. (...) There was an editorial decision to give the same amount of space to all of the areas, which I find a little absurd because the proportion of the public who attend art galleries is not comparable to the public who attend rock concerts or go to the movies. (popular music critic, arts/culture supplement)

When *Blitz* was incorporated into the media group, *Impresa*, it became perceived as the “poor relative” among the titles owned by the group “both because of the printing quality (which has never improved over the years) and for the simple fact that it is a newspaper whereas most titles in the group are magazines (with all the graphic advantages that it brings) (...) The fact that it has the manager’s daughter in its administration may show some interest but the resources have never been big – only one market study was implemented and it was badly managed. Its web page was closed”. (journalist, weekly music title). Some journalists claim that the new administration has failed to understand the traditional status of the newspaper, marketing *Blitz* in the wrong way: “There is a neat

displacement here... As you can imagine the Balsemão group¹⁴ is not even remotely aware of what the interests of a certain alternative youth are” (journalist, weekly music newspaper). Music journalism suffers from both marginalisation and misunderstanding. Those who work on the newspapers, and upon whom the music journalists somehow depend (press editors, managers), tend to misrepresent popular music as a youth staple and popular music coverage as something which matters solely to a drifting youth readership:

We are aware that music is very important for certain sectors, but even more for the youth and that is what we try to keep in line with. Of course there are inherent problems since music is a short-cycle phenomenon and it is also problematic for a 50-year old journalist to write about bands that appeal to a 14-year old audience (editor, daily newspaper).

Popular music’s lack of recognition is best seen in the little attention it receives outside of specialised journalism. Literature and film are discussed and referenced in general sections, often being used and quoted in editorials and opinion articles but popular music remains the domain of a small group, often being mistakenly perceived as devoted music fans rather than professional journalists. *Diário de Notícias* (less), *Expresso* and especially *Público* feature contributions from the Portuguese intellectual class within their pages. While culture is debated and referenced in such contributions,

¹⁴ *Grupo Impresa* is also known as *Grupo Balsemão* following the name of its

popular music is largely absent and confined to specialised journalists. A lack of recognition of music journalism affects its output:

It is an endless cycle because it leads to a lack of interest in popular music both from readers and from editors and directors, and so it becomes natural that the journalists tend to give up fighting for things to improve. (former contributor, arts/culture supplement)

It is, therefore, noticeable that music journalism's position within cultural hierarchies and the impact that these hierarchies have in general newspaper's editorial lines, affect to a great extent the status of music journalists.

Personal taste and public interest

An awareness of the tension between personal taste and public interest is mostly present in the definition of an editorial line. Many seem to agree that the journalist/editor must overcome a tendency to indulge in putting his own tastes and interests above those of the public, by finding the balance between the two. The importance of addressing different publics, each with different tastes and interests, is seen by some journalists as crucial to a better performance of the title.

This opposition often translates into an issue between aesthetic and journalistic relevance. Aesthetic relevance usually matches the tastes and interests of the journalists while public interest often clashes with the taste of the journalist and is seen as a constraint. The year's calendar of releases exemplifies these constraints with Spring and Christmas being the most busy seasons. The demand for music coverage in such seasons is very dependent on the features of the market. Christmas is usually characterised by the release of compilations, box sets, re-editions and re-packages, while Spring meets a more diverse supply usually to support the forthcoming Summer tours. Music journalists meet obligations to cover the most important releases, which leaves little space for lesser known artists, which they would like to introduce to the public. In that sense, according to one journalist, "the aesthetic criteria are always at a disadvantage" (former editor, weekly music newspaper).

In spite of this awareness of the tensions between the duty to inform and cover the interests of the different readerships, and the determinism of personal taste in the editorial line, there seems to be a general detachment on the part of journalists from a clear-cut editorial line that overcomes this tension. This is visible in some supplements, where, according to one journalist, the editorial line is the sum of the different tastes from the staff.

Q – Is there an editorial line in *Y*?

A – In explicit or formalised terms no, there isn't. Even when it comes to music, I think it is very dependent on the tastes of the people who write about it (...) Obviously, if one pays attention, it is quite obvious that there is a stronger emphasis in a certain area, namely, in dance music, but that is also because there are more people who are specialised in that area. (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

More than reflecting the prevalence of taste in the aesthetic orientation of the title, the journalist explains the predominance of dance music through the fact that there are more journalists specialised in this area among the staff, therefore, ignoring the existence of an editorial line that privileges such genres. With such an assumption, it becomes clear that the journalists' taste is a key element in the definition of an editorial line – if we define editorial line as the (aesthetic, journalistic) orientation visible in a particular music title and not as a set of guidelines predefined by the editors. Quite often, the editorial line is upheld by tacit agreement between the editors and the staff, thus reinforcing the informality of such a professional space.

The editorial line is implicit, informal; there is an editor, then, in the music section, there are a number of contributors according to each area: pop, jazz, classical, etc... But there isn't such thing as a line to be followed; that is left to each one's criteria depending on our speciality and taste. (popular music critic, arts/culture supplement)

The absence of a line to be followed by the journalist leaves room for each of the contributors to impose their own criteria according to their tastes and interests. This freedom is, apparently, positive. The next interviewee is aware of the duty of the journalist to cover what he defines as having an obvious and immediate journalistic interest (the mainstream?) – and, simultaneously, to reject what has none (music that is too bad to be written about?) – but stresses the wide gap between these two extremes that the journalist is able to fill with his own criteria.

We have always been given the freedom to do what we want, nevertheless trusting our responsibility and conscience (...) In between what is obvious and immediately important and what is obviously and immediately excluded, there is a vast area in which you are allowed to choose what to cover. (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

Rather than being in a subsidiary position, taste is at the fore in the understanding of music journalism practices and, as seen in some of the arguments presented, it quite often precedes public interest in the definition of an editorial line. This tendency is often a source of criticism within the journalistic milieu. The concern expressed by journalists about the need to address the different publics is reinforced with the argument that this does not always happen. Indeed, as certain interviewees have stressed there are cases where only the tastes and interests of a minority are covered: “Y is clearly a

niche product (...) It clearly serves a very limited share of opinions. It is a well-informed group, indeed, but one that ignores other relevant things.” (editor, arts/culture supplement). The editor of *DN+* is critical towards its competitor for not keeping in line with the music supplements’ duty to address the interests of different publics: “one feels that *Y* is a clear display of a taste group and does not cover the whole of the music market as one supplement should” (ibid.).

Maybe we went too far in that selectivity (...) there is a much stronger emphasis on electronica and dance music; for instance, I would not expect that coverage of rock would be so neglected (...) when it is so clearly aimed at mass-consumption (...) I think that maybe there was a flaw there; such selectivity was not very accurate because we ended up being selective in only one direction. (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

The same criticism is visible, in a more general scope, in the next quote, where it is claimed that the sharing of similar tastes among the best journalists often leads to music journalism resembling a sort of lobby. This is something that journalists and editors must overcome by subduing taste to public interest.

People who write about music do usually share similar interests. Those who write better and are more interesting have the tendency to be more elitist in their tastes, which leads to the fact that to have a good or even the best team, you have the most elitist one, which is equivalent to a lobby. (former editor, arts/culture supplement)

A sense of duty towards the readers is noticeable in the responsibility of the journalist to cover something that is of public and social interest and worth.

Q – What kind of responsibility should a music journalist have?

A – It is the responsibility to show something of public interest, something of public and social value. It is like in all journalism, you have to inform people, you know, but not in the sense of informing about the new releases from the majors' promotion departments or from *Ananana*.¹⁵ (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

Other journalists consider that the surplus value of music journalism must lie, nowadays, in its capacity to be analytical and critical, rather than simply informative and suggest that such a need can only be achieved with a more comprehensive editorial line, one that overcomes the tastes of a peculiar group.

¹⁵ Independent local distributor/retailer.

I feel that, at the moment, the editorial line followed by the current editors is extremely limited because it is mainly determined by the tastes (...) of a group of journalists, namely from the editors and the staff aligned with them. (contributor, weekly music newspaper)

What we find in common between these last three quotations is the fact that the problem lies not in the excessive importance of the journalist's taste but on how the absence of an explicit editorial line which is inclusive and comprehensive, often open the gates to the prominence of taste groups inside the publication. The hegemonic effect of certain taste groups can thus be identified as an issue within music journalism, especially in the context of a non-specialised music press like the Portuguese.

It is quite curious because when people with similar tastes meet and have some common social activity, they talk about everything but those common interests which are, to a certain extent, implicit. They have a sort of tacit agreement "I know you like it and you know I like it too" and so instead of talking about the quality of this and that, one talks about the special edition, of how one found that edition, and curiously, there is less discussion about values than there was in the past, when music journalism was informed by ideologies (...) People discuss the aesthetics to a lesser degree focusing instead on where to find that special mix with the white sticker in the cover that is heard everywhere but is nowhere to be found. (former editor, arts/culture supplement)

This quote reinforces the idea that the agreement on tastes and interests stands against an idealised sphere where music argument should be possible. Whenever the journalists share similar tastes and interests, their public reasoning about popular music tends to be weakened, as arguments are more centered on the commodity-value they convey (where to find a special edition of a record release) than on its aesthetic worth (is it good? Why?). The journalist compares this current status with the past, when music journalism was still shaped by aesthetic ideologies that made argument possible.

The clear definition of an editorial line is, therefore, crucial to reach a compromise between taste and public interest: “The editorial product has to reflect the orientation of the editor, that is, someone who is responsible for the definition of a strategy, of a target and areas to cover, and of a clearly determined editorial line.” (editor, arts/culture supplement). The absence of a clearly defined editorial line in a publication is assumed and criticised, in the following quote, by a member of staff.

Q – Was this new selectivity something that was defined or did it happen because of the journalists that work for the supplement?

A – I don't think it was clearly defined (...) I think that it is due both to a certain idea of modernity and then, probably, to a bad management of the resources (...) and it is a dangerous thing because, this was not our primary intention. It ended up being, for a number of reasons, our arrival point and there is the problem of losing some readers in the process. (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

Such absence is replaced by vague and abstract concepts such as the abovementioned idea of modernity. Bad management is also pinpointed out as a problem, as significant areas in popular music are not covered due to the lack of a specialist writer. This raises the problem of how journalists and contributors are chosen. Lack of professionalism is claimed by some as being the source of the problem, as professionals are chosen either for being friends or for having similar tastes to the ones that are already there. The social (net of informal contacts) anticipates and determines the professional in music journalism:

Lack of professionalism, pure and simple! People are chosen not because they have certain profiles but either because they land in the staff room by chance or because they are friends or they have similar tastes to the editors.” (editor, arts/culture supplement)

Yet, broadly defined editorial lines reveal that music journalism is always, to an extent, selective. Certain areas within popular music are simply ignored by serious music journalism. Though being the only specialist popular music title, *Blitz* ignores certain music phenomena that are dismissed for being aesthetically unworthy, but are relevant when it comes to sales figures. This is the case with such phenomena as boy or girl-bands or with a very dismissed national popular music phenomena, “*pimba*”:¹⁶

Blitz has always been defined by its independent, alternative, marginal profile, in the sense that we won't cover those phenomena or acts that are more commercial such as boy-bands or slow Portuguese music, but we are not completely in the margins, in the sense that we don't refuse to talk about any record that is in the charts. That would be absurd (editor, weekly music newspaper).

Such an option is seen on the strength of certain types being excluded from music coverage. A distinction is drawn between music that can and music that cannot be written nor read about. Journalists make this distinction based on aesthetic and cultural considerations. Firstly, they claim that certain types are not worth writing about because they do not favour a “metamusical” speech.

¹⁶ The “*pimba*” phenomena spreaded in the mid-1990s when it received strong coverage in a television channel. It refers to a music scene which had developed in small towns and locations, especially in small free-markets and events. It incorporates elements from traditional songs and slow Portuguese music but adding cheap, “dumbed down” lyrics (source: *Sons*, 3/10/1997).

Secondly, the people who listen to these types of music are not interested enough in music to read about it.

It's very difficult to avoid this in music journalism, to write about something which does not create a meta-musical discourse (...) Few people would be interested in writing about Marco Paulo¹⁷ and why? Because he sells records that appeal to people who don't enjoy music or who enjoy it but not to the point of searching for information in the press or in books. (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

If this seems to make sense in the case of such genres as *pimba*, there are other genres that are neglected by music journalism for no apparent reason other than the journalist's taste. This reinforces the aforementioned claim that most rock journalists share the same interests. *Heavy-metal* is a typical example of a music genre neglected by music journalism, particularly music supplements. It is claimed that the rejection of *heavy-metal* has simply to do with the fact that the journalists who write for the supplements do not like this type of music.

For instance, I don't remember noticing over the last ten years in *DN+*, in *Y* or in *Cartaz do Expresso*, a single review on an *heavy-metal* release... I don't think this is an editorial line, this is just a matter of the people who work there not listening to nor enjoying heavy-metal (popular music critic, arts/culture supplement).

The concern which music journalists typically exhibit in aiming to strike a balance between personal taste and public interest is rarely witnessed at the level of duties towards the readers. Few journalists among the interviewees have put the duty towards its readers in a straightforward, clear-cut way. Few have stretched beyond the broader idea of addressing different publics and, significantly, few seem aware of any market survey or audience study conducted by their title. Those who do are notable exceptions:

Things have to be done very carefully because we can never have the pretension to think that the public is ready to listen to music the way we do. We deal with music professionally, we are constantly listening to new things and we are much quicker in digesting music than most people (...) We must pay attention to people as they are because they have their jobs and their other priorities (editor, arts/culture supplement).

The editor is addressing the music journalists' tendency to indulge in writing as if they were the readers of their own work. He advocates a coherent editorial line where new artists and tendencies in popular music are presented in tandem with those that are familiar to the reader.

¹⁷ A camp singer, who pioneered the "pimba" genre.

We are not speaking for ourselves, we are speaking about a product that is also necessarily commercial because it is part of the title's selling strategies (...) We must give the people what they already know and next to them we will put the new things and that is how you introduce them. (editor, arts/culture supplement)

Presenting new artists is not enough per se to captivate the reader's attention. They must be grounded in a context where the reader will pay attention to them. Many of the interviewees have mentioned *Blitz*' longstanding strategy of bringing a mainstream act to the front cover, while featuring less-known artists in the inner pages. These more obscure artists were chosen according to the journalists' taste or own criteria of aesthetic relevance. Knowledge of the public is often limited to distinctions that are broad and grounded in intuition rather than empirical data, such as the one between a fluctuating and a stable readership:

There was a percentage of readers that would buy the newspaper because of the cover (...) but because we would never fall down a certain pattern of sales, it means that there was a backbone of readers who would buy the newspaper, regardless of the cover and I suspect that it was a group that was attracted by a certain credibility (...) all the rest would be more ephemeral publics which would purchase on the strength of the hype of the moment. (contributor, weekly music newspaper)

While the fluctuating readership buys the title on the basis of its cover, the stable readership is allied with the title regardless of its cover. These readers are seen as the “backbone” that secures the average sales of the title. One music editor saw the management of the relation to these two types of public as crucial to the editor’s work. He says that the journalist/editor must have in mind the “public” while, at the same time, legitimating its position towards the “people who really like music” (editor, arts/culture supplement). These are a small but important group: “On one side, you must give attention to the public. On the other side, you must appear credible to the people that really enjoy music though these are a minority. It is something that is difficult to manage.” (editor, arts/culture supplement). Such distinctions that the journalists make incorporate value judgements. While some mention those who really like music, others (as in the previous quotation) maintain that the readers who form the backbone are not only more central to the title’s commercial viability but also that their allegiance revolves around an idea of credibility that is delivered by the title.

The prevalence of taste has to be equated with the fact that, contrary to what it may be suggested, such a feature does not necessarily translate into a stronger autonomy for the music journalist. Indeed, some of the criticism towards the music journalists is anchored in the idea that the more the journalist is

specialised according to his/her taste or interests, the more music journalism works on the strength of the record label's interests. Some journalists argue that specialisation is a current trend because it meets the interests of the people who sell records. It makes it easier for them to promote their artists when they can identify a target, "specialised" readership: "because it is on their interest to fragment audiences. Since it makes record promotion easier" (journalist, arts/culture supplement). Such a tendency also has a negative effect in music writing because aesthetic boundaries in popular music are blurred and, by specialising in one genre, journalists are missing the connections that such genre has with others. Knowledge and understanding of popular music is at odds with one being an expert in just a specific genre, one argues:

There are records that are obviously directed towards a public devoted exclusively to dance music. But I think that a critic who devotes himself only to that genre is not a good one (...) he does not know enough about music. (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

Those who have the power to write about music should have a wider scope (...) this has to do with the lack of references that certain journalists have when they characterise certain phenomena because they don't listen to, they don't want to know and they only focus in the area that they like... And I think that when you write in a major newspaper like *Público* or *Blitz*, you must have a wider cultural frame (former contributor, arts/culture supplement).

From the aforementioned examples, one can broadly see certain tensions within music journalism. One such tension is between the need to define an editorial line that is in line with the market and also the tastes and interests of the journalists. Another tension is between the sort of knowledge that is comprehensive and covers all areas within popular music and the tendency for specialisation in an increasingly fragmented music market.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I examined music journalism in Portugal by considering its status as a cultural and professional space. It can be argued that the relative homogeneity of the space and its acknowledged role of gatekeeping hide a problem of status. These two factors do not provide sufficient grounds to define music journalism as a strong, autonomous space. Music journalism certainly enjoys a more credible status than radio because it has resisted the dumbing down of contents represented by the dominance of play-lists in music radio. But music journalism is also dismissed within the journalistic field on strength of the low cultural status enjoyed by popular music in the field of culture.

This dismissal can be seen in three ways. First, in editorial decisions in culture/entertainment supplements where often popular music is at a disadvantage in relation to other sections. Its coverage does not reflect its significance as a form of entertainment. Journalists attribute this to the dismissal of popular music as a lower cultural form or as a form of entertainment as opposed to culture. Second, it can be seen in media group strategies where other titles are privileged. Although *Blitz* has largely benefited from its incorporation in one of the largest media groups in Portugal, it has remained secondary to the group strategies. These strategies often

privilege the other newspaper, the weekly broadsheet, *Expresso*, and have kept *Blitz* in its former inkie format when most specialised titles in the same group are glossies. Third, popular music receives little attention outside of music supplements, sections or pages. This indicates a underlying dismissal of popular music within the broader sphere of culture. Unlike cinema, which is discussed in editorials, opinion articles and cultural sections, popular music is confined to its specialised “corner” of music journalism. Music journalists are often perceived as music fans, unlike movie or book critics who are often allowed to appear on television programs and have a more legitimated status as cultural mediators.

I have also considered the role of IT and the web as sources of information to be key issues on considerations about the status of music journalists. The availability of information in the web constitutes a threat to the role of music journalists and critics as opinion-makers because the readers have more information at a quicker pace on websites. Short news is the main area affected as it becomes redundant to publish information that has been available and updated throughout the week in websites. However, reviews, interviews and biographies which were part of the formative role of music journalism are also available on a larger scale through the web. The role of the journalist in discovering new artists and as an opinion-maker has diminished to a considerable extent. Journalists

are facing a problem here and while this seems to be a common concern, there is not a common, spelled-out strategy for dealing with this issue. What can journalists do to make their work distinctive and valuable?

While the status of music journalism is a reflection of its relation to the wider fields of cultural journalism and of the constraints posed by new information technologies, some of its problems are internal. Having developed through the 1980s relatively free from pressures from the music industry, the space of music journalism has been characterised by a relative closure in tastes and interests. Music journalists and critics tend to share similar tastes and interests. As far as the space of music journalism is overlooked in editorial or media group strategies, journalists tend to indulge in submitting public interest to personal taste and interests. Excessive attention to certain areas, especially within the “leftfield” (the craze of the music press, as one journalist mentioned), in general supplements can make music journalism too selective and elitist and less of a gatekeeper.

While music journalism has been seen among the other media as “the strongest link” for its acknowledged gatekeeping role - in opposition to the dumbing-down of popular music radio and the absence of a television broadcasting policy towards popular music - there is a tendency within music journalism to take this status for

granted. The absence of a clearly defined editorial line, its replacement with a tacit agreement among the staff in respect of the areas which need to be cover, the absence, to a certain extent, of professional criteria to recruit new journalists, plus the lack of discussion between journalists on the value of popular music, all lead to a relative closure of music journalism towards notions of public interest as it opens the gates to the proeminence of the tastes and interests of the journalists. This closure is ambivalent. In a way it may suggest autonomy in the sense that music journalism finds its own ways of self-legitimation without the need for reasoned discussion (what and how to cover? Who to address?). On the other hand, there seems to be a strong reliance on taste and knowledge in popular music (knowledge on aesthetics as opposed to knowledge of the music industry or of “the business”) as the main linchpins of music journalism. This is what I understand from the comments regarding the editorial line as being defined by the tastes and interests of the staff.

This closure in the space of music journalism has two possible consequences for the role of music journalism in the public sphere. First, notions of public interest disappear from view as coverage of popular music is predetermined to appeal only to a minority. This turns music journalism into an elitist space and may contribute to reinforcing its exclusion from the public sphere of culture. Secondly,

a strong reliance on taste and the absence of a clear editorial line creates the illusion of independence and self-sufficiency. As one journalist mentioned, “what happens is that if a title doesn’t have a clear-cut editorial line it becomes subject to the influence of the promotion departments” (journalist, arts/culture supplement). This influence requires further investigation and in the next chapter I will look at the relationship between the journalists and the music industry as represented by record labels and concert promoters.

Chapter Five

Music journalists and the music industry

In this chapter, the relationship between music journalists and the music industry, as represented by press and media-officers in record label and concert promotion companies, will be examined. This relationship is central for an assessment of the role of music journalism in the public sphere.

Independence from the market is acknowledged as a marker of the public sphere.¹ Indeed, Habermas (1962/1989) traces the collapse of the public sphere in modern societies attributing such collapse, partly, to the growing influence of the laws of the market that pervaded the public space for rational debate. The market replaced rational-critical debate with consumption, he argues. The case of journalism is often revelatory in this respect. The commodification of journalism and the move towards market-driven principles of entertainment (Dahlgren, 1995; McNair, 1998) has been considered as contributing to the erosion of its status as a fourth estate. The market pressures come in the form of advertising, audiences/readership and media ownership by large economic groups.

In the case of music journalism, special attention has been paid to the pressures from the industry as represented by the record labels and the concert promotion companies (Chapple & Garofalo, 1977; Frith 1978/1981; Negus, 1992; Forde, 2001a, 2001b). It is more or less assumed that the journalist/press-officer' nexus (Forde, 2001b) is more important than advertising and sales in assessing the independence of music journalism. That is certainly true in the Portuguese case where music supplements, being part of general, high-selling titles, enjoy more independence from advertising and readership constraints. While many seem to point out the power of the music industry to control the press' agenda (Frith, 1978/1981; Breen, 1987; Reynolds, 1990b; Savage, 1991; Negus, 1992; Toyne, 1993; Shuker, 1994; Arnold, 2001), a complementary approach that puts its emphasis on the music press rather than approaching it from the industry's point of view has been absent (Forde, 2001b). Though Negus, who offers one of the most comprehensive examinations of the popular music industry, suggests that the music press is "controlled" by the music companies, it is noticeable that his account overlooks the journalists' view, privileging the standpoint of the press-officers and publicity agents. The inextricable link between the press and the companies is unquestionable, but beyond this it is interesting to ascertain how that dependency is played out. What kind of disruptions may arise from a

¹ See Habermas (1962/1989), Dahlgren (1991, 1995) and Fraser (1992).

relation in which “dependent on one another for their daily livelihood, the press-officer and journalist mutually make each other’s lives easier”? (Negus, 1992, p.125). In his research, focused on the relations between music journalists and press-officers, Forde (2001b) claims that such a relation is not necessarily one-way not even fully deterministic. Instead Forde suggests that there is a complex relation of “mutual dependency that is characterised by compliance, compromise and resistance on both sides of the exchange” (ibid., p.5). The outcome of such relations is more uncertain than previous studies have suggested.

The relationship with the record companies and concert promoters is crucial to an assessment of music journalism’s independence from the market. Music journalists are expected to retain critical independence and to have their own normative criteria on what to cover. Yet, they depend on record labels and concert promoters for access. The links between the two are, thus, unavoidable. In that sense, to determine whether music journalists are part of the music industry, or not, may be a pointless exercise. The discussion posed in such terms seems oversimplified. Certainly many journalists are proud to claim their independence from the industry, while others are happy to concede that both the press and the record companies help to sell records, thus making it difficult to trace a division between the two sides.

Broadly speaking, journalists are dependent on their sources and develop professional (though mostly informal) relationships with the record labels and concert promoters in order to have access whether to a new album release, an interview, a press conference or a gig. If this makes the case for the press being a tool for the labels to use when promoting their artists, it also leaves a margin of independence for the journalists. While record labels and promoters certainly influence, to an extent, what is covered, they do not, in principle, determine how it is covered. Critical independence is crucial to the journalists' normative code of practice.

Yet, as clear-cut as it sounds in theory, all this requires further examination. Drawing from information collected through semi-structured interviews, I will examine how such a relationship is managed on both sides. The independence of music journalism happens ideally when the journalists set up their own agenda and do not allow the record labels or promoters to influence it to their advantage. Since it is impossible for the journalists to operate outside the industry, such independence has to be assured through the management of that relationship - not its dismissal. Rather than giving a definitive answer about whether music journalism enjoys an independent status from the music industry or, conversely, that the influence of record labels and concert promoters weakens or even threatens such autonomy, I will argue that journalists, with their own

ideologies, practices and resources (forms of capital), can play a proactive role in this relationship.

Music journalists and record labels

Music journalists are commonly dismissed for selling-out and serving the record labels' interests. Indeed, this is probably the biggest stigma that affects music journalism as a profession. But on the other hand, in the Portuguese case, music journalists are seen as playing an important role as opinion-makers. Underlying the relationship between journalists and record companies is the tension between two oppositional sets of values. On one side the journalists and their commitment to the aesthetic and to what is of interest to the readers. On the other, the music industry (as represented by record companies and concert promoters), primarily concerned with selling music.

In their profession, music journalists develop daily contact with record labels and concert promoters. This is a professional relationship that has evolved with the growth of the music industry in Portugal and the professionalisation of music journalism. Yet a straight dependency upon record labels was there even at the early stages of *Blitz* back in the 1980s. Though the contacts were not so frequent and it has been said that the music industry took time to

acknowledge the importance of *Blitz*, it is now more or less assumed that, in its early stages, *Blitz* published so-called promotion interviews:

That is, a label either Portuguese or foreign, would invite a journalist, usually a free-lancer in its trust, to interview an artist (...) that interview would then circulate through dozens or hundreds of media outlets (...) *Blitz* published, in the eighties, several promotion interviews which were given for free by the labels. Most were foreign so they just had to be translated and at the time you would fake the name of the author. Mind you, this is no secret. (journalist, weekly music newspaper)

With limited resources and limited access to coverage of foreign artists, journalists had to turn to record labels who would be happy to offer these interviews for free. At the same time, *Blitz* would very often have people from the record labels among the contributors as part of this “access to information at the lowest cost” strategy. In spite of these early strategies, it is generally argued that subsequently *Blitz* went on to develop relatively free from the pressures of the industry as it was not until much later that the labels start to acknowledge the crucial importance of the title in their promotion strategies.

What happened subsequently was the development of the industry sustained by the establishment of the main record companies in Portugal, coupled with the consequent growth of the

national catalogue in record labels and the increasing inclusion of Portugal in the tour schedules of international artists. These factors led to the industry acknowledging the key role of the media and, for the case that matters here, of music journalism in their promotion strategies. The increasing importance of the press promoter occurred as a consequence of the expansion of media departments in record labels and concert promoters, and it reflected the closer relationship between the music industry and the press. In Portugal, the leading record companies do now have a press-officer in charge of daily contact with the journalists. Smaller companies and concert promoters may usually have a single media-officer in charge of contact with all the media and sometimes a single promotion department deals with all contact with media, both in terms of coverage and airplay, and in terms of marketing and publicity. Yet, whether specialised or not, the press is essential to the companies' promotion strategies.

The relationship between music journalists and press promoters can not be fully assessed without considering the distinct positions the two sides occupy in the music industry. Press promoters work with the economic goal of selling their artists by ways of promoting them the best way in the press. Music journalists' professional responsibilities, on the other hand, are two-fold and less straightforward. They have to cater for their readership, to secure the

sales of the title to which they write for. But they also work as gatekeepers of taste ensuring that the economic goal of promoting an artist is filtered through their own taste and through notions of what is good and important. The music journalists' commitment to the aesthetic value/relevance of what is covered or reviewed is always an important factor when considering their professional relationship to the wider industry. It is because both sides work with different values and develop different ideologies over the same subject – music – that conflicts may arise and that such relationship has to be managed.

The conflict of interests between the journalists and the press-officers can be placed in the tension between art and commercialism in popular music (Stratton, 1982, 1983; Negus, 1992, 1995). Although both parts are equally interested in maintaining the relationship, they are not on board the same ship as some – especially those from record labels – may suggest. Press-officers are eager to see journalists as working partners - indeed, one former promoter mentioned that being a working partner should be the main career goal for the press-officer. In contrast, journalists tend to be dismissive towards the idea that they are part of the industry, as represented by record labels and concert promoters:

Something that I can hardly accept is when someone from a record label claims that we are all in the same boat or that we work with similar aims. We don't! (...) That our working subjects are the same is a different matter. But the goal of a record company is to sell records. Ours is to sell newspapers. (journalist, weekly music newspaper)

Although selling newspapers is presented as the reason for such dismissal, another explanation is the music journalists' professional ideology, which includes a commitment to music distinct from its commodity value. Most music journalists are music fans and find in their occupation a chance to write passionately about the music they like. It is generally acknowledged that they enjoy a certain degree of independence and freedom in their choices, as they can indulge in writing about acts that have a limited cult appeal and sell no more than a few dozens. Such commitment to the music they like, or that they consider to be aesthetically important, clashes with the interests of the majors and concert promoters:

Some years ago I was working for BMG and I made a survey of the press to conclude that 90% of the reviews were on releases of which only 25 units had been imported to Portugal (...) And I said to myself: Damn!... I have a label that earns 1 million thousand escudos per year, I invest in advertising in these titles and they are writing about something which will sell 25 copies! (concert promoter).

Knowledgeable music journalism has different values from the record labels. Not all the releases from record labels meet the criteria of the journalists on what is relevant to be covered. Quite often the biggest selling acts from the major labels are ignored or receive little attention from the press.² At the same time, marginal acts, which are often left to second plan in the label's promotion strategies, are the craze of the music press, prompting the journalists to contact the labels in advance to ask for a copy of their new release or to book an interview. There is a tendency for small labels and distributors, like *Música Alternativa*, *Ananana* or *MVM*, to have their catalogue overrepresented in press coverage when compared to the majors, or to its significance in the market.³ This is because their acts meet the tastes and interests of music journalists. For these companies, the work of music journalists is crucial:

If it is a release from an independent label that arrives here without the gearing of the American music industry, then it needs to be legitimised by the critics. It needs that form of dissemination because it can't count on MTV, MCM, or the European music channels, which reflect its previous career in the American market. (manager, retail/distribution company)

² Acts that fit into categories such as "pimba", boys and girls bands, teen-pop in general, certainly do receive little attention from the knowledgeable press but so do mainstream pop/rock artists considered to be too commercial for the journalists' criteria (say Shania Twain or Bryan Adams).

³ This tendency is most visible in *Blitz*' reviews pages where, invariably, most of the reviews are in new releases from small labels/distributors.

Sometimes there is more pressure from those retailers than from the multinationals, probably because if we name-check the labels of the artists that we write about, there is already a majority of imports from independent retailers in relation to the multinationals. (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

This function of gatekeeping ensures that music journalism enjoys a relative autonomy from the commercialism of the music industry. This autonomy is always relative because of the aforementioned pressures from the independent sectors (labels, retailers). What this means is that although journalists do not necessarily write about the artists that sell, there are no cultural or aesthetic values (from the journalist) that exist free from the economic values (from the industry).⁴ Indeed, journalists' editorial choices always meet the industry's needs whether they are represented by the majors or by the independents. However, it is significant that high levels of investment in promotion by major record labels, and the wider appeal of their acts do not translate into stronger coverage in the press. How these different values are managed, so that the needs of both sides are met is something that requires further examination:

⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the independent sector from an institutional point of view, see Hesmondhalgh (1999).

If you make a list including every label there are about sixty releases but only ten of them are reviewed. And usually those ten will show in every newspaper. Why? Because it was determined by the labels that those were the bets and it was for those that they took pictures, videos, promotion releases, interviews... In their business, labels decide what has to be covered. (concert promoter)

This suggests that although labels do not manage to promote all their acts in the press, they do succeed in spotting which ones to promote and to have them widely covered. We can, thus, broadly assume that though operating on different principles and with different values, journalists and record labels find ways to converge and compromise while maintaining their independence. This is achieved through a professional relationship that is developed over time with regular contact

Press-officers and music journalists

Press-officers deal with music journalists almost on a daily basis. The relationship involves sending copies of new releases, promotional stuff (text and photographs) and press releases to the journalists. Additionally, press-officers contact journalists to arrange interviews, and perhaps to offer tickets for gigs abroad. These acknowledged practices occur through two types of communication

which are essential if we are to understand the relationship between press-officers and the press. Firstly, there is a formal style of contact. An example of formal contact is the announcements on new releases or upcoming events which are communicated through press releases or by sending e-mails to mailing lists, which includes all music journalists from the Portuguese press. In this instance, the record labels and concert promoters make sure that the information reaches all members of the press community in a democratic way, also ensuring that the information reaches the largest possible number of titles. However, the second type of contact is far more relevant to understand the ambivalent relationship between the press and the record companies. This is the daily, informal contact, through which press-officers choose a journalist/title to which they will provide information first hand. Press-officers are free to give the privilege of first hand information to whichever journalist or title they believe is most suitable to cover or review their artist or event.

We primarily send the information for the mailing list. Now, that information that you have, being that Radiohead are playing in Portugal, has an undisputed news-value. You can try to negotiate with one title that you think is more valuable to give it the information first so that it will be ahead of the other titles (promoter, concert promotion company)

Their developed knowledge of the press, and the media in general, allows them to identify the journalist who will be most

useful to cover their act. A journalist may be targeted if he is specialised in a certain area, has a particular taste, or simply because he is well-credited.

However, it would be simplistic to see music journalists as passive pawns who stay at the other end of the line waiting to be contacted by the press-officers. Music journalists are proactive in this relationship, quite often being the ones who call the press-officers asking for a new release that was forgotten, or got little attention from the label, to book an interview with an artist or to confirm first-hand information spreading on the web, or through word of mouth. Being “proactive” is crucial to the journalists’ independence, or as one of the interviewees has put it, “good journalists go in search of the information. Bad ones wait for it to be sent by the labels” (journalist, arts/culture supplement). While press-officers must spot the right journalist to promote their acts, their interest does not match those of the journalists. There are different agendas and different priorities that must be met and journalists can not remain simply as receptors in this relationship if they want to meet their agendas. In this sense, journalists act very often as PRs themselves, trying to sensitise the press-officers to a certain act that is being insufficiently promoted and that could break in Portugal if properly done so.

There have been cases in which the media call our attention to a certain release. In a certain week I may receive five or six calls from journalists asking for an album which we are not intensively promoting because we were working on something else. (former press officer, multinational record company)

I have been nagging the promoters to bring him [Four Tet] to Portugal. I think he would have an audience here. (editor, arts/culture supplement)

The key feature in this daily contact is informality. Journalists and press-officers treat each other informally and quite often socialise over a lunch or a round of drinks. This informality is part of the professional ideologies on both parts of the equation, though it tends to be more legitimated in the press-officers' discourse than in the journalists'. Press-officers and professionals from the labels tend to see this informality as natural and beneficial for the relationship:

Thank God it is [informal]! There is nothing extraordinary about it, I mean both sides secure their independence and their freedom to enjoy what the other does and as it often happens there is the chance to converge and it is in these occasions that people try to deepen such contacts. (manager, multinational record company)

The more informal the contact the more doors are open; but also more easily the journalist says “I won’t give it a front cover because I am not interested in it” (...) The daily contact allows the ties to be strengthen and that is good. And then there are journalists that are former music fans and go nuts when an artist they like come to Portugal. And that is very important and sometimes we voluntarily call to tell that such band is coming to Portugal. (press-officer, concert production company)

A relationship of mutual trust arises from this informal contact often blurring the line between the personal and the professional.⁵ One press-officer used the term *jogo de cintura*⁶ to describe a relationship in which each of the parts must be able to move in a way so that lines are not crossed and the independence of each side is preserved: “There must be a *jogo de cintura* and a management of the situation because, in the meantime, there is a relationship of friendship that has already been created and which has to be well

⁵ The following quote puts in evidence how the boundaries between the personal and the professional are often blurred in a way that it would appear that the personal may come first: “I remember once earning a lot of credit and respect from a journalist with whom I already had an excellent professional relationship... One day he was giving the front cover to an artist from another label but who had been with our label before. He had been asking the label for a slide from the artist but, because of this or that, when the issue was about to go on print he still did not have the slide. So he called me, I was very busy but I could feel his desperation to the point where I decided to get a cab and bring the slide to him. And it was not for the sake of covering an artist from my label but because I felt that that person was desperate and needed my help. And obviously I didn’t do this thinking “now I will get something from this” or “now I have him in my hand” even because that simply does not happen”. (former press promoter, multinational record company).

⁶ The term *jogo de cintura*, with no English equivalent, means the waist’ moves made by competitors in fighting sports in order to avoid being defeated by the opponent. The term is also commonly used to describe the capacity one has to adapt to a situation, especially when there are others’ interests involved.

managed and measured” (press-officer, concert promoter). The *jogo de cintura* is put in evidence when press-officers negotiate a front cover or a feature article with an editor:

How did I get a main feature? I gave something else that I could not give to others. As simple as that. For instance, you can tell Nuno Galopim “I’m giving fifty tickets to the Gotan Project concert and Galopim knowing that there is great interest in that gig will give it a main feature. This are ways of influencing, the so-called “*jogo de cintura*”, ways of persuading but never in a bad sense. (promoter, concert promotion company)

When such informality is not properly managed, both the journalist and the press-officer are risking their credibility by not being able to keep the necessary distance between their interest and that of the other side.⁷ This can be caused by negligence, such as when manipulation is too obvious and patronising:

There was this chap who was responsible for the BMG catalogue and who asked me if I would like to do an article to re-promote a certain rapper (...) and I replied “promotion is done with publicity so put an advert here if you want...”. Things have to be crystal clear and anyone at the labels knows the type of discourse they must have to talk to me (...) I don’t want us here to be taken for writers of free adverts. (editor, arts/culture supplement)

⁷ This situation is also common to those independent distributors or retailers whose sales are highly dependent on press coverage. One journalist mentioned the situation in which he told one of the retailers that he was off for holidays from work the next day, to hear the retailer, between lament and complaint,

The relationship of mutual trust can, therefore, be temporarily broken. This happens in extreme cases when a record label decides to “boycott” a certain journalist or publication. They do this by not sending any promotion material when one of their acts has had a bad review. Both sides tend to read the situation in a different way: for the record labels, those situations only exist when they feel that the journalist was unscrupulous:

Let’s suppose that a journalist thinks that the label should have better promoted a certain artist and that the label is not interested in that; or that the label thinks that the journalist should have given more attention to a certain act from that label (...) It is not a conflict really, it only becomes a serious matter when such things are not deal with transparency nor honesty. (manager, multinational record company)

For the journalists, it is simply a problem of the labels trying to retaliate and pressure the journalist into writing more favourable reviews.

When the new Michael Jackson was released, Sony decided not to send us the record because they were aware that it was going to be put down (...) but that is not a problem, we go to the shops and buy it. But yes there is that kind of reaction like for instance, for a few months, records arrive late in the staff room or simply never come, or interviews that we were interested in become difficult to have access to. (popular music critic, arts/culture supplement)

inquiring “are you leaving tomorrow? So who will review our records?” (as

While situations of “boycott” were common in the past, they have tended to become less frequent. Professional relationships between the two parts have evolved in a way as to make manipulation subtler:

In between 1984 and 1990, the labels quite often boycotted us. We took some risks and then for some weeks or months a certain label would not advertise nor send the CDs - not a big problem, we would go to the shops and buy them. I think that these days they are more sophisticated, the pressure exists by offering trips to concerts, giving interviews to ones and not to others. (former editor, weekly music newspaper)

There were two paid trips to go and see U2 in Miami (...) But *DN* was not chosen (...) and later I asked them why they had chosen *Público* and *Expresso* and they said “because you didn’t like the album”. (editor, arts/culture supplement)

Record labels have conceded that a break in relationships with the press is undesirable and often translates into poor professionalism. They have, thus, found better ways of managing the relationship to their own advantage. Quite often, privileging one source over the other occurs as a subdued, underplayed strategy in which a publication or a journalist, in particular, is cast off for a bad review. Such politics are ambivalent to the label’s advantage: while journalists may feel that they are being excluded from access to information in an unfair way, press-officers can make such a strategy

quoted by journalist from arts/culture supplement).

appear natural, as it is their right to privilege a certain source. Conflict is underplayed leaving the journalist with no other option but to go and buy the albums and concert tickets from the retailers:

We were excluded from the excursion to Madonna's concert two months ago... [Q: Did anyone from the press go?] All except us! So we have no doubts about what happened (...) They work on this basis "you put down the artist I hyped, now you are fucked". Now it's obvious that this works in both ways because we can buy an interview that was done elsewhere, we are not given access to the concert but we can buy the tickets ourselves. (former editor, weekly music newspaper)

Paying expenses for concerts and press conferences abroad is a particularly slippery practice in this relationship. Giving first-hand information, booking interviews and supplying records are, in the national context, common practices, where journalists know where they stand. In contrast, trips abroad commissioned by the labels can blur the frontiers between journalism and publicity, leaving the journalist in a more dubious position:

The frontiers between what is and what isn't corruption are very thin. For instance, Luís Represas has recorded a new album and went to London to master it (...) So although he lives in Sintra, the interviews for the Portuguese press were done in London... Do you find any reason for that? (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

I doubt about the capacity of many journalists (which is understandable) to judge negatively something to which they were politely invited and maybe they still had some time left to go and enjoy the city, know what I mean? (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

It is not surprising, then, that press-officers are eager to see music journalists as working partners, foreseeing advantages in fostering such a partnership and in avoiding conflict. “Privileging” one source is the perfect alibi for the press-officers to promote their acts the way it best suits their interests. It creates the illusion that the journalists are being privileged in a legitimate way when it is the labels’ goal of promoting their acts through the right channel that is being fulfilled: “The conditions of access to the information are such that it is almost inevitable that the information that is reproduced is the information that the label wants” (former editor, weekly music title).

The specialisation of music journalism is perceived by some journalists as a trend that works to the advantage of the industry. It helps the labels into promoting their acts more effectively, as it makes it easier for them to spot the right journalist to whom they should give first-hand information.

Specialisation makes those partners even more interesting for the music industry. If you have a title that is specialised in dance music and a record company has dance releases to promote, then they will work with that title in particular, won't they? (editor, weekly music newspaper)

In face of this, some journalists tend to be dismissive about specialisation to the point of opposing being a journalist to being a specialist: "I would rather work with journalists, not with specialists" (editor, weekly music newspaper). Not only does specialisation narrow the scope of music journalism (as argued in chapter four), but it also makes music journalism look suspiciously compromised with the interests of the labels.

Social and symbolic capital

While informality is important in creating a relationship of mutual trust, it also assists in blurring the importance of various forms of capital in the understanding of this relationship. Press-officers make this informal relationship seem natural and manage to conceal and underplay the interests they represent. By putting so much emphasis on this informality they also tend to obfuscate the key importance of status within the industry. For press promoters, it is essential that they know who is who in music journalism, and that

they establish a good working partnership with the most acknowledged and reputed journalists.

We only have two or three copies of a new release and so the journalists that will receive them have to be chosen accurately (...) The title for which that journalist writes has to be important because it must have some tradition in covering this type of music. This will secure some media visibility to the release. Then, obviously, spotting the taste of the journalist and keeping track of his work through the years. (manager, music retailer/distributor)

The importance of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is paramount on both sides. The assertion that “it is not what you know but who you know” (Negus, 1992, p.116) makes perfect sense here. For press-officers, knowledge of the social space of music journalism is essential if they are to spot the right people to address when there is a new release. For music journalists, it is important to have their name acknowledged by the record companies and concert promoters so that they will be in a privileged position among their peers when the labels and promoters make their choices. At the same time they too must know who is who on record labels and concert promoters in order to assume a proactive approach to such relationships.

Social capital comes up as the most important resource in this relation. It is mostly important for press-officers and for

journalists to know who is who on both sides of the equation and to have a good network of contacts. Press-officers must know who works for what publication, what do they write about and the taste of the journalist/critic. Crucially, they must develop that informal relationship with the most acknowledged ones or with those who write for the most acknowledged titles:

One curious thing is that you have labels that are successful and then two members of staff move to a different label and that label starts to sell more records. And this is because those two professionals have privileged contact with a certain number of journalists and are, thus, able to make the information flow better. (promoter, concert promotion company)

Journalists also need to have a good network of contacts among record labels and concert promoters. Music journalists benefit in the long term from such networks of contacts, despite the fact that they can evade some of the pressure exerted upon them by the record labels. Journalists may be able to avoid pressure by buying CDs from retailers and buying tickets to attend the gigs. However, it is not only free access to new releases, promotional material, interviews, tickets and travel expenses to concerts abroad which form important resources for facilitating the journalists' work. Informal relationships remain important to the journalist, for instance, because they can result in the companies hiring the

journalist to write press releases.⁸ Also, in the same way that informal relationships assist press-officers to know who are the right journalists to cover their act, informal relationships can also offer the journalists greater insight into press promoters, perhaps revealing who is more competent and co-operative:

If our editors sympathise more with a press promoter because he is more competent, quicker at answering our requests, like, say, a new release in first hand, it is obvious that maybe that press promoter gets better treatment than the other who is careless. (journalist, weekly music newspaper)

It is very important for the people at the press, whose desks are always filled up with new releases, to understand that when they receive a CD from *Ananana* it is because that record is special. Because when they receive a CD from *Ananana* it means that there is someone at *Ananana* who thinks they are the right person to write about it. (manager, record retailer/distributor)

Social capital is, thus, essential to understand the relationship in both directions. Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1986, 1993a), which often turns into symbolic capital (1986, 1990) when acknowledged within its field, is also important and is inextricably linked to social capital. Recognition for music journalists reflects the strength of their knowledge in popular music, whether more or less

⁸ This situation is common, though record companies approach it in different ways. Some companies demand that the press release is signed by the journalist so that they make themselves assured that the journalist will not review that record or that, if he does, it will remain coherent with the positive tone of the

specialised. Certain journalists and critics have made their name over the years and have acquired a symbolic status of opinion-makers whose work is relevant for the music industry:

Very often, we become aware of a certain band through the opinion-makers. And that is very important and you know, Nuno Galopim, Vítor Belanciano, and some journalists from *Blitz* are very important in the launch in Portugal of new artists or tendencies. (press promoter, concert promotion company)

Though such recognition is mediated by a strong cultural capital, it is when that cultural capital is recognised by the readers and translated into higher record sales, that the journalist achieves a certain status within the music industry. It is then fair to say that cultural capital, though being at the background of the relationship between the journalists and the press-officers, is only crucial when it turns into symbolic capital by means of the impact that the work of the journalist has in record sales:

We cannot forget that from the moment Nuno Galopim likes a record enough to give it an excellent review and make an interview things won't end there. Nuno Galopim is a reference among his peers and is not only an editor. He has a radio program with an influence on the music consumer. So, the most important thing is to identify the people who occupy certain positions. (manager, record retailer/distributor)

press release. Some others, though, opt for issuing unsigned press-releases even when they were written by music journalists.

Cultural capital (the journalist/critic's knowledge in popular music) is, therefore, coupled with the journalists' influence in record sales, whether this happens at the niche level of specialised music retailers and distributors, or at the wider level of major companies and large chains of retailers/distributors. While cultural capital may be acknowledged by the readers, it is not so important for the record companies unless it can be used to their own advantage, that is, if record companies can use the journalists' cultural capital and turn it into economic profit. This leaves the journalist in a subdued position where the cultural and the aesthetic (the two ideological principles that shape journalistic discourse on popular music) are dependent on profit (the main ideology in the music industry).

Conclusion

The evolution of the music industry in Portugal over the last twenty years is a multi-platform process, where both record labels and music journalism have grown in with a relationship that is primarily symbiotic. The press, like other media, has become an essential outlet in the promotion strategies of record companies and

concert production companies. Additionally, the implementation of the main multinational record companies in Portugal, their investment in a national catalogue⁹ and the development of concert promotion agents have sustained the growth and the professionalisation of music journalism. Although both work with different goals and are grounded in different ideas about the value and meaning of their working subject, journalists and press-officers relate to each other almost on a daily basis. Such contact is kept at an informal level, blurring boundaries between the personal and the professional. Press-officers are generally more positive in their depiction of the relationship, often alluding to the journalists as a working partner, who is on board the same ship as the labels. Journalists are more dismissive and tend to emphasise that their goals do not match those of the labels.

In real terms, both sides develop their own strategies to meet their needs. Informality plays a key role in underplaying any obvious persuasion, influence or manipulation, making them seem natural to both sides. As tension and conflict may arise when the interests are not met, press-officers have developed more subtle ways of influencing the work of journalists, without having to resort to the traditional “boycott”. Giving information first hand is a more effective way through which labels, simultaneously, win the trust of

⁹ With the exception of Warner Music, all the major companies have signed Portuguese acts.

the privileged journalists/titles and underplay a backlash on those that are “cooled-out”, especially when that happens because of a bad review or coverage.

Journalists are not (and must not be), merely passive agents in this relation. Their commitment to the criteria of aesthetic value and relevance in their editorial choices determines that quite often they are the ones to address the labels and promoters. Quite often too, their editorial choices meet the interests of small, independent labels/distributors/retailers, not those of the large multinationals. Their cultural capital (knowledge of popular music) partly hinders the economy of the music industry as those artists where the labels put more money into promotion are not those that receive the most attention (and, still less, approval) in the knowledgeable press. In face of this, labels and promoters try to meet their needs by making sure that those artists likely to receive good press coverage are well promoted. In general, the press-officers’ social capital, defined by their knowledge of who is who in the music press and their good management of the relationship with the press, allows them to have artists that are “readable” in the knowledgeable press covered simultaneously by the main titles. On other occasions, and especially in the recent trend of specialisation in music journalism, press-officers will use that social capital to identify the right journalists to cover their act.

In the relationship between the press and the music industry, both the journalist and the press-officers use their resources, or forms of social (crucial for both), cultural and symbolic capital (more important for the journalist) in order to meet their needs. The outcomes of such relationship are more unpredictable than has been suggested and there is space for dynamics of consent and resistance on both sides of the equation (Forde, 2001b). But a good management of those resources is essential for journalists because they must maintain their independence, if they do not want to be seen as an outlet for the record labels. The answer to the question whether music journalism is independent of the music industry or not, lies not in whether music journalism can operate outside of a relationship with the labels - it can not. It lies, instead, in the ability of the journalist to manage that relationship matching a good use of resources (or forms of social and cultural capital) with an understanding of the way that relationship works.

Chapter Six

Coverage and discourse on popular music in the press: from ideological journalism to consumer guides

When the laws of the market governing the sphere of commodity exchange and of social labor also pervaded the sphere reserved for private people as a public, rational-critic debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode. (Habermas, 1962/1989, p.161)

This chapter will examine the evolution of popular music coverage during the last twenty years. The focus will be on how this evolution has, at different times, placed or displaced popular music from wider issues, which are beyond the more immediate aesthetic and biographical elements in popular music. These issues comprise, for instance, the politics of the music industry, the wider cultural and social phenomena that frame popular music, the place of Portuguese music in the international/global market and the role of the media in the music industry. These wider debates, coupled with the editorial line in each title suggests that popular music coverage can be understood as part of a public sphere, where music is the subject of reasoned argument and articulated in discourse to express wider concerns. Drawing from the criteria defined in the introduction, I

will consider four conditions which support the assessment of popular music coverage as part of the public sphere:

1. Inclusive music coverage, meaning that coverage in general titles comprehends a wide range of areas, genres and styles.

2. Coverage/participation of different actors: journalists, artists, professionals from the industry, readers.

3. Reasoned discourse on popular music as opposed to emotional discourse (Stratton, 1982, 1983).

4. Independence from the market.

An assessment of the role of music journalism in bringing popular music to the public sphere can not be fully realised without examining some case studies of music coverage over the years. Therefore, this chapter considers the evolution of popular music coverage since 1980, focusing on three distinct periods: 1985-88; 1992-95; and 1998-2001. The focus on these three periods was determined by a preliminary investigation of coverage material. Having initially focused my analysis on music coverage in specialised titles and supplements from 1980 onwards, I found these three periods to be representative of distinctive moments in popular music coverage. I will consider whether the differences in coverage are partly determined by the state of popular music at the time. How

the differences in coverage are determined by the state of music journalism and its relationship with the music industry will also be explored.

1985-1988: militant journalism and the ideology of difference

The first period (1985-88) is partly marked by the establishment of *Blitz* as the main reference title in popular music coverage. The strength of *Blitz*, and its now acknowledged impact on the consumption of popular music in Portugal, was at odds with the limited resources that backed its launch and development through the 1980s. Yet these conditions were also responsible for its approach to music coverage and consolidated its impact. Regarded with suspicion and dismissed by record labels and concert promoters, as another well-intentioned but doomed project, *Blitz* developed without a strong financial backbone and with little advertising revenue. While this meant that while not being profitable as an enterprise, *Blitz* was able to develop relatively free from the pressures of record companies or concert promoters. Certainly there was always a certain degree of compromise with the market and, as seen in chapter five, promotional interviews were published in its early stages. But the main focus of *Blitz* was its characteristic

missionary approach to local artists coupled with an extensive coverage of the new trends in Anglo-Saxon popular music. Journalists refer quite often to that period as one of “militant journalism” and I will stick to the label, though examining it critically.

The kind of writing one finds in *Blitz*, and occasionally in other titles such as the cultural supplement in the weekly *Expresso*, between 1985 and 1988 partly reveals an ideological alignment with emerging scenes in popular music (local and international) and concomitantly negative criticism of the dominant music industry. Its commitment is ideological, in the sense that it clearly and conscientiously traces a division between the conservatism of the music industry and the aesthetic challenges brought by an emerging underground scene. It also separates the general public, apathetic and conformist with the music industry values, from a selective audience in search of something new. A feature article on a compilation released by new independent label *Ama Romanta* is evidence of *Blitz*' ideological engagement, promoting new artists that are aesthetically at odds with the trends and conventions of the industry.

"The album shows that it is possible to overcome the inertia of the traditional labels (...) as it addresses an audience tired of the situationism of the charts and of the provincial disregard for Portuguese bands, and underlines the difference of its aesthetic and social ambitions, putting itself on the margins of the vicious conventions of the Portuguese music market." (in *Blitz*, 24/6/86)

Terms like inertia, provincial and conventional are used to refer to the Portuguese music market, while difference, ambition and creativity are qualities attributed to the new artists presented in the mentioned compilation. The discourse is self-consciously political almost reading like a manifesto for cultural and aesthetic change.

"[This album] is enough in the Portugal of 1986 to stimulate other artistic search, politically detached from social habits and ideologically constructed in between mundane excesses and solitary anguishes (...) Poor but honored, the majority of the artists published in this double LP showcase the creative vitality of their generation". (in *Blitz*, 24/6/86)

Popular music is, in this context, articulated so as to express concerns wider than simply enjoyment and entertainment. The cultural state of the nation, the conservatism of the music industry and of the masses that "feed the charts", and the conflict between generations, are underlined subtexts which emerge in many of the writings of that period. An insistence upon difference as an ideology is in evidence, almost amalgamating many of the emerging artists into one stance, that of being different.

"Searching for difference almost as an ideology in itself, not avoiding experimentation nor the penchant for risk, *G.N.R.*, *Heróis do Mar* and *Ban* translate into different words the concepts of their artistic future". (in *Blitz*, 25/11/86)

This ideological approach in local music coverage is coherent with the other purpose of *Blitz*, that of divulging new sounds from abroad, especially those derived from the then blossoming independent market. Coverage of now legendary independent label 4AD reveals the homology of values between coverage of local and foreign artists:

“Founded in 1979 by producer Ivo Watts-Russell, 4AD has everything expected from a project and from a personal vision of what music is and what it must be and nothing of a commercial enterprise. It communicates with the world periodically but in almost all of its gestures - from record releases to press promotion - the notion that it is radically at odds with the current way of thinking in common record companies is confirmed. Its production is not addressed to everyone. Staying close to the anonymous crowd that feeds the charts is not desired. One must deserve that music to have access to it". (in *Blitz*, 1987)

The abovementioned label is described in opposition to the other record companies and to the taste of the masses. It is a consciously exclusivist discourse, where access to such music is considered to be the privilege of a select few who deserve it. That select few are opposed to "everyone", the undifferentiated mass of consumers that feeds the charts and perpetuate the dominant values of the music industry. There is a display of exclusiveness in the predominant discourse of this new generation of journalists. For example, covering new radio station, R.U.T., the journalist defines it as,

"A radio that is not concerned with the masses but that is addressed, instead, to a peculiar audience, the students and the citizens of the capital, not giving the alibi of trying to cater for everybody to justify some narrow-mindedness in the programming". (in *Blitz*, 7/1/86)

Similarly, in a feature article on a new release:

"That implies being the receptor, with his own intellectual frame, the one to imagine the reading that best makes those songs his'. A kind of creative reception that obviously is not within reach of those young idiots to whom the music is nothing but a stimuli to bang the head. That's why "Liberty Belle..." is an album for elder audiences". (in *Blitz*, 20/5/86)

This exclusivist approach was also seen in *Espresso*, the broadsheet weekly title acknowledged for its more culturally demanding profile. Coverage and music criticism in *Espresso* followed similar principles to those of *Blitz*:

"The new music has to be confidential. To a certain extent, it is necessary that many people do not like it so to create the necessary group dynamics that gives strength to those music movements that aim radically to reassess and create something new." (in *Espresso*, 22/2/86)

Exclusivity is, thus, presented and incorporated in discourse as being essential to the progress of popular music. This is a deeply ideological discourse containing a contradiction: whilst journalists supposedly attempt to ensure that these new artists reach

a larger audience, they claim the artists are meant for a vaguely defined select minority (elder audiences, students and citizens of the capital or an anonymous crowd that stands in opposition to the masses). This dismissal of the masses was coupled with criticism of the music industry, especially of record label politics. The issue of a perceived gap between record labels and the live circuit was often taken up by journalists. Sometimes taking on the role of the A&R in record companies, the journalists were themselves acting as talent seekers and promoting unsigned artists in the press. The importance of divulging the new Portuguese artists was consciously displayed in journalistic discourse. In a reflection piece on the state of Portuguese music in 1986, published in *Expresso, Blitz'* editor Manuel Falcão argued about the wrongs in the Portuguese music industry, comparing two releases, one by a major label and another by a new independent label:

"The reason for this paradox is that many labels do not seem to understand who is the audience that may want to buy Portuguese artists and they are in most cases oblivious to what is happening in the live circuit". (in *Expresso*, 7/6/86)

"Something is wrong when the best Portuguese releases from the last six months are independent, self-funded, the result of joint schemes or other situations dependent on the imagination (...) Simultaneously, official releases or those from major record companies are notorious for their, almost generalised, mediocrity, here and there polished with a smart production (...) The emergence of a record like 'Divergências' is a kind of clarion call and a public denunciation of the state of the music industry in Portugal and of the gap between those who make music and those who make decisions about it (in *Expresso*, 7/6/86).

The wider context of Portugal's integration into the European market is charged with having created a false consciousness among those who work in the music industry. The easier access to most foreign releases, including those from the flourishing independent market, makes the case for another trait in the ideology of difference advocated by the journalist: the need for Portuguese acts not to replicate the sound of foreign acts and for record labels not to release the artists that misguidedly follow such trends.

"The music milieu has so far failed to acknowledge the consequences of the integration of Portugal in the E.E.C.: one must not aim to make music that is similar to music from abroad because music from abroad is already with us (...) This situation has obvious consequences in the national industry. A label always thinks twice before they release an album from a Portuguese artist because it involves much more expense than a foreign one (...) And so what is promoted are the imitations, the fake, instead of creating something new." (in *Expresso*, 7/6/86).

In a reflective article published in *Expresso's* cultural supplement, Miguel Esteves Cardoso argued over the state of

popular music, often bringing to light the aforementioned oppositions, especially the one between creativity and industry:

"It is so easy to enjoy them [pop songs]. To 'enjoy' is the death of popular music. Public opinion is so damn unanimous (...) All of them are submissive to a certain well-known industry. It is a vast and profitable industry and it has an expanding audience: it is the nostalgia industry. As the audience got older, the sixties became the senility of the music industry". (in *Expresso*, 22/2/86)

"The power of decision in record labels and the media is nowadays in the hands of ex-hippies who were, in the meantime, recycled as managers, radio DJs, advertisers, producers and label managers. In Portugal, where each and every trend in taste tends to crystallise - as there is a moronic horror towards originality and aesthetic challenge - music taste is more mass-influenced than ever. (in *Expresso*, 22/2/86)

The type of discourse seen in *Blitz* and partly in *Expresso's* cultural supplement reflects a certain autonomy achieved by music journalism from the music industry. Music journalists aligned themselves with the emerging underground circuit and created a cultural agenda that was autonomous from the dominant national music industry. Their "allies" included certain niche radio stations (most of them, like *R.U.T.*, illegal)¹, certain author programs on public stations (most of all, the legendary *Som da Frente* produced by acknowledged DJ, António Sérgio), the then emerging

¹ Local radio stations flourished in the mid 1980s when the law for radio broadcasting was changed and many pirate radios (illegal radio stations) were launched. Among them was Radio Universidade Tejo which, although limited to broadcasting in the Lisbon area, became acknowledge for its broadcasting policy mostly addressed to left-field, niche audiences. R.U.T., as with other local radios, was shut in 1989 when a new law prohibited illegal broadcasting.

independent labels (*Fundação Atlântica, Transmídia, Dansa do Som, Ama Romanta*) and retailers (*Contraverso, Motor, Ananana*). The detachment from the dominant industry can be summarised in a series of oppositions met in discourse that are shown in the next table:

Music industry	Music journalism (<i>Blitz, Expresso</i>)
<i>Mainstream</i> <i>Major labels</i> <i>Imitation</i> <i>Sameness</i> <i>Dominant patterns</i> <i>Conservative</i> <i>Fake</i> <i>Mass that feed the charts</i> <i>1960s / 1970s</i>	<i>New underground acts</i> <i>Independent labels</i> <i>Creativity</i> <i>Difference</i> <i>Innovation</i> <i>Change</i> <i>Authentic</i> <i>Selective audience</i> <i>1980s</i>

The emergence of this ideology of difference in Portuguese music journalism by the mid-1980s can be explained by a number of factors. At the time the still embryonic music industry, which had developed since the late seventies, was mainly dominated by professionals who belonged to the generation which grew up in the sixties. Radio stations, record companies and television broadcasters had crystallised in a celebration of rock's past and of the mainstream. This status quo was also maintained in the press, especially in the long-standing weekly entertainment newspaper

Sete.² At the same time an emerging generation of music journalists who had previously contributed to the existing titles were in tune with the most recent trends in popular music abroad. Today access has been widened and there is not such a sense of novelty and exclusivity about foreign music but in the early eighties new releases from the emerging leftfield of popular music (mostly acts from independent British and American labels) were only available in small quantities via import, and usually through specialised retailers/distributors. This new wave of journalists was part of a “privileged”, well-informed crowd that was in touch with the new releases.

These journalists also mingled in the same social circles as the emerging national acts. They developed a symbiotic relationship with these new acts, promoting them against the apathy and conservatism of the record labels. *Blitz* emerged from this need and later became the main reference for new trends in fashion and popular music in Portugal and abroad. Staff and contributors worked with missionary zeal in what became an ideological project - even although they were eager to claim that *Blitz*, at the start, was a hobby and a way to escape the monotony of their work for other publications.

² Although in the early 1980s, *Sete* featured the groundbreaking contribution from Miguel Esteves Cardoso.

Blitz also defined its own ideological space in opposition to *Sete*, as far as the new generation of music journalists tended to dismiss the dominant values in music criticism in Portugal.³ Though not being specialised in music, *Sete* included coverage of popular music often putting a pop act on the front cover. Whereas *Blitz* partly established a taste agenda that was defined by its editor as "everything to the left of the Eurythmics", *Sete* was more populist and aligned its coverage with the taste of the masses and of the dominant zeitgeist in the music industry (consecrated 1960s to mid-1970s artists). The conflict of taste (if not of ideologies) between the two publications came a few times to the fore in the pages of both titles. In a concert review in *Sete*, underground pop band *Pop Dell'Arte*, which had gained rave reviews and extensive coverage in *Blitz*, was put down for being pretentious and their fans dismissed as "pseudo-intellectuals". The ideology of difference was questioned and opposed to another set of values:

³ An piece from early 1986, following a controversial poll from the NME that excluded "Sgt. Peppers" from the top 100 of all time best albums, was a showcase for *Blitz*' dissidence with the dominant ideology among music critics: "I am willing to bet a considerable amount of money that a poll compiled by the Portuguese critics, most of them being from the 1960s generation, could not have any other result but the triumph of "Sgt. Peppers" (in *Blitz*, 25/2/86).

"I have been told that this is the difference, the irreverence, the originality. I can accept all that but no one will convince me that such concepts are synonymous with quality and good taste which in my humble and apparently ignorant opinion are far more important (...) From *Pop Dell'Arte* some good and fresh ideas come to the fore but these are limited by a pretentious difference aimed at a pseudo-intellectual minority that makes of that difference its 'raison d'être'" (in *Sete*, 3/2/88).

Another piece, although in much more abstract terms, addressed the scepticism of the new generation (of journalists?) and its dismissal of rock's past. They are described as sceptics, reactionaries, slaves of fashion, parrots and as the "enemies of Alex":⁴

"The sceptics hate the past. Especially that past which has left such deep marks in a generation that the following ones remain sensitive to its legacy - an aesthetics of ingenuity that for the 'believers' is a palliative, a hope, a certainty, the time of a beautiful dream, and that for the 'modernists' is the mark of rotten illusion throughout the last fifteen years. The sceptics do not listen to Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young because history is for the ageing (...) Sceptics are the enemies of Alex (...) reactionaries in the reverse sense, slaves of fashion, parrots for a wallpaper 'underground', viperous in their futuristic ignorance of those who, for fear of missing the next bandwagon, end up not catching one, not even that of pleasure." (in *Sete*, 13/3/85)

But the new journalism's criticism of the music industry was also determined by the conditions in which *Blitz* emerged. The lack

⁴ In Portugal the term "friends of Alex" has been used to describe those who lived their youth in the sixties and praise the culture from that decade while dismissing the present. The term has its origins in the Portuguese title for the 60s

of attention from record companies during the first years of its existence and the limited resources available (including information sources) left much space for journalists to write long, reflective articles where that ideological stamp is more visible. As record companies started to acknowledge the importance of *Blitz* and as it became a key contact in the press-officers' phone list, those reflective articles became less common - although they did not completely disappear.

In spite of its ideological commitment, this new approach to music journalism could not be identified with politics as such. Though some of its acknowledged writers and contributors (Rui Monteiro, Luís Maio, João Lisboa) were aligned (or had been in the past) with left-wing organisations, and though *Blitz* was itself part of a structure (CEIG) that belonged to the Portuguese Socialist Party, such an ideology was grounded on aesthetic rather than political values: "We were completely independent in political terms. I mean there never was any attempt to use *Blitz* for political goals (...) There were people [among the staff] from the radical left to the moderate right but none from the Socialist Party." (journalist, *Blitz*). The aesthetic politics of *Blitz* turned its readership into the new selective crowd of hip consumers, who were in line with the latest trends in music and fashion. It also assisted and reinforced the creation of

era nostalgic movie "The Big Chill". In Portugal the movie was titled "Os Amigos de Alex".

taste groups. The legendary *Pregões e Declarações* section was full of messages from readers claiming loyalty to their subculture or taste group and diatribes against any other. They also tended to reproduce the journalist's discourse towards the record labels, although in a more down-to-earth manner:

"They should burn all the Pink Floyd, Genesis, Yes, Mike Oldfield, Doors, Bob Dylan, Led Zeppelin and other dusty fossils! Down with the sixties and seventies! Luís Pinheiro de Almeida is a mummy!!! Long live the eighties. (New Order, Joy Division, etc.) (in *Pregões & Declarações*, *Blitz*, 1/7/86)

"Utopia: what if all the silly labels that we have would release B.A.D., Love and Rockets, The Wake, The Pogues, Danse Society, Jesus and Mary Chain, etc.? Death to Polygram, CBS and Vecemi! (in *Pregões & Declarações*, *Blitz*, 1/7/86)

Although this new generation of journalists played a key role in the emergence of new taste groups, their critical approach to popular music and popular culture in general meant that once those taste cultures crystallised and became self-referential, they were not immune from criticism. At certain stages journalists penned criticism in reaction to the common-sense, taken-for-granted approach of the emergent taste cultures which they once helped to create. A tendency for a tacit agreement over the quality of certain artists was questioned by the journalists:

“Everyone seems to agree that this is music of rare beauty. Some people see beauty where others only see the ignoble. But what you find here is, on the opposite, a sort of tacit agreement on the concept applied to music. Tacit because nobody is bothered to express in concrete terms what kind of beauty it is and because everything is reduced to a singular telepathy supposedly transmitted by the music.” (in *Blitz*, 28/12/86)

“For an observer with a minimum interest, it is incredible that the aesthetic standards of criticism are exactly the same as two years ago. That such a tacit acceptance of the international models of consumption is revealed. And that there is not a true will for change, novelty and for a profound change in the dominant patterns in popular music”. (in *Espresso*, 22/2/86)

In spite of obvious aesthetic ideologies in *Blitz* and *Espresso*, there was not an aesthetic fundamentalism in journalistic discourse. Artists who had received positive coverage in both publications could be later dismissed and put under scrutiny. There was a wholesome tendency to favour reflection and argument over consensual agreement. The aesthetics of popular music were not an end in itself but something to be analysed in a broader context. The traditional coupling of record reviews and biographical articles was challenged, as more analytical and longer articles became more common. Coverage of current trends in popular music, which had been a longstanding feature in *Blitz*, could be dismissed when it became obvious that they were reproducing a new status quo.

"It is necessary to cut the umbilical cord that is connecting us to the (nowadays very poor and conformist) foreign music press and try to search for the next music as if we were deprived of all the music that we had." (in *Expresso*, 22/2/86)

It is fair to say that journalists in this period played an important gatekeeping role. They were not simply reflecting what was happening in the music industry, they were anticipating it, bringing new artists to public domain. Indeed, important artists with acknowledged impact in the Portuguese music scene were covered in the press when they were still recording for small labels or yet unsigned. It was with this new generation of journalists that popular music and subsequently music coverage began to be taken seriously, rather than simply a means through which record companies could promote their latest releases. Long reflective pieces became a common feature in *Blitz* and *Expresso* (and to less extent in *Sete*), where popular music was contextualised and placed within wider issues. Emphasis on music as text and on biographical features was far less relevant than the conditions in which music was produced and in its social and cultural significance.

At the turn of the decade, *Blitz* became a key tool in record labels' strategies. Sales peaked at 20,000 and its qualitative impact in music consumption was acknowledged by the small music industry. Revenue from advertising also increased, primarily because advertisers started to acknowledge *Blitz* as a safe target on their

marketing strategies. At around the same time, *Blitz*' editor at the time, Manuel Falcão, left to become the new editor for the rival *Sete*. Later Luís Maio was invited to join *Público* as editor of its music supplement. Miguel Esteves Cardoso, whose innovative writings in *Sete* were compiled in what became the first collection of writings on popular music published in Portugal, *Escrítica Pop* (Cardoso, 1982), co-founded the weekly newspaper *Independente* and soon ceased to write about pop music to become more of a political and social commentator. *Blitz* became a school for music journalists at the start of their professional career, before they moved on to better contracts with other publications. As there were a limited number of publications compared to the abundance of music journalists, many eventually went to fill positions in the music industry.

In a way this generation of music journalists was to a great extent co-opted by the music industry. Music journalism remained a weak space due to its economic vulnerability (e.g. low wages, dependency on advertising revenue) while the music industry evolved significantly. But in the period we consider here (1985-88), music journalism achieved a certain level of autonomy. During that period, many writings on popular music were politicised and stimulated reflection rather than consumption. There was a gap between what was happening on the live circuit and what was being released and promoted by the labels, which was addressed by the

journalists. In doing so they were active participants in the music scene and agents of cultural change.

Crucially, there was also a gap between the Portuguese and the Anglo-Saxon music industries (and consequently between music journalism on both sides) which the journalists tried to narrow. In an article published earlier in the decade, Miguel Esteves Cardoso celebrated the importance of the *NME* and the role of the journalist as participant, innovator and creator in the music scene.

"The creativity of the NME derives from the fact that it does not limit itself to a reflection of reality (or the 'hit-parade') but in its aim to change it. More important than the singularity in the writing is the singularity in the attitude. An attitude that, by understanding its social and economic contexts, serves rock music best. Or putting it more clearly: devolving to rock its most noble of functions - far beyond being a simple pleasure - that of social force able to denounce and mobilise, to reflect and change." (in *Sete*, 29/4/81)

The pattern was to a great extent reproduced in *Blitz*, whose editorial principles and visual style were partly borrowed from the NME.

An understanding of popular music journalism as part of the public sphere can not be understood without reference to the impact of *Blitz* and, to a lesser extent, other titles like *Sete*, *Música & Som* and *Expresso's* cultural supplement. These titles were concerned with analysing popular music from a political frame of mind, questioning the power over music and putting the conditions

of its existence under scrutiny. In chronicles and reflective pieces, journalists articulated popular music with wider cultural, social and economic contexts, stimulating critical reflection. They were also responsible for bringing unsigned artists to the public domain, eventually triggering the interest of record companies. However, by vesting popular music with ideological meaning, journalists were often reductive. The conventions of journalistic discourse often favoured emotion over reasoned analysis (Stratton, 1982):

"It is pointless to try to make them [Robert Wyatt's "Old Rottenhat" and the Cocteau Twins' "Victorialand"] accessible to the people - not because it would not make the people any good, but because the relapsed understanding of the masses would mistake them for erudite music or Indonesian folk, removing all the importance from such a charity act". (in *Blitz*, 8/7/86)

Generalisations and reductive ideas about popular music were often used to attract the readers' attention and convey the idea that the argument mattered:

"The popular music of today has taken baroque sentimentalism and romanticism to exhaustion. One listens with contentment to all those pretty songs but we do not see what they are trying to achieve (...) They lack a key-motive, an intent, a theology, a utopia. They don't want to have a reason (...) In a word they lack authority. The authority one finds in the Dylan from 1965-66, the Velvet Underground from 1967-69, the Doors from 1967. Or the Sex Pistols from 1976. Or the Talking Heads from 1977-79. Or the Joy Division from 1978-80." (in *Expresso*, 22/2/86)

The cases presented here indicate that in the period of 1985 to 1988 the new generation of music journalists, most of whom had previous experience in music and cultural journalism, helped to bring popular music to the realm of public discussion by displacing its coverage from the domain of the music industry. Popular music became a social (and sociological) matter, and a source of argument (on its aesthetics, politics, fashion, social meaning) rather than simply an object of information and judgement.

The ideological discourse on popular music was not fully in line with the form of reasoning that characterises the public sphere. Music journalists allowed the intromission of emotion (and of their peculiar taste) in their *ideology of difference*, and often used vague and abstract concepts to oppose the masses and the industry. They defined the music audience with a negative template, labelling it as passive and undiscerning, and created an elitist discourse, where good popular music was the privilege of a select few.

The ideological discourse on popular music had an ambivalent relationship with the more formal political arena. Some journalists had been affiliated with left-wing organisations and tended to invest their reflective articles with the political rhetoric of the time. But there was not, by any means, a direct correspondence between music and politics - even if one existed at the level of discourse. Indeed, the space of music journalism and criticism encompassed journalists

from a broad political spectrum.⁵ For instance, the status quo of popular music was partly represented by a strong lobby of left-wing artists, who were acknowledged not only for their artistic work but also for playing an important role in the political upturn that led to the coup in 1974. The discourse in 1980s music journalism was, therefore, a mix of generational and cultural (rather than formally political) conflict over the value of popular music.

"The older ones may think that the future of pop music in our country lies in the maturity of the previously established coordinates in a way that it is the privilege of long-standing artists. But the truth is that those long-standing artists have in their majority either stagnated or retired while the new debuting acts have shown, in spite of their condition of debutantes, to be perfectly up to the task of promoting progress". (in *Blitz*, 11/2/86)

1992-1995: pluralistic and “objective” coverage

Between the first and second periods considered here, significant changes had occurred in the music industry and, therefore, in music journalism. By 1992-1995, all the major record companies were now operating in Portugal and - with the exception of Warner - signing Portuguese acts. While in the 1980s, the development of the local music industry was done with the growing

⁵ Manuel Falcão later became the Secretary of Culture for the Social Democratic government and Miguel Esteves Cardoso ran for the Presidential Elections for the small, conservative, Monarchic Popular Party (Partido Popular Monárquico).

availability of international repertoire, by the mid-1990s such integration was partially complemented with the reverse movement of national acts abroad (e.g. Madredeus, LX-90, Rão Kyao, Dulce Pontes, Mísia). At the same time the Portuguese music market had evolved and there was a generation of national artists with acknowledged national careers. The structure that supported Portuguese artists had significantly improved with the most advanced recording conditions being available in Portugal. Additionally, the major companies adopted an inclusive policy towards local acts, and independent labels also began to emerge, with *Moneyland Records*, *MTM* and *Numérica* following the Anglo-Saxon patterns developed in the 1980s. Significantly, the progress of the Portuguese music industry happened during a period of general recession abroad. These developments meant that coverage of popular music began to expand, and to be taken more seriously by the general press. Record reviews and interviews became a common feature in the arts and entertainment pages of most general titles. Even more importantly, the emerging music supplements made an important contribution in bringing popular music to a wider public sphere by appealing to those outside youth culture and non-music fans, who had not been targetted by specialised titles like *Blitz*.

During that period the ideological discourse seen in the years 1985-88 was progressively replaced by a more empirical

approach to issues in the music industry. Journalists moved away from addressing issues from an ideological frame of mind. Instead, journalistic research and interviews with agents within the industry became common features in music coverage. This was particularly the case with *Público*'s music supplement, *Pop/Rock* (and later with *Sons* and *DN+*). The former antagonistic discourse was diluted. Criticism of the music industry was still there but was less doctrinal. There was a clear tendency for journalists to be more equidistant towards the different interests in the now well-established field of popular music in Portugal. The former divisions between the alternative and the mainstream, between different generations of bands and between the labels' politics and the reality of the live circuit had blurred. Instead, different factions began to move towards a single, more unified, journalistic discourse. Music journalists were effectively addressing issues in the music industry at a more inclusive level.

In the *Pop/Rock* supplement, a central piece on the state of Portuguese music reunited musicians from different generations and from diverse music genres to debate issues, such as, the place of independent labels in the market, the increasing use of the English language by the new wave of bands and the role of the media in coverage of Portuguese music. The piece was titled, "Portuguese music: the first debate in the 1990s". In the same year, articles on the

music industry were a regular feature in *Pop/Rock*. Attention was drawn from artists/releases/events to some in-depth analysis of what was happening in the music industry. The second-hand market, the music press, the “indie” market, the distribution circuit, the exportation of Portuguese music, the local music scenes, the legislation for Portuguese music airplay, were issues that were covered throughout the years 1992-95 in the *Pop/Rock* supplement.

Music journalists were not writing so much about the industry as an abstract, monolithic bloc in opposition to the creativity of an emerging music scene. Journalists started to mention record labels and to address managers and other professionals within the music industry to voice their opinions. They became regular referenced sources in music coverage. Objectivity and pluralism were the main traits of music coverage in the *Pop/Rock* supplement. Full coverage of the state of the music industry from the centre to the margins of music production demanded a more objective stance that could not be met through the kind of subjective reasoning seen in *Blitz*. A typical strapline in *Pop/Rock* introducing a “dossier” on Portuguese music for 1995 read:

“1994 might have been one of the best years for Portuguese pop/rock music. Because of that and because the expectations are higher in both qualitative and quantitative terms, the big question is what is going to happen. Will those who were successful be living off its current glories or releasing remixes? (...) Moved by curiosity, the staff at Pop/Rock could not wait and so spent the last week of the year calling all the national artists who had given us their contacts and those whose contact we discovered - a search in alphabetical order with no bias regarding music genre or taste (a curse we promised to break for good at 23:59 on December the 31st 1994)”. (in Pop/Rock, 4/1/1995)

A concern with objectivity and pluralism is in evidence here. In using the artists as a source of information, rather than pondering over their careers in a subjective manner, the journalist is privileging factual information over judgement. When explaining the criteria through which the artists were chosen as a source, the journalist is consciously indicating a preference for pluralism in music coverage, in order to break with a tendency towards selectivity based on taste.

Although particular attention was given to the Portuguese music industry, Pop/Rock’s approach to the foreign trends and phenomena was done in similar terms. Long articles were written depicting the music scenes at the time. A long feature article on the grunge movement, titled “Empire grotesque” (25/3/1992) included a section which identified the most relevant acts (divided in “classics” and “revelations”) and contextualised the movement in historical terms as well as it addressed its impact in the music industry:

"It was still an obscure cult at the beginning of last year. But after Nirvana's 'Nevermind' the grunge scene was promoted to the new goldmine of the American music industry. Now everybody wants their slice of cake and even the rotten rags from the Seattle 'vagrants' are at the top of 'trendy' recommendations in fashion magazines". (strapline in *Público*, 30/12/92)

The more objective approach to music journalism went hand in hand with a more serious approach to popular music. Popular music was not just about aesthetics nor ideology. It was about its significance in the market. What was more important to music journalism was what was happening in the music industry at that time. Music journalism still performed an important gatekeeping role, partly because the concern with pluralism was not entirely enacted at the expense of judgement, but also because some special attention was paid to the margins of the industry (independent labels and retailers/distributors, artists):

"The still restricted but more and more solid spread of independent labels (...) is a cause for jubilation among those fond of this area. It means in the first instance that there are alternatives to the editorial policies of the big companies which is very important for the artists and for consumers because the rules in this business are to have no rules at all and the executives in multinationals are not the measure of all things (...) The absence of an independent circuit in the 1980s led to the multinationals signing projects that were not up to the challenge and aborted before they had the chance to show their value." (in *Pop/Rock*, 25/8/1993)

The difference was that those margins were now part of the industry. Although the above quote suggests that there was some

opposition between independents and multinationals, both were now perceived to be part of a single reality called the Portuguese music industry.

The type of coverage seen in *Pop/Rock* reflected and reinforced that blurring of boundaries. The 1980s' discourse was one of differentiation, focusing on the distinctive qualities and virtues of the independent underground scenes. The typical discourse in mid-1990s *Pop/Rock* supplement involved integrating the margins of the industry and accepting the mainstream as a space of indisputable public interest. This was partly a consequence of the evolution in the music market, but was also determined by the "upgrading" of popular music coverage to the pages of a culture savvy, general newspaper. Therefore, serious coverage of the music industry and an equal attention to all "credible" areas in popular music became the landmark in *Pop/Rock*. To add to this, by 1995, *Pop/Rock* had created a new feature in the second page called *Opinar* where, either staff or readers would contribute every week with an opinion feature usually about issues in the Portuguese music industry. The development of *Opinar* occurred when the supplement expanded due to an increase in advertising.

The type of coverage seen in *Pop/Rock* in the years 1992-1995 is the closest to the terms of a public sphere. Popular music is diverted from its function of entertainment and music coverage

replaces ideological discourse with critical analysis grounded in a factual depiction of the issues covered. With the creation of a readers' page and the consequent increase in interactivity between journalists and readers, *Pop/Rock's* politics was inclusive: artists, professionals from record labels and from the wider music industry (retailers, promoters among others), and readers all were represented in some way. The journalist was still playing an important gatekeeping role. Judgements on what was good, bad or important remained in music journalism. However, the journalist/editor also acknowledged the responsibility to recognise different areas and agents in popular music and the music industry in their coverage.

While 1980s music journalism helped create taste cultures, putting popular music on the lifestyle agenda for a hip crowd, the type of discourse seen in *Pop/Rock* tried to merge the "connoisseur" (part of that hip crowd) with the more casual listener.⁶ By emphasising coverage of the music industry, *Pop/Rock* also became useful for people working within the industry. *Pop/Rock's* "serious" coverage of the music world happened at the expense of the emotional discourse that characterises so much writing in the music press (Stratton, 1982, 1983) and so there was a risk of alienating readers who wanted to be entertained rather than informed. Still, the objective style and the pluralist approach in *Pop/Rock* ensured a

⁶ This was done at the cost of accusations against the supplement of being at times either indulgent of the mainstream or too "alternative".

coherent and inclusive approach to popular music that helped in legitimating its status in the public sphere of culture.

1999-2002: consumer guides

The third period considered here (1999-2002) is characterised by the increasingly widespread shift of music titles into consumer guides. Coverage of popular music remained limited mostly to *Blitz* and the music supplements. However, editorial policies and coverage departed significantly from the wider industry and became more clearly focused on new releases. Interviews and reviews became the dominant feature in most titles, leaving limited space for feature articles and for the sort of research journalism previously seen in *Pop/Rock*. With the fragmentation of the music market and the expansion, in number and density, of niche audiences to the point where the idea of a general public became questioned, the main concern in music coverage was how to cater for certain niche audiences while not losing sight of the others. The difference in the coverage of popular music, seen in the three main titles (*Y*, *DN+*, *Blitz*) throughout this period, reflects an awareness that, as consumer guides, they could focus on certain areas at the expense of others. More significantly, they could address different readerships due to the development of niche advertising. Differences in discourse

became related to the areas covered and to the status of the title/target readership.

The type of discourse seen in the music pages in *Y* departs significantly from *Pop/Rock* and *Sons*, both previously having been music supplements in the same title. Feature articles on the music industry were scarcer and replaced by coverage of new releases that often included interviews coupled with a review. The almost pedagogical style was left behind and a new emphasis was put on music coverage as rendering a service to the reader. The use of imagery and other literary resources reflects a stronger focus on creativity in journalistic writing. In some cases, subjective accounts were accompanied by an affective approach that tries to empathise with the reader by translating into words the writer's listening experience:

“This man [Kurt Wagner] could have just returned home after a day's work. This man could be happy sitting by the tree, smoking a cigarette, searching inwards and outwards for the harmony of things. With his acoustic guitar, that man could make that stream of happiness run through the strings to the long and slow songs where a drawling voice sings.

Of course this is just imagination but that's what one may think about when listening to the eleven unforgettable songs on 'It's a woman'". (in *Y*, 1/2/2002)

“A music that draws us near the zero grade of perplexity towards the world. In between silence and overwhelming fury are unspoken emotions. Do not miss, in Lisbon on the 29th, GODSPEED YOU BLACK EMPEROR!” (strapline in *Y*, 11/1/2002)

“David Sylvian faces the paradox: (...) pop or ambient, painter of the artifice or designer of simplicity, artist of the void or pacifier of chaos, one hears in his music the humming of something bottomless. Silence can be anything and nothing. He is coming to Portugal at the start of his tour”. (in *Y*, 21/9/2001)

A playful use of words and of stereotyped ideas is another trend in recent music journalism. Conventions about pop music and pop culture in general which have long been ingrained in discourses on popular music have become a source of creativity and are incorporated with irony and playfulness in music writing. For example, the idea that Portuguese audiences prefer sad to cheerful alternative pop music is displayed in a short review on a new release by Ash:

“Whenever you feel depressed, play ‘Intergalactic Sonic 7’s’ and see a new world in front of your eyes. A pink and baby-blue world. Sometimes it is better to wear something other than black” (in *Y*, 13/9/2002).

The association between appearance – wearing black – and music preferences is incorporated in order to persuade us that although being too cheerful for Portuguese audiences, the record is good.

In the next quote, the artistic affinity between two songwriters from different generations – Leonard Cohen and Suzanne Vega - is taken for granted rather than being explained to the reader. It is implicitly assumed that the reader is aware of the

mentioned affinity and so the article privileges a creative word-play about both releases that is entertaining for the well informed reader but which alienates the less informed ones.

“Both Leonard Cohen and Suzanne Vega have new albums: ‘Ten New Songs’ and ‘Songs of Red and Grey’. Master and disciple. Which one is which? How different is the autumn in both of them. Cohen has resigned searching for heaven but claims to be happy. Vega is still winking, unquiet, stung by the bees. The sting has left his spirit to rivet in her soul. He shuts up. She dances. (strapline in *Y*, 12/10/2001)

The more pedagogic approach seen in the previous *Público*'s supplements was partly relocated to *DN+* which while assuming itself quite blatantly as a consumer guide – it follows a quite rigid interview, review, retrospective pattern – has both a more accessible, readable coverage style and a stronger concern with the music market/industry issues. This is quite visible in coverage of new releases, particularly from Portuguese artists:

"In a scenery of endemic laziness and apathy, the new order of ‘D.I.Y.’ was established, a rare thing in this corner of the earth where many artists like to live the creation as the whole, forgetting that one has to bring the art to those who can appreciate it (...) And so with a posture that did not turn the pop/rock circuit into an oasis of beer and women *The Gift* did deliver the goods. And so the seed turned into fruit". (in *DN+*, 7/4/2001)

DN+ inherits some of the concerns seen in 1980s journalism, and which were visible in the 1992-1995 period in *Pop/Rock*. The

weekly column from editor Nuno Galopim reflects the journalist as a cultural commentator – though this is only the editor’s “prerogative” - placing popular music writing in a wider context than that of consumption (as emphasis on reviews/interviews would suggest) and aesthetics.

“Revealing the lazy, scheming, self-interested slackness of the radio, the single [Lamb’s ‘Gabriel’] was hammering the airwaves more often than a year ago when it was released as the promotional single for the album. It is not that we should block the airplay of anything six months on from its release. But giving continuous airplay to the same song one year on from its release shows the way in which radio stations have lost the role of divulging, to serve the interests of those who want, most of all, audiences behaving like obedient sheep. Not aiming to change anything as someone may run scared.” (editorial in *DN+*, 3/8/2002)

In a colloquial style, the editorials in *DN+* articulate popular music with the wider music industry and with current issues in a sort of music-centred review of the week. In this instance the journalist/editor while reinforcing a status acknowledged by the industry is also assisting those who work within it in the making of reasoned decisions based on the journalist’s judgement. A particular emphasis in the Portuguese market turns the editor/journalist into the conscience of the music industry. When the crisis in the music industry became a public concern, the editorial read:

“Like the global markets waiting to see what will happen, the [Portuguese] music market has done little to fight the inertia. Depression reigns. The retailer complains. The distributor confirms and suffers a little more. The label manager acknowledges the problem and does not hide his pains. The artist absorbs the drama and dives into the shadow (...) As with clinical depressions, the solutions can be found inwards (...) And while no one decides how to fight the uncontrollable piracy (a serious mark up in the price of CD-R would be the first action to ponder in a chain of events. Another would be the rethinking of exaggerated retail prices in official releases) and nobody faces the problem with radio and television (urgent at a government level which, as things stand by, sounds like a dream), the only course of action remaining is for the industry to face with confidence the signing and releasing of new artists. Whether being good or bad, the new releases deserve the trust from those who sign them.” (editorial in *DN+*, 13/10/2001)

Elsewhere *DN+* is a consumer guide with a more inclusive approach than *Y* and *Blitz*, with a scrutinising attention to the national market, to a well-managed compromise between the different taste groups and to the different generations of readers. Its language is in general terms more accessible than that of *Y* and the approach to wider issues more concrete and down to earth. Whereas *Y* and *Blitz* tend to compartmentalise areas and genres in their discourse, *DN+* quite often brings different factions of the music market to the same arena. As seen in this review on leftfield pop band Sigur Ros:

"In an editorial world clearly surrendered to the exploration of the teenage market, anything that is declared as a deviance to *the norm* (read pretty boys and girls bands plus bad rock bands) tastes like an elixir. And when that elixir has no immediate decoding and forces us to stop and think... that's even better!" (in *DN+*, 18/11/2000).

Whereas *Y* is more oriented towards aesthetics, *DN+* is more overtly political. Its politics is, like in *Pop/Rock* and *Sons*, one of inclusiveness towards the market. While *Y* ignores both international and local artists that do not conform to its taste agenda, *DN+* assumes that equal coverage of different areas within the market is a precondition for music journalism to play an active role in the creation of taste. The principle in *DN+* is that, by placing coverage of Michael Jackson, whose most recent album, "Invincible", was utterly slated by critics, next to coverage of Sigur Rós (whose album, "Agaetis Byrjun", was album of the year for *DN+* in 2000) Michael Jackson's fans will eventually divert their attention to the Icelandic space rock gods.

The conversion of music titles into consumer guides is also seen in *Blitz*. The bastion of ideological music journalism in the 1980s went through considerable changes during the 1990s. In recent years, it has started to dedicate more space to the teenage market. This meant strong coverage of *nu-metal* and the American post-grunge scenes. *Blitz*'s emphasis on interviews, short bulletins on

upcoming events and new releases, reviews and trivia highlights its status as a consumer guide. Other developments included a synergy with *SIC Radical*, a digital channel owned by the same media group. *Blitz* devoted one of its pages to the channel's highlights for the week. *Blitz*'s writing style became less reflective, instead combining clear information with generally positive comment.

“With the gates opening this Monday, *Super Bock Super Rock* rolls out the red carpet to Belgium band *Zita Swoon*. They thank us and give us promises of schizoid pop drained with disco-sound, funk and opera.” (in *Blitz*, 26/2/2002)

“Less than one year ago, *Drowning Pool* were no more than mere strangers to the scene. A spot in *Ozzfest* and the release of debut album ‘Sinner’ has changed everything. Talking to singer and main songwriter Dave Williams we lift the curtain to one of the current great sensations in America.” (strapline in *Blitz*, 26/2/2002)

The near total disappearance of reflective music journalism and the establishment of music titles as consumer guides has to be contextualised against the evolution of the music market over the last ten years. With the expanding and more fragmented market, the record companies are more dependent on the press (and other mass media) to promote their releases. The same goes for concert promoters as live events (gigs, festivals) have flourished over the same period. It is evident that if the pressure exerted upon music journalists to cover the label's and the concert promoters' acts is more subtle (as seen in chapter five), it is nevertheless stronger and

more effective. As the market is more saturated with new releases and the music industry has found new ways to multiply the offer (compilations, box-sets, reissues, remixes, tribute-albums, all having met a considerable boost over the last ten years) little space is left for the sort of reflective journalism seen from the 1980s to the mid-1990s. Popular music is left to its commodity status where taste and aesthetic judgement have become the source of struggle between the titles themselves and between the titles and the record labels.

The peculiar features of music journalism in Portugal – such as the small number of specialised titles and the core group of journalists/critics acknowledged as opinion-makers, who were either involved in or influenced by 1980s ideological journalism – creates an interesting dynamic leaving some space for journalists to manage this shift from reflective journalist to consumer guides in a way. The journalists have been able to ensure some critical reflection remain at the margins of the consumer guide culture. Titles like *DN+* and occasionally *Blitz* still promote discussion. Throughout March 1999, for instance, *Blitz* published a series of reflective comments from musicians, journalists and readers on the issue of whether Portuguese bands should sing in Portuguese or English. But these are exceptional moments in the context of an unreversible trend. One in which music journalism renders a service to the consumer rather than forming citizens' opinions.

Conclusion

An historical analysis of popular music coverage is useful in revealing distinct types of discourse on popular music as well as different editorial lines. I came up with three distinctive types and have isolated three different periods where each type was met with particular significance: ideological journalism (1985-1988); pluralistic journalism (1992-1995) and consumer guides (1999-2002). These three models correspond to different moments in music journalism and cannot be separated from the wider context of the national music industry throughout the last twenty years.

The first model (ideological journalism) is characterised by an approach to popular music as a site of political struggle. Journalists drew from political discourse to praise the emerging underground acts and dismiss the record companies, and the other media, for sticking to conventions and privileging established artists and genres. They played an important role of opinion-making for the consumers - who bought the new Anglo-Saxon releases available on import and regained an interest in the new local underground acts - and for the record companies - who eventually signed some of those acts. Their discursive conventions were influenced by the left-wing

rethorics of the 1970s, opposing the new (the underground acts) to the conservative (music industry) and the discerning audience to the masses. However, this new generation of journalists and music writers (which included Manuel Falcão, Rui Monteiro, Luís Maio, João Lisboa and Miguel Esteves Cardoso) were not part of a political project, at least not in the same sense as in the 1970s when *Mundo da Canção* was promoting protest singing against the regime. Their ideology was rooted in aesthetics and taste rather than in politics as such. Their agenda was established in opposition to the dominant music establishment as represented by the record companies and rival publications like *Sete* and *Música & Som*. The sociological effect of their work was the creation of a selective crowd of hip music consumers in touch with the new trends and proudly aligned with “everything to the left of the Eurythmics”. This selective crowd was constructed in discourse. It was there on ideas of “good” music being exclusive - the privilege of a few who did not conform to the dominant taste of “the mass that feeds the charts”.

The impact of 1980s militant journalism is beyond contest. Journalists filled an important gap between the music industry and what was happening in the live circuit, especially in Lisbon and Porto. In doing so, they changed the politics of record labels and contributed to the acknowledgement of music journalism (and of popular music itself) as a vital cultural force. In the light of

independence from the market being a marker of the public sphere, they certainly contributed to the constitution of popular music as a public sphere. However, the type of discourse deployed allowed the intrusion of emotion over rational analysis often reducing complex realities (the people who buy and listen to music) to abstract constructs (the mass that feeds the charts, the passive audience). Militant journalism was central in the creation of an ideology of difference rather than in creating reasoned discourse on popular music.

The second model (pluralistic and “objective” journalism) was mostly seen throughout the 1990s in *Pop/Rock*, *Sons* and, to some extent, later in *DN+*. It was characterised by the awareness that significant changes in the music industry rendered obsolete the traditional oppositions between alternative and mainstream, the music industry and the local circuit and a more inclusive approach was needed. Journalists aimed to inform the public of what was happening in the local and global music industries and sacrificed reflection articles for research pieces which allowed for many actors within the music industry to have a voice. Critical comments from the journalist were still dispensed but they took into account the views of musicians, label managers, promoters and retailers, among others. The creation of a discussion section, where readers were able to participate, emphasised the pluralistic approach in those

supplements. Editorial lines dealt with what was happening in the market, rather than overprivileging the critics' preference for certain areas.

I argue that this approach was in line with an idea of public sphere, first, in replacing emotional discourse with more detached, yet critical analysis. Second, in being more inclusive towards the different actors who are interested in popular music (from label managers to readers) without necessarily subduing journalistic interest to the interests of the industry.

At the turn of the decade, a third model (consumer guides) has become the dominant pattern in coverage. Both reflective and research articles have almost disappeared as music coverage has resorted to a rigid interview/review format always synchronical with new releases. The writing style has become playful and subjective rather than pedagogical and objective and the segmentation in the music market has allowed the editors to privilege certain areas at the expense of a pluralist coverage. In this context, however, there is still some space left for editors to promote a partially formative approach to popular music (as it happens in *DN+*). One where popular music is explained in a broader context rather than only detailing the biographical (the artist's career) or the aesthetic (what genre does it fit in; what are its features; what does it sound like?). But these formative features which were once common in music journalism,

now read against the grain in the context of the dominant
interview/review format.

Chapter Seven

Case study: Ideologies of music journalists towards Portuguese music

When, in late 2001, a crisis in the Portuguese music industry became a matter of public concern, music journalists were compelled to take a stand on the matter. The issue went to expose the differences among journalists in terms of their attitudes towards coverage of Portuguese music. While in *DN+*, the editor's weekly column had been addressing the matter on a regular basis and the editorial line has always reflected a concern with the national market, other titles reacted to the problem in different ways. *Y*, for instance, made no reference to the crisis, although there were signs of renewed attention to the national market in the work of contributor Miguel Francisco Cadete – following a period notable for a neglect of Portuguese music in the supplement.

In *Cartaz*, where the status enjoyed by critics allows them to choose albums for review regardless of their market significance, João Lisboa and Jorge Lima Alves co-wrote a piece which addressed the crisis, following the publication of the annual poll for best

albums in 2002. Commenting on the difficulties they found in coming up with a list of the ten best national albums, they blamed a third party for the problem. Starting with the assumption that “in *Cartaz* we have always been more interested in the music as such – whether from Portugal, Estonia or America – than in stories of “imperialist” conspirations or in the labyrinths of the music industry” (in *Cartaz*, 5/1/2003), the two critics abjured their responsibility by drawing a distinction between rock journalism/criticism and the politics of the industry:

Well, is it us (and the critics in general) who have this penchant for ‘marginal’, ‘esoteric’ and ‘strange’ music tastes? Or was it ‘the industry’ (and its privileged outlets in radio and television) that have definitely resorted to bet exclusively on ‘product’ for immediate and guaranteed success?” (ibid.)

In *Blitz*, the recently created column titled “new adventures in hi-fi”, published on the second page, was open for participants in the music industry to write their thoughts on the crisis. The views from label managers, musicians and journalists were published in the column ensuring pluralism of opinions on strength of the diversity of participants.

The above examples show how different titles have approached the state of emergency in the Portuguese music industry. While a brief look at how the issue was addressed in the press tells

us about the journalists' views on Portuguese music, a more in-depth analysis is also required. In this chapter, I will look at the ideologies of music journalists towards the case of Portuguese music.¹ Coverage of Portuguese music has always had a peculiar status in popular music journalism. The responsibility to cover national artists has been an ever present issue in staff rooms on the strength of the importance it bears for the wider national industry. When Portuguese singer Rui Reininho was asked to ironically make a dismissive comment about *Blitz* in its 400th special issue, he doubled the irony by stating that “*Blitz* is the best Portuguese publication on foreign music”. The comment did not entirely do justice to the title as *Blitz* had played an important role in the promotion of new Portuguese artists throughout the 1980s. But in its unfairness, it showed just how relevant is the issue of covering Portuguese music, as well as the weight of the expectations upon the media in this respect.

In recent years with the crisis in the industry and its effects on label policies towards local artists, journalists have been somewhat pressured to take a stand. In a national market oriented towards British and American releases, what space should be given to Portuguese music in the press? Should coverage of Portuguese music be taken as a duty considering the implications for issues of national

¹ Here Portuguese music is defined as music made by Portuguese artists regardless of style, genre or language.

and cultural identity? Can attention to Portuguese music be in line with the role of music journalism in the constitution of a (national) public sphere of culture?

I will start by contextualising coverage of Portuguese music in the current scenario of crisis. Then, I will trace the evolution in coverage of Portuguese music from the early 1980s onwards. I will use the terms “militant journalism”, “desk journalism” and “proactive journalism” to refer to the different tendencies in music journalism that have developed over that period. Professional ideologies, mediated by issues of capital, will be in the foreground of this analysis to explain this evolution and the different approaches to the matter.

Context

Over the last twenty years, the Portuguese music industry has continually debated the issue of the place of Portuguese music, in both the local and global markets. As this is a matter that concerns many actors within the music industry, it has received considerable attention in the music press over the years. For music journalists, the problem is reflected in the definition of an editorial line, in two ways: how much coverage of Portuguese music should a newspaper/supplement have, considering the share of the domestic

repertoire in the music market? And how should Portuguese music be covered considering its distinctive features and the sources of information available?

Perhaps more than any other site in Portuguese public life (cultural or political), with the possible exception of cinema, popular music is a transnational subject. When politics are covered in the media, unless there is a matter of unquestioned relevance or concern – such as war or a global policy decision – the internal affairs come first. When sports are covered, national sports have priority – unless there is a global event being held such as the Olympics or the World Cup. But in the case of popular music, coverage of the national market is, in general terms, modest in comparison with coverage of foreign releases. This is no surprise. Over the past twenty years, the yearly sales figures of Portuguese music had its share between 12 and 25%, never approaching the values for the international repertoire (always above 60%) (Neves, 1999).² These figures firmly confirm Portugal's status as a consumer of foreign music rather than a producer of local music (ibid.). All the multinational record companies now have a Portuguese branch and all, with the exception of the EMI-Valentim de Carvalho group, have a relatively small share of national repertoire.³ In radio and television broadcasting, a

² Original source: Associação Fonográfica Portuguesa.

³ In Portugal, the record company EMI merged with the Portuguese label, Valentim de Carvalho, and became the only multinational whose share of

law imposing a share of 50% of national repertoire was issued in 1981 only to be largely ignored by both radio stations and television channels. To reinforce this structural tendency, the last couple of years have seen a general crisis in the music industry arguably caused by the increasing use of digital audio files (like MP3 and Napster) to record music and, more broadly, to the arrival of the CD-Rom as a new tool for recording music without loss of sound quality.⁴ This global crisis had an impact on the local music industry, with 2001 and 2002 registering the lowest figures in sales of domestic repertoire of the last twenty years (17% and 13%, respectively). The cutbacks in the national BMG branch are just one recent event that demonstrates the impact of the global crisis on local music policies. BMG is a multinational record company, which in the past was responsible for the launch of acknowledged Portuguese artists. By the early 1990s, it had the second biggest share of Portuguese music, next to the leading group EMI-VC. In 2001, BMG limited its local catalogue to three acts and reduced its activities to promotion, shifting all major editorial decisions to its office in Spain. This decision reflects the local effects of a global crisis, as record labels are reluctant to expand or invest in local artists.

national repertoire is bigger than the international. Sales figures for 2001 show 39.5% of Portuguese repertoire against 18.4% of international.

⁴ Some journalists also mention the competition from the DVD in the entertainment market as adding to the decrease in record sales.

However, in contrast with this tendency, it is noticeable that over the last fifteen years, some of the biggest selling artists were local. Platinum sales of Portuguese acts reached around 36% of the total platinum sales, thus, undermining the widespread assumption that Portuguese music is under-appreciated by Portuguese audiences.

The balance between the local and the global music market is managed in different ways in the mass media. On radio, there has been a notable tendency for a decrease in Portuguese music airplay.⁵ On television, apart from a program devoted to the album charts, Portuguese artists (usually those who have already achieved a certain status) have little other than a couple of appearances on talk and quiz shows. On the other hand, music journalism has been seen as the good samaritan in the Portuguese music cause, something which is attributed to its bigger margin of independence towards the industry and a consequent immunity to its trends: “Music is secondary in the politics of most newspapers, therefore music journalists objectively enjoy more independence than the DJs” (manager, major record company). That autonomy is evident in coverage of Portuguese music.

⁵ Recently, the press has mentioned a lowest peak of 3% in Portuguese music airplay in August, 2001. This figure can not be proved with accuracy. Data from monitoring companies, though not being entirely trustworthy (because they do

Ideologies in music journalism: militant journalism, desk journalism and proactive journalism

Since the emergence of the first publication specialising in popular music, we find coverage of Portuguese music in the press that is relatively in line with its relevance in the market. We have to go back to the early 1970s and the emergence of *Mundo da Canção* to find a title devoted mostly to the national repertoire. But the aim in *MC* was not to promote Portuguese music in general but a certain type of Portuguese music, the protest singing of authors like José Afonso, José Mário Branco and Adriano Correia de Oliveira against the status quo of *nacional-cançonetismo*. It was an aim rooted in a left-wing ideology of music as a site of struggle against the regime rather than a defence of the national music industry as such.

The growing availability of foreign releases following the creation of the first democratic government after the 1974' military coup, music coverage was increasingly more centred on the Anglo-Saxon market. *Música & Som* and *Blitz* followed this tendency although *Blitz* maintained an acknowledged militant role towards Portuguese artists. Recent years have seen the crisis in the music industry and, in particular, the declining sales of domestic repertoire, affect the space devoted to Portuguese music in the press. With

not include all radio stations), indicate a share of 17% average between January and September 2001.

popular music increasingly becoming a globalised site, the challenge of competing in the new global order is reflected in growing difficulties for Portuguese artists to receive media exposure. However, we have to examine the press more closely to find significant differences relating to different periods and to the editorial line followed by each title. This idea was confirmed in the interviews conducted for the purpose of this research. Contrary to a consensual agreement over the amount of attention given to popular music, it was found that there were different ways of perceiving the problem, which therefore translated into different journalistic practices towards Portuguese music. One important question to consider is whether the “being Portuguese” could be regarded as a criteria in journalistic practices:

We do not promote. It is up to the record labels to do that. We make news and in that sense we take music for its own worth. To me, it doesn't matter if it is done in New York or Cacilhas.⁶ What matters is whether it is good or not (former editor, weekly music title).

There is the misconception that once a Portuguese album is released, it is our duty to cover it. I don't think so. The press is one thing, the artists are another, full stop (...) The problem isn't ours but the market's. (music editor, arts/culture supplement)

⁶ Small seaside location, next to Lisbon.

This is another strong premise: Portuguese music first. For a simple reason: I can praise the Sigur Rós album as much as I can (...) but it won't have the slightest impact on what they do because they will never read me. But anything I write on Camané, Mafalda Arnauth, Rui Veloso, Belle Chase Hotel or The Gift⁷ not only has an effect on the artist but in whoever signed them and all those that work with them. In other words, there is necessarily a feedback that is absent when it comes to foreign music. (editor, arts/culture supplement)

Portuguese music (...) is dependent on the Portuguese media. I dare say that the mass media also depend on Portuguese music; but they don't all know it. (journalist, arts/culture supplement).

The quotations show different perceptions of the role of the journalist within Portuguese music. In the first two cases, we find a detachment on the part of the journalists towards a problem that, from their perspective, belongs to record labels, the market and the artists themselves. The journalists claim that their responsibility is towards music as such, regardless of its origin. The stress upon national origins is regarded as an intrusion in the professional ideology of the journalist as critic, which values a commitment to the artistic relevance/interest of the artist. On the other hand, the latter two quotations reflect a more compromising attitude, justified by the interest and survival of the industry. Here, the journalist advocate an

⁷ Portuguese acts.

interdependence between the interests of the press and the interests of the music industry as represented by different agents. In this case, the definition of an editorial line is not limited to a simple accompaniment of record releases but involves a conscious decision to compromise for a cause. Musicians, record labels, concert promoters and a large number of professionals who work in the music industry are regarded as being implicated in the matter and, consequently, as being affected by the work of the journalist.

These two approaches, far from being explained in terms of editorial options, must be understood against the background of the social and professional conditions that frame the journalist's practices. They reflect the practices and ideologies that emerge from the interaction between the journalist and his sources. Starting from the first two quotations, should we consider that the absence of the national origin criteria as a filter in the definition of journalistic practices translates into a stronger independence towards the industry? Is such independence compromised if certain actors within the music industry are interested in "protecting" Portuguese music? Certain journalists, indeed, see the duty to write about Portuguese music as an external pressure:

I remember when I was working for *Blitz*, we did receive letters and phone calls almost every week to tell us that there was “a new band and you are not paying attention to them”. I mean, *Blitz* or *Y* do not have to be a charity institution for every new band around. (music editor, arts/culture supplement)

Such comments assume that the nationality factor has acquired an ideological weight inducing the journalists to take a stand in opposing external pressures (mostly from the industry) to promote Portuguese artists. While external pressures suggest that Portuguese music should be covered, the journalist claims he does not have to cover Portuguese music as this could appear patronising: “If there has ever been a politics in this title, then it is not to treat Portuguese music differently. We think that it would lessen its value and to give it a lesser status than it has” (former editor, weekly music newspaper). Other journalists claim that the lack of attention towards Portuguese music reflects the increasing influence of the major, multinational labels on the media. That influence is felt not only in the lack of attention given to Portuguese music but also in wrong perceptions on what is of public interest.

What I think would be essential in the definition of an editorial line, regardless of the title, is to understand what the place of Portugal is in the context of the global music industry (...) To try to understand, from all those releases that come from the multinationals, what is of interest to the Portuguese audience and whether we are not simply working as a “transmission-belt” for record label policies that have nothing to do with us. (journalist, arts/culture supplement)

This tendency is reinforced by the hegemonic effect of the international sources of information. Acknowledged British, American and French titles act as important sources for music journalists which reinforce the influence of foreign music industries upon Portuguese music journalism. The importance of the web as a source of information, instead of lessening this impact, increases it:

One thing that would be very interesting would be to see the difference between coverage of Portuguese artists and foreign ones. Because with Portuguese artists you don't have the British magazines or the web sites as a source of information. That explains the scarcity that you often find in the coverage of Portuguese artists because the journalists don't know what they are talking about (journalist, arts/culture supplement).

Access to sources is essential in understanding the line pursued by journalists. The problem here is not so much the quantity of coverage of Portuguese artists, but the way in which they are covered. Coverage of Portuguese artists, excluding longstanding

popular ones, demands more journalistic research than is the case with foreign artists, about whom information is far more accessible. Constraints in journalistic practice are, thus, important to an understanding of the ideologies relating to Portuguese music. Of particular importance here is the definition of contemporary music journalism as a “desk journalism”.

It’s hard to understand when this milieu is so small and most bands who deserve attention and have nothing on the internet, are at the distance of a phone call... (...) One common expression that I use to describe music journalism in Portugal is that it is a “desk journalism” (label manager, former journalist).

Something that *DN* does and I think that *Sons* used to do very well too was to try to go and search for new things that were happening, gigs that no one else would go to, and that is something that is not done here anymore, clearly (journalist, arts/culture supplement).

This desk journalism is a recent phenomenon, associated with, among other things, the rise of the web as a source of information and the disappearance of a certain sense of community that characterised music journalism during the 1980s and early 1990s. Journalistic practices in that period would reflect the proximity between journalists themselves and between journalists and artists. In a way, it was less professional and more “militant”. Immediate,

informal contact with sources (especially the artists themselves) was common:

In the case of Portuguese music, our primary sources were the artists, the musicians, with whom we would socialise in cafes, clubs, whatever... We had close contact. We'd go to every gig, there was the "Rock Rendez-Vous"⁸ and everybody would go there. So we all knew each other, we'd all treat each other informally (former editor, weekly music newspaper).

This closeness between journalists and artists was informed by the social and professional context of that period. The amount of information available was much scarcer, not only because there was no world wide web but because the record industry in Portugal was still quite insignificant by Western European standards. The mediation role of the record labels was limited. It became natural for the journalist to gather information through direct contact with the artists, by attending gigs, if not knowing them through sharing the same social spaces. These contexts contributed to conditions in which it was natural for journalism to have a more active role in coverage of local music. The importance of music journalism for local artists was exemplified in the launch of *Madredeus*⁹ successful career:

⁸ Legendary club in Lisbon, popular during the 1980s for its live venues mostly from new Portuguese acts.

Fifteen years ago things worked differently... We would talk of music projects that were not yet recorded. I remember that *Blitz* was the first newspaper to cover *Madredeus* and it all began with an informal talk between Rui Monteiro and Miguel Esteves Cardoso in Frágil¹⁰, that led to a small news piece and then triggered the whole phenomenon... And the band had not even recorded yet” (former editor, weekly music newspaper).

This trend has waned as journalists have reverted to more sedentary journalistic practices, in which access to the artist is mediated both by the record labels and the new information technologies - the use of the web is of paramount importance here. The evolution of music journalism may be seen, in this respect, as contributing to a misleading effect: journalists now have more information and, simultaneously, greater and easier access (though mediated by the labels that represent the artist) to foreign artists:

All we would need was half a dozen phone calls... And there was not a regular coverage on gigs or even interviews. And now that happens because, on one hand, foreign artists come to Portugal more often and, on the other, journalists travel much more and contact the artists more directly. (journalist, arts/culture supplement).

At the same time, journalists have become more detached from local production, especially in respect of their role in discovering new talents and breaking new artists. Because access to artists is

⁹ Portuguese band with a successful international career.

¹⁰ Another popular club in Lisbon, especially during the 1980s.

more and more mediated by the work of record companies' press/media-officers, certain journalists, especially the ones with wider professional experience and knowledge of the industry, tend to be more critical towards contemporary journalism where, they claim, their younger peers allow the record labels to determine their journalistic agenda. Crucially, there is here a generational split between older journalists who started to write in the 1980s/early 1990s and were still very influenced by the aforementioned militant (and ideological) journalism, and the journalists who joined the staff rooms from the mid-1990s onwards:

If you want to know my opinion about the way things are selected in the press, I think they are chosen according to what is proposed by the labels' promotion departments or to what is the current hype in foreign magazines (journalist, arts/culture supplement).

The first editor of a newspaper is the press promoter from a *major* because the first filter for the records that are covered and reviewed in a newspaper or a supplement are the press departments. If they decide to send this record instead of another, there are 90% of probabilities that the one that was not sent will never get attention in the press. (label manager, former journalist).

Instead of creating more flexibility in journalistic practices, this new context driven by changing social relations and the increasing importance of IT, led to a uniformity of practices, making

music journalism merely reactive to the industry. The need for a more proactive approach in which the journalist finds his own sources of information apart from record labels is seen, by older journalists, as beneficial for coverage of Portuguese music, while at the same time it strengthens the independence of music journalism towards the industry.

There is, then, a change in the amount and type of coverage of Portuguese music as a result of these interrelated factors. In the first place, there is a greater dependency of journalists upon record labels which, in their interest, are not willing to invest their money in local artists. The relationship between journalists and record labels is now part of daily working routines on both sides of the equation. This departs from 1980s “militant” journalism when, still at its early stages, the music press was ignored and looked upon with disdain by the labels and, on the other hand, journalists were more reluctant to compromise with the record labels. In the present context, however, record labels recognise in the journalist a professional partner who is essential if they are to meet their needs. At the same time the journalist has become aware that, in order for the title for which he writes for, to survive, he must compromise with the labels: “One thing that has prejudiced this title for a long time was our radicalism in not compromising with the labels. I think there should be a middle

term which would be acceptable” (contributor, weekly music newspaper).

As this relationship becomes more essential for both sides, the journalist must manage it with professionalism if he is not to run the risk of allowing the promotion departments to become the primary filter in editorial and journalistic choices. In this sense, those choices do quite often reflect their dependency on the press departments, at the same time that less coverage of Portuguese music is seen by many professionals in the industry as reflecting the labels’ own politics and their reluctance in signing new Portuguese artists.

Secondly, the emergence of the web as a source of information must be considered. This new tool also works as a filter for the journalists’ work and, simultaneously, detaches him from contact with artists without a record contract or media publicity. The easy access to information through the web creates a new sort of selectivity, which is determined by two factors. First, by its daily use which contributes to the so-called “desk journalism”. Second, by the amount of information on a certain artist or scene which usually increases on the strength of its popularity and coverage in the traditional media.

Finally, I consider the hype effect that translates in an excessive attention given, usually in a celebratory tone, to a certain artist or music phenomenon. The hype effect is attributed to label

politics and their influence in the press: “That’s the labels trying to sell their local product. Then, because of those open channels between the promotion departments and the newspapers, the *NME* sells their pals’ music and so does *Wire*” (journalist, arts/culture supplement). Certain foreign titles (I mention the ones that have been quoted by journalists as most relevant to their work: *New Musical Express*, *Mojo*, *Uncut*, *Rolling Stone*, *Wire*, *Muzzik*, *Les Inrockuptibles*) have been longstanding references among music writers and journalists. Such an influence also helps to alienate the journalist from local production: “There is a powerful lobby from the independent labels, especially in the foreign press, either American, British or French, that is then emulated in Portugal because of our provincialism” (journalist, arts/culture supplement). The hype effect also triggers the need in certain journalists to be the first to cover something that is big abroad but to which Portuguese audiences are still oblivious, as anticipation in hype coverage brings recognition either by readers or by professionals inside the milieu. The local/international filter is also important here as this sort of recognition only tends to happen when the hype is created or reproduced in relation to foreign artists:

If I do a cover with these guys that are relatively unknown in Portugal, man, I will be visionary and cool because I will be seeing something that no one else does. However no one will apply the same principles if the same is done in respect to Portuguese artists, no matter how good they are (label manager, former journalist).

These contexts create professional routines which more experienced journalists are critical about:

Journalists are not interested in attending live gigs. They are interested when there is a festival or any other highly-promoted events but if you organise a gig to promote a new act nobody goes there (retailer, former contributor, arts/culture supplement).

Journalists have that attitude of dealing only with very formal things: record, promotion department, journalist X or Y, article in the press and that's all! (...) If it is a kid from Porto who recorded an album in his bedroom, made 500 copies and distributes those copies by himself on the retailers, it strays too much from normal patterns within which they are used to working (label manager, former journalist).

The habit of anticipating coverage of local artists, the interest in watching new artists perform live, the contact with new artists, non-mediated by promotion departments, the interest in reporting and in journalistic research are opposed to contemporary journalism, deemed as news-focused, "formal" and formatted.

Music journalism isn't just about record reviews and interviews and gig chronicles, which are the only three things you read in the press nowadays. Reflecting about music, doing some research about it... These things have disappeared completely (label manager, former journalist).

At this point, it becomes obvious that music journalism is not that side of the music industry which stands ideologically in opposition to market forces (as it happened with “militant” journalism). Indeed, the lack of attention to the national market happens in the strength of trends in the global industry and in news production. An illusion of autonomy in journalistic choices helps the journalist to manage the problems that arise, by discarding his responsibility to others, whether to the market (“it’s a market problem, not ours”) or the musicians. This supports the idea that the press is not there to charitably aid local music. However, this trend is not common to all journalists. The creation of a stereotyped view of Portuguese music also creates conditions for certain journalists (as other professionals from the record industry) to react against such a state of affairs. Those conditions have to be understood in relation to music journalism as a cultural space where agents (the journalists) and larger groups (the newspapers) compete among themselves making use of their available sources (music capital, sources network, credit and recognition inside the milieu).

Covering Portuguese music is paramount. And that thing that others see as boring, that is to disseminate what is done this side of the border, here is a priority. That is because it has to. Because if there is no coverage of what is being done here, there will be no Portuguese record industry in the future and then we'll have a Polygram office to sell their records (editor, arts/culture supplement).

In this sense, the frequently mentioned opposition between the journalist and the record industry becomes, in the context of Portuguese music journalism, obsolete. Not only is the industry not an abstract, monolithic block as has been suggested, but the journalist freely chooses to be involved in a cause that he shares with other agents within the music industry.¹¹ Such an option does not necessarily mean a submission on the part of the journalist to the interests of the industry. Instead of a simple association between both sides, we can talk of a convergence of interests that leads to the creation of synergies between the media and certain agents within the industry:

¹¹ Although this study is not focused on record label politics, some figures regarding the label's domestic catalogue, show that the EMI-Valentim de Carvalho group had nearly 40% of the share of national repertoire in 2000. The independent Vidisco had 26%, while the others were below 10% (source: AFP).

Currently there are journalists who are very interested in the problem of little airplay of Portuguese music; and in this sort of struggle, we find allies more easily among the journalists who, compared with their radio colleagues, benefit from much more independence and, thus, may freely join a crusade that seems right to them (manager, multinational record company).

Such politics has its own risks. In the first place, the risk of changing from a situation where Portuguese music is underrated, to one in which its importance is inflated in relation to market figures: “I cannot conceive how at the end of the year a Portuguese title chooses the ten best foreign releases and the five best Portuguese ones. Here we do the opposite: we pick the ten best foreign albums and the twenty best Portuguese” (editor, arts/culture supplement). The risk in this case is that the stereotype is reversed and reproduced by excessive and disproportionate attention being paid to Portuguese music. Portuguese music is given more coverage because it needs the support of the media to reach the public and not so much for its intrinsic qualities and, in face of this, the journalist is at risk of rendering true the idea of Portuguese music as a charity case: “There is always that patronising side in saying that we must give more attention to Portuguese artists, those ‘poor little ones who need help’” (journalist, arts/culture supplement).

Also, a missionary attitude towards Portuguese music, in a small-scale market like the Portuguese, favours the creation of synergies around certain projects. In 1998, new Portuguese pop band *The Gift* got massive coverage in *DN+*: “*DN+* did that with *The Gift*... It seemed that there was nothing else on the face of the earth but *The Gift*. This is obviously a case of lobbying, isn’t it?” (former editor, weekly music newspaper); “Truth be told, when the record came out, it was the newspaper that gave more coverage. And why? Because there is a strong relation of empathy between the journalist/critic and the artist. In that week, maybe somebody was losing out because there were other releases that were not featured or reviewed.” (promoter, concert promotion company). The autonomy of the journalist attached to his recognition inside the milieu allows him to forge alliances with other agents, i.e. certain labels, the artists themselves or even other journalists.

These practices, while being in the interest of certain agents within the industry (especially labels with an important share of Portuguese music in their catalogue and concert promoters) and of musicians and artists, have to be treated cautiously by the journalist, at the risk of misunderstanding. Concentrating on a single artist, where he sees the potential to make a breakthrough, alienates those readers who do not identify with such editorial choices, at the same

time that it may be met with reservations from his peers who align themselves differently towards the problem.¹²

The intervention of criteria (primarily the “being Portuguese” factor but also the artists’ “professionalism” and “working capacity”) which are unfamiliar to the system of values that guide music criticism¹³ become a crucial element in the reaction to stereotyping. The journalist assumes an interest that though not neglecting the artistic (because the music is good) is grounded in a broader ideology (to promote Portuguese music when few media are willing to do the same):

The same way we saw the NME “making” Suede, the press here, like the radio, have an important role in picking new artists and showing them, that is if they are worth it. We are not doing anyone a favour (...) I would never do the same with another artist if he/she didn’t have the qualities worth being shown to the public, the music being very good indeed and an unequalled working capacity (editor, arts/culture supplement).

Such intervention can not be made unless the journalist creates certain conditions to legitimise his own options. The credits of the journalist, the acknowledgement of his devotion to the cause (of Portuguese music) and the empathy of other agents within the

¹² Bourdieu’s binary model makes sense here: “the field of journalism is divided in two models with different legitimation principles: one model whose legitimation is achieved through peer recognition; and a second one, in which it is achieved by public recognition” (1996/1998, p.70).

¹³ See, for instance, Lindberg et al (2000) and Fenster (2002).

industry are elements that assist in legitimating the journalist's practices.

The journalists are often like antennae that pick up what's happening in the milieu, aren't they? And many times the anticipated interest that certain journalists have (I mean certain journalist because it's obvious that we can not make general claims, obviously there are people whose opinions are more important to us than others, right?) and their opinion is very important, no doubt about it (manager, multinational record company).

Here, we find a third type of music journalism for which I use the term "proactive" in the sense that the journalist deliberately assumes a compromising attitude towards coverage of Portuguese music. The predominance in coverage of global repertoire tends to be the norm and attention to Portuguese music has waned to considerable extent due to important changes in newspaper production and to technological changes. But this proactive journalism makes use of the journalists' own resources (social links, acknowledged status) to go against the grain. It is an approach to music journalism where an ideological principle (protection of the national market) overcome the tastes and aesthetic interests of the journalist.

Conclusion

Throughout its existence, music journalism in Portugal has been an important reference point for the music industry in the promotion of national artists. Since the 1980s, with the emergence of *Blitz* and up until the present day with the impact of music supplements in daily newspapers, it is widely assumed that music journalism plays an important role in the making of new artists and coverage of longstanding ones. However such importance cannot be taken for granted. Rather it has evolved with the development of the music industry and responded to new contexts which have emerged over the years.

The militant journalism, which was coincident with the emergence and progress of *Blitz* in the 1980s, was in line with a local industry still in its early stages and characterised by a certain sense of solidarity and empathy between journalists and artists. It was progressively replaced by a professional journalism characterised by specialisation and fragmentation (both in relation to the title, editorial lines, journalistic competences and targets). Contemporary journalism is more aware of the importance of having a relation to the industry, especially in what concerns the mediating role of record labels. To this we add the emergence of new information sources

that have become essential tools to journalists, having crucial consequences for professional routines.

These transformations are crucial in understanding the journalists' positions towards one of the key problems in the Portuguese music industry: the place of Portuguese music in the national and global music markets. Rather than explaining the different positions on the basis of the different editorial lines relative to each title, I suggest that it is necessary to go further and find an explanation in the social and professional conditions in which music journalism is practised and in the way in which those conditions work on and, simultaneously, germinate different ideologies about Portuguese music.

In this current context, we found two different ideologies. One that transfers the issue to the market (labels, promoters) and production spheres (artists, musicians, producers, engineers), arguably securing the journalists' independence and its own duty to act as a critic/consumer guide for the reader. The other assumes journalism as an active part in the evolution (and resolution) of the problems facing the national industry. Here the journalist sees the interests of Portuguese artists as a priority that justifies his attitude of responsibility towards the music industry. This is a more holistic view, in which all sides of the industry - journalists included - are seen by the journalist as both a cause and a solution to the problem.

The first ideology, in its illusion of independence and exemption from the problems of the industry, conceals the fact that professional music journalism is part of the music industry, in the sense that it both requires and is determined by contact with agents within the industry – especially the press departments in record labels. The use of the web, on the other hand, through the official and non-official sites of artists and events covered by the journalist, contributes to the emergence of a certain professional ideology that we may define (drawing from a journalist’s own words) as “desk journalism”. We refer to it as an ideology because such a professional routine has consequences for the choice of contents, diverting the journalist from once valued practices such as the direct contact with unsigned artists and, thus, diminishing the role of the journalist in introducing new artists. This desk journalism also restrains the practice of *reporting*, a highly valued journalistic genre within the arts and culture area.

In practical terms I tend to believe that these new contexts contribute to a decline of interest of the music journalist towards Portuguese music. This decline of interest reproduces and reinforces the stereotyped image which overshadows the whole local music industry, from the record labels which are cautious about signing Portuguese artists, to the media (especially, radio and television) which pay little attention to Portuguese music.

Journalists prefer not to make judgements nor even talk with Portuguese artists, except for the acknowledged ones... Over recent years this became a bit reductive and there is a big problem for the industry and for its communication outlets. This is because after a certain period, especially because of the radio but also because of television, only those who had a star status received airplay or broadcasting. So, it is necessary to have achieved some popularity or a longstanding career in order to receive coverage in the media, while fifteen years ago this was not necessary. I mean, you would speak of projects that weren't even recorded (former editor, weekly music newspaper).

A second ideology reacts proactively to the problem by regarding music journalism as a profession within the music industry, thus, bearing a responsibility towards coverage of Portuguese music. The journalist, in this context, participates actively in certain synergetic movements that involve other agents and groups within the industry and which revolve around a certain cause, ideology or promotional goal. The defence of Portuguese music emerges as a cause that mobilises the journalist and justifies his participation in synergies that value certain music projects. Such a position has a two-fold effect which the journalist must be able to manage. On one hand, the journalist must be able to participate, effectively, in the inversion of the negative stereotype, helping to make new artists successful, while, at the same time, assembling the credit and acknowledgement from the industry for his dedication to a

“good cause”. On the other hand, by so doing, he is at risk of subverting certain established values in the sphere of music criticism which have to do with the journalist’s duty to be independent in the choice of contents. That is, he/she should not be perceived as being subject to the interests of artists and of the record labels.

The formation of ideologies in Portuguese music coverage allows us to conclude that in order to understand such issue it is necessary to go beyond the traditional opposition between the journalist and the industry. In both cases presented, the influence of the industry on the journalists’ practices and ideologies seems indisputable. The industry cannot be taken as a monolithic bloc that acts under the hegemonic logic of the global market, nor can the journalist be regarded as being once and for all in an autonomous or subservient position towards the interests of record companies and concert promoters. Just as within the industry there are different policies and ideologies towards Portuguese music, so do journalists assume different positions towards the problem. Such positions cannot be dissociated from their relationship with the industry.

It also became clear that criticism of the tendency towards “passivity” in music journalism was also framed by a cleavage between generations. There is a latent conflict between journalists from the militant generation (and those who were still marked by its achievements) and a new generation of “desk journalists” who filled

the staff rooms from the mid-1990s onwards. The formers have gained a wider professional experience from working with and within the music industry. Some have now moved away from music journalism to fulfill different positions in the music/entertainment industry and are now in a more detached position from which to voice criticism on the state of music journalism. Knowledge and experience within the music industry rather than leading to a subversion of the journalists' cultural status, increases reflexivity and makes journalists more proactive and critical towards their relationship with the industry.

The question must then be addressed more acutely in the way journalists mobilise their individual resources (or forms of social, cultural and symbolic capital) and, through them, manage their ideological relationship with other agents within the industry. The ideological independence of the journalist (and of music journalism in general) is, therefore achieved in his/her capacity to understand the industry's logic and to act above and within the industry, contributing to its change while, at the same time, establishing a space (and a status) recognised by other agents. Bourdieu's claim that "one may quit the ivory tower to impose the values nurtured in that tower and to use all available means, within one's specialised field and without (...) to try to impose on the outside the

achievements and victories that autonomy made possible”
(1996/1998, p.75) makes sense here.

Chapter Eight

A voice for the readers: interactivity in the music press

One of the main issues which must be considered when the role of mass media as a public sphere is assessed is that of interactivity with readers and audiences. The development of IT and its incorporation in the media titles' strategies is a new terrain that is becoming central to media research (see Rheingold, 1993; Jones, 1997; Fernback, 1997; Katz, 1997; McNair, 1998; Schultz, 2000; Sparks, 1999, 2000). The emergence of IT has, indeed, opened new possibilities for interactivity and public participation. Most online versions of press publications now have their interactive channels (forums, chats, bulletin boards) where readers can express and share points of view both between themselves and with journalists. In this sense, readers not only have the chance to voice their opinions and make demands on the newspaper's output but they themselves become a source of information. They not only assess the information but they may be active participants in the generation and dissemination of information. Does this make for a more fully realised public sphere?

While there has been a growing interest in online music communities (Watson, 1997; Mitchell, 1998; Kibby, 2000), next to nothing has been written on interactivity in music journalism. This is understandable since interactivity is a relatively new area of study and the particular case of interactivity in music journalism is a subtopic. In this chapter, I will look at interactivity in Portuguese music journalism focusing on *Sons'* section *Opinar* and on *Forum Sons*, the online forum for discussion launched in 1999 as part of the online version of *Público*. I will evaluate their contribution to the public sphere by examining the fans/readers' discourse. This serves as a useful comparison with the previously examined journalistic discourse.

A short account of interactivity in Portuguese music journalism

Interactivity between journalists and readers has been present in different forms, in Portuguese music journalism. For fifteen years *Blitz* published the legendary *Pregões & Declarações* which, as noted in chapter two, was a section filled with short messages from readers. There were declarations of love and affection, messages expressing support for certain artists and disdain for others, messages attacking certain youth tribes, adverts for musicians

(recruitment and selling of instruments) and for record collectors. There was no space for discussion at all and the interactivity was little more than an ongoing weekly exchange of messages. Yet *P & D* was crucial in boosting the sales of *Blitz* in its second year (1985).

A new level of seriousness in the readers' participation was only achieved when the supplement *Pop/Rock* created the *Opinar* column. The column aimed at stimulating the exchange of ideas and arguments between journalists, artists and readers. Readers were able to voice their opinions about current issues in popular music as well as on the supplement itself. At the time of the transition from *Pop/Rock* to *Sons*, the principles of *Opinar* were explained:

The main goal of this supplement is not only to cover music but to work as a barometer for its reception. What is expected from the critic is that he will be the mediator between the artists and the consumers, a position which is never easy nor clear. Therefore, there is a need to challenge the critics with other interlocutors. These can be put into three different groups: artists, producers and consumers. We address this column, *Opinar*, to all. (in *Sons*, 13/6/1997)

Opinar was responsible for two major changes in the supplement's line. One, it reduced the space for reasoned discussion to a section on the second page. And two, it shifted the onus for the creation of reasoned discussion from the journalist (as the single "authority") to the reader. In the years between 1995 and 2000,

Opinar alternated letters from “knowledgeable” readers, dutifully selected by the staff, with opinion features from the journalists. The content of these letters varied considerably but fell into three broad categories. First, letters asking for information regarding artists. Second, critical remarks about the supplement in general or about a single article/review, in particular. Third, reflections on current issues in popular music. Luís Maio who was himself responsible for many of the reflective texts in *Opinar* conceded that the idea of creating a space for discussion and exchange of opinions between the three groups was “somewhat idealistic, but worked quite well at times” (Luís Maio, questionnaire). However, in early 1999, the staff at the *Sons* supplement decided to extend the interactivity of *Opinar* by launching an online forum for discussion. The creation of *Forum Sons* was more a natural consequence of the possibilities for interactive discussion offered by the title’s online version and the need to give more space for interactivity among readers, and less a product of multi-platform editorial strategies. Yet, *Forum Sons* remained for some time the only forum in the online version of *Público*.

Case-study: Forum Sons

Forum Sons began in February 1999. The initial idea was to organise the forum around topics suggested by the journalists. The forum provided an important alternative to *Opinar* since discussion was ongoing and more open ended. However, owing to technical limitations with the software used, it was impossible for the journalists to update the topics for discussion. As a consequence, *Forum Sons* became progressively self-managed by its participants, though one journalist, Fernando Magalhães, remained the moderator. In the earlier stages, the forum operated as a private community with only one journalist as a moderator and regular participant and a core group of about 25 readers contributing almost on a daily basis. More recently, due to a change in format, the forum has become closer to an open space for debate on issues regarding popular music. During the same period, *Sons* was replaced by *Y* in the printed version of *Público* and *Opinar* folded. *Forum Sons*, therefore, became the main space for discussion, in contrast with *Y*'s consumer guide profile.

Regardless of its content, *Forum Sons* is a successful forum. When other forums were launched on *Público Online*, none came close to the level of participation seen in *Sons* – although one,

devoted to discussion of September the 11th was also very successful.

In sociological terms, the success of *Forum Sons* can be explained by the following two factors. First, by access. For the last twenty years popular music has lost its novelty status and become more a commodity for leisure consumption. This is particularly true of the so-called leftfield market. During the 1980s, “leftfield” releases were only available through “import” and distributed through small labels in Portugal. When Portugal joined the EU, the music market expanded considerably. Popular music commodities, in all their formats and genres, are now available in Portugal as elsewhere in the EU. Secondly, the success of *Forum Sons* can be explained in terms of the development of music journalism alongside other media.¹ The influence of *Blitz*, along with music supplements in daily newspapers, has been considerable in the creation of a well-cultivated readership in popular music. This readership remains a minority but an important one in acting as mediators between the critics and the consumers.

While these two factors have explanatory power in accounting for the success of this forum, the intrinsic features of online communication must also be taken into consideration. Luís Maio partly explains the success of the forum in comparison with the

Opinar column, using the argument that communication is more in line with the current pace of popular music culture:

People who never wrote for the *Opinar* column, found courage to do it in *Forum Sons*. Is it the case that conventional writing in a subject like music is more intimidating than the hypertext? Is it circumstantial? Or is it that the advent of a new, more immediate model in writing is more adequate to the music culture in our times? (former editor, arts/culture supplement)

Other journalists are eager to present the forum as fulfilling the needs of music fans who would like to be writers and journalists: “Quite often I think that the forum has turned into a small ghetto of people who would like to have a position in music journalism and criticism” (journalist, weekly music newspaper). Maybe it is the huge discrepancy between people who consume music and the people who make a living from it (either the musicians, critics or journalists) that explains such an avid interest in *Forum Sons*.

¹ As mentioned in chapter three, certain radio stations (XFM, Voxx) and acknowledged radio programs (like *Som da Frente*) were important referents in the creation of a “knowledgeable” popular music audience.

Features of the forum

Data collected between July 2001 and May 2002 revealed the following features:

- Nearly 52,000 posts (messages).
- About 5,850 threads (subjects). An average of 40 new threads every weekday.
- About 600 participants overall (including “lurkers”), 64 of these having each more than 100 posts.²
- 5 are music journalists.
- 12 work in the music industry (as journalists, website editors/contributors, label managers, radio DJs, musicians).
- Most of the participants are aged between 25 and 35.
- Most of them have or are studying for a university degree.
- 46 have nicknames.
- Only 5 of the active participants are female.
- Many of the users have become acquaintances and developed a social contact outside the forum.

² Lurkers is the term used to refer to non-active participants in online communication formats like forums, chats, bulletin boards and discussion groups.

Starting with the assumption that this is, indeed, a successful forum, it is used here as a case-study to assess the contribution of online communication. In particular, the significance of a particular group – the readers – will be evaluated in terms of their role in the creation of discourses on popular music in the public sphere. In order to assess this contribution, I posed the following three questions:

1. What are the contents of the forum?
2. What impact does it have on a wider sphere (on music journalism and on the music industry, in general)?
3. How does it help in the making of a public sphere where popular music is a subject of reasoned discussion?

Following similar principles to those applied to my depiction of the public sphere of music journalism, I defined the possible contribution of this particular forum through four factors: pluralism of opinions/tastes; participation of different actors; use of reasoned discourse; detachment of discourses on music from its commodity value.

Contents

Having no editor, *Forum Sons* is an open space in which patterns of communication shift between those expected in a typical forum for discussion – that is, where argument is the main feature - and those seen in online chat-rooms – trivial talk conducted in real time. A core group of participants write up to twenty messages a day. Being an open space with no effective filtering of information, its contents are varied and require systematic treatment. Here, they are divided into three distinct types of information.

Firstly, I consider *comments and opinions*. The initial aim of the forum, as already noted, was to raise discussions in popular music between the readers and the supplement. Comments, opinions and judgements are all central constituents of the information one finds in *Forum Sons*. When certain comments provoke interest, an argument is raised and Forum becomes a lively space for public debate. The regularity of discussions is not always proportionate to the forum's daily flow of messages. Discussions happen periodically and usually develop over the following two or three days. In the forum archives one can find some interesting debates on popular music. Some of the issues included were: the status of Portuguese music and of Portuguese music journalism; the relevance of lyrics in

popular music; the use of English language by Portuguese bands/artists; the *new* and the *recycled* in popular music; the importance of rock criticism. Other, less in-depth, discussions are concerned with the latest features in the press, new record releases, gigs and current issues not necessarily related to popular music, such as current affairs and football.

Secondly, I consider *information* (as such). It is hard to ignore the fact that, perhaps, more than a space for debate, *Forum Sons* has the potential to be an alternative source of information for music fans. In the forum archives, one finds messages whose purpose is essentially to give information about records, concerts and other cultural events. One of the most recurring message threads has the senders revealing the new releases that they have been listening to with a critical comment. Also the forum works as a link to other sites on popular music. Many participants, especially those who own or work for “niche” publications or labels/distributors, include links to their own sites in the messages that they post.

Finally, I consider *trivial talk*. The existence of virtual community ties is maintained and reinforced by frequently transforming the forum into something closer to a chat-room. This is less significant to the creation of “community content” but is essential in keeping participants online, often triggering a new subject for discussion.

On the other hand, a quantitative survey of the *threads*³ posted in the forum is useful for understanding the relevance of the different types of content. I considered the total number of threads in a week to find the proportion of each type. I went further defining six types of threads derived from the two variables, format and content.

Firstly, I consider discussion threads. These are usually messages triggering a discussion on a certain topic. Sometimes a single question is posed for discussion. At other times, there is a reflective comment from the participant, which aims to stimulate discussion.

Example:

“There has been a lot of talk on this forum about what is wrong with Portuguese music. If the truth be told, there are some positive comments as well, but the question that proves difficult to answer is, what is missing in Portuguese music?

- a) An artist that does this or that?
- b) A publication that covers this or that?
- c) A label with a different policy?
- d) A chain of retailers with a different attitude?
- e) A radio station devoted to Portuguese music”?

(in *Forum Sons*, 11/4/2002)

Secondly, I consider the comments and opinions on issues regarding popular music (a new album, a band, a review or a publication). These are usually about one paragraph long and the participant makes comments and judgements on the issues:

³ Thread is the term used in online communication to refer to the messages in

Example:

“The question is: why does Nuno Galopim have this obsession with 1980s pop? Over the last few months in *DN+* he wrote texts, opinion articles and reviews on re-masters, re-mixes, re-issues from artists such as ABBA and eighties’ electro-pop bands (...) Is it an obsession? Some act of missionarism? An incurable nostalgic revivalism? A reactionarism?... I may be wrong but an editorial line that privileges the past can not develop further: it stagnates, loses its contact with the new tendencies (and we know that musical and aesthetic movements happen so quickly), alienates the public seeking something new, as it only addresses an older generation of listeners who are as retro as Galopim”. (in *Forum Sons*, 27/11/2001)

Thirdly, I consider factual information. These are usually very short messages either asking for or giving information on new releases, events (especially live gigs), music websites and trivia. Fourthly, I consider threads on other subjects such as those concerning subjects other than popular music (mostly movies and football). Fifth, I consider personal threads. These are messages expressing ordinary everyday affairs (daily events, worries, etc.).

Example:

First day at work. I went and logged on the computer. Will start working at 10:30. If I have the strength.

I went to two Valentim de Carvalho shops, one in Algarve: which although a smaller shop had better sales than the one in Coimbra! Purchases: Isotope 217, Mr. Hollogallu (CMT and NC), Jimmy Tenor, Geez 'n Gosh, and I even found Gramm and the Psykoscifipop compilation, which a friend of mine bought.

Good morning!!!

(in *Forum Sons*, 12/10/2003)

forums and discussion groups that trigger a discussion.

The sixth type of content that I define is what I propose to call community threads. These are messages concerning the forum community (organising meetings/events, planning CD compilations from the forum, concerns regarding the forum).

Example:

Yesterday, it was also suggested that we discuss a possible *Forum Sons* meeting at a national level, possibly in Lisbon and with one of the two holidays in early December (1st and 8th) as possible dates.

What do you say?

(in *Forum Sons*, 12/10/2003)

The next table shows the proportion of each type of thread in the overall survey of 119 threads, over five weekdays:

	Frequency	Percentage
Discussion	1	.8
Comments and opinions	14	1.8
Factual information	53	44.5
Other subjects	22	18.5
Personal	19	16
Community	10	.4
TOTAL	119	100

The survey shows us that although *Forum Sons* was created as a forum for discussion, the amount of discussion on popular music (once a week) is scarce in comparison with other contents. The forum clearly serves purposes other than discussing issues in popular music. Messages with information on new releases, live gigs and

other music events, websites or cut'n pastes with reviews from the press are clearly the most prominent features in the forum (44.5%). Messages concerning subjects other than popular music are also common in the forum (18.5%). Football, in particular, is often discussed in the forum while movies are a less frequent yet relevant topic. Other contents included are critical comments and opinions on music events, new releases and music reviews and publications (11.8%). Here we see the fan playing the role of the rock critic. Yet, for most of the time, these commentaries are short and attached to a rating. Other contents with some quantitative importance are the mundane comments on everyday life (16%) and messages regarding the forum community (8.4%).

Not only do discussions happen only periodically but they also tend to be launched by a core group of acknowledged participants: moderator/journalist, Fernando Magalhães, independent label manager and former journalist, Rui Miguel Abreu, musician Victor Afonso and former website editor, Vítor Junqueira are among the few participants who contribute with reflective comments. As with printed journalism, the credibility of the forum is connected with the status certain participants have achieved. This status either precedes the forum (as in the case of Fernando Magalhães and Rui Miguel Abreu who already had a status outside the forum) or it has been

acquired through long term participation (as with Vítor Junqueira and Victor Afonso).

Although interactivity and accessibility have created conditions for interesting discussions on current issues regarding popular music in a way that is uncommon in the printed press, I argue that two other purposes are far more crucial. First, the circulation of information that is quite often unavailable from other Portuguese media or that is available first in the forum. Second, and in common with other online interactive sites, the creation of a sense of community among those who participate in it. A discussion of the impact of the forum is useful in order to assess its contribution to the public sphere.

Impacts of the forum

a) Creation of a community

The most obvious impact of *Forum Sons* was the creation of an online community of music fans. People who have developed an interest in popular music and do not have an occupation in the music industry nor even the chance to engage in debate on their favourite subject, find in the forum a chance to exchange opinions,

information and arguments with their peers. As one participant stated, “it is important because it is a meeting point with people who always have something in common with me” (forum participant, questionnaire).

This sense of community has evolved over the five years of the forum’s existence. There were times when the forum resembled a close-knit community based on taste and knowledge. A core group of participants shared an interest in a particular area in popular music, *electronica*, to the point of inhibiting people with other tastes and interest from participating:

Sometimes there is little respect for one’s opinion. I think there is an enormous cult around a certain music area which affects almost all the participants who, therefore, make it untouchable, “genius”, devoid of negative criticism – that’s what happens with *electronica*. (Forum participant, questionnaire)

Over the last couple of years and due to an update in the forum format there has been an increase in the number of regular participants and with it the forum has become more pluralist in terms of taste.⁴ Yet, there has been a lack of representation of more mainstream tastes.

⁴ In June 2001, *Forum Sons* was made accessible through a list of forums launched by *Público* Online. Placing *Forum Sons* alongside other thematic forums gave it more visibility and brought new participants. Also, the change in software with the new format made it more playful and functional.

The creation of a sense of community has a two-fold effect. On one hand, it creates feelings of empathy and belonging among participants with similar interests. On the other hand, it has diverted the forum from its former function of stimulating discussion: “In my opinion, the forum has evolved and deviated to some extent from its former aim of creating debate on music. That debate is still there but many people log on only to talk to friends.” (Forum participant, questionnaire). Frequent use of clicks, gags and private jokes between members is at odds with the forum being an open space for discussion.

b) Creation of taste and knowledge

What is posted on the forum lies somewhere between the opinion-making of rock critics and journalists and the expertise of music fans. Most participants are well-informed, die-hard music fans with knowledge in the most innovative areas of popular music (such as so-called “new tendencies” in *dance* and *electronica, post-rock...*) as well as on pop/rock’s back catalogue. Their opinion, tastes and knowledge of popular music lacks the authority of the rock critics but there is, among participants, the acknowledgement that the forum complements the press as a source of information and opinion formation.

The users of an online forum create what can be called *community content*. People like to read not only the opinions of professionals but also those of amateurs (...) There is sometimes a specialists' opinion from which readers feel estranged (...) So this is another service that the forum gives to the readers... a service that is provided neither by journalists, nor professionals, but by the readers themselves. (Webmaster, Público Online)

The fact that people who are not necessarily professionals in the music milieu are able to talk about music is helpful to understand the meaning of music. Quite often the journalists are too tied to their ethics (...) which prejudices more sincere opinions. (Forum participant, questionnaire)

This is particularly significant in the context of the small scale of Portuguese music journalism. Specialist music titles (like *Raio X* and *Índies & Cowboys*, both devoted to leftfield areas in popular music) are scarce and poorly distributed. The forum has been playing an important role in disseminating information on these marginal areas of popular music.

c) Creation of argument

While ideological argument seems to be absent in the current music press, the forum reflects the different values that exist in music consumption. Notions of perfectionism, authenticity, the innovative vs the conservative, the alternative vs the mainstream

have played a role in arguments on aesthetics within the forum. The forum also reflects different attitudes to music consumption. For some, listening to music seems to trigger reflective comment and the forum is used to write about listening experience. For others the primary concern is to display knowledge on the record/artist. However, on a more postmodern interpretation of popular culture where meaning has rescinded, communication within the forum tends to be limited to lists of current favourites in typical “name-dropping” fashion.

d) Source of information

As first-hand access to sources is important in the music industry, the forum has the potential to be an important information source. New releases from artists which are not yet available in Portugal (accessed, for instance, through the Napster, Audio Galaxy, MP3) are written about in the forum triggering the interest of journalists and radio DJs. It has been widely acknowledged that among the “lurkers” are journalists and radio DJs. Indeed, many journalists who were interviewed mentioned the forum, although they were not keen to state whether or not they used it as a source of information. Yet, there has been evidence of the contents of the

forum being used as a source of information on album reviews and coverage in the music press:

I am not sure whether people working in record labels bother to look at the forum... But as for the radio and the press, I have no doubt that this is a forum which has more importance than one expects, since there are many lurkers. This happens because this is a forum that shapes opinions. Or because many people write saying 'hey, have you listened to this album?'. Or because reviews are written in a spontaneous way, without the motivation of a deadline or of someone having to mention new release from label X. These are people who buy the record and then want to talk about it. And I know that there are a lot of people in the press and in radio who pay attention to what is written there, and if they do it is because they are learning something from it. (manager, independent record label)

Editors in small labels, writers for online publications and fanzines, and band managers have been using the forum to publicise their work. A common feature in the messages are links to other websites devoted to popular music, either publications or small record labels. In this sense, the forum also works as an interface with the music industry, especially with the less-visible niche labels and publications. It may contribute to a more decentralised network of information.

Forum gives us a great chance to exchange information almost as if we were talking. This interactivity on popular music is not seen elsewhere. One gets information more immediately in the forum. Opinions on new albums circulate in the forum – posted by journalists from *Público* and others, who had access to the promos, or by the other participants who have access to it through the MP3, etc. (Forum participant, questionnaire)

e) Criticism in the music press

One of the more significant impacts of the forum has been its role as a “watchdog” for the music press. Journalists use the forum to get feedback on their work and on the publication they write for. They occasionally participate in the forum to reply to some negative criticism made by the participants. In late 2002, a significant number of messages which criticised *Y*'s editorial line were posted in the forum. Music editor, Vítor Belanciano, was compelled to post a message in defence of the supplement. Over the next weeks, there were noticeable changes, namely stronger coverage of alternative rock and a drive towards more pluralist coverage than was evident before. In a far more serious incident, a journalist from *Y* was denounced in the forum (and evidence offered) for plagiarizing a review from a website. Obviously, this was a very delicate matter which seemed never to be brought to a satisfactory conclusion..

There were no public apologies or explanations, nor was there any public note of action against the journalist.

Conclusion

Forum Sons is a good indicator of the strengths and limitations of online forums in the creation of new public spheres and, in this particular case, of a public sphere for popular music. The small scale of the Portuguese music industry and of the music press, in particular, partly explains the attention that the forum gets from media professionals (especially journalists and radio DJs). Its impact can be seen in the attention it is given by music journalists, who use it to search for useful information and get feedback on their work.⁵ At another level, the forum creates its own body of information, the so-called *community content*, following the premise that sometimes the opinion of the “amateur” can be as important as that of the professional. The forum allows subordinated groups (the fans, the writers for the online underground press, the small label managers) to play an active role in the circulation of information in the popular music industry. This information can be used by professionals in the

⁵ Here, the claims of Schlesinger (1987) and Correia (1997) that journalists pay little attention to the feedback from readers, as well as, to some extent, my own findings in chapter three, are arguable. I found on chapter three that many journalists tend to place their own tastes above what is of public interest. In this particular case, it seems that journalist do, indeed, take into consideration the tastes and interest of the public.

music industry to their advantage, therefore being converted into a form of cultural capital.

As for the potential to promote discussion and reflection on popular music the forum has been relevant but by default. Because discussion and reflection is almost absent in the current music press (Portuguese and International), the forum is nowadays one of the few spaces in which music is discussed and reasoned over. However, as we have seen in a more in-depth approach to the forum contents, those discussions are scarce and rely heavily on the “authority” of the participant. As the forum is an open and democratic space where everybody, including journalists, are able to discuss popular music freed from institutional constraints – directly from the newspaper, indirectly by the record labels – the forum has the potential to promote a new public sphere for debating popular music. However, this potential is not fully met. I wish to suggest several reasons for this. The first concerns access. The participants in the forum are predominantly male, educated, form part of the CD buying culture and are well-informed on popular music. Does this mean that only people that fit into these categories are interested in talking about music? Or is it that those are the only ones who are entitled to talk about music or that feel that they have the authority to do so? Secondly, there is relatively little space for reasoned discourse in popular music in the forum. While the forum community is proud of

promoting “good taste” by talking about artists that are not commercial at all, there is a strong emphasis on music as a commodity throughout the forum.

The forum has been an important source for circulating the information. Until now it has remained a plural space, though the consumerist impulse is also noticeable (e.g. the need to own that record so to write about it in the forum). (Forum participant, through questionnaire)

The “consumerist impulse” is expressed in many ways. Lists of albums to sell, lists of albums recently purchased or downloaded through the internet, personal polls (all time favourite albums, best musicians, etc.) all contribute to the forum being tied to the broader market economy and the situation of music as commodity within it. When popular music is valued primarily as a commodity that one possesses its importance as a cultural/art form becomes marginalised. This being the case, it is fair to say that the forum ties popular music to capitalist values especially that of conspicuous consumption. Many forum participants buy an average of a dozen CDs per month and use the forum more often to reveal their purchases than to make substantial comments about them. This type of participation is in line with the forum being both an important source of information and a taste community but it does not contribute to the making of a fully realised public sphere.

The inherent features of interactive forums are ambivalent in their contribution to the construction of a public sphere. *Forum Sons* is open for everybody interested in popular music to participate in and what is written there is available to anyone with access to the web. But the forum facilitates a type of participation which is *in line* with the quick pace of the music industry - not *critical of* it. Immediacy makes the forum a valuable source of information but undermines its character as a space for reflection. The forum definitely gives a voice to the margins of popular music but there is little critical discussion to persuade us of the virtues of those margins. Instead there is a tendency to reproduce online the existing taste groups as participants cluster in small communities within the forum. Quite often, clashes between different tastes only reinforce the prevalence of a taken-for-granted cultural superiority over aim of reaching of some common understanding from which discussion can evolve.

However, it is also worth noting that sometimes the expressions of taste as markers of superiority can lead to reasoned argument. There is a sense of unpredictability that derives from the immediacy of online communication:

Subject: my TOP for 2003 so far

Message: It seems to me that you haven't listened to much stuff... Or, to put it differently, one or two exceptions apart, you've been listening only to the more mediatized stuff.

You should explore some other stuff...

Only Alpha and Blur would be in my list, so far.

(message sent by *aeriolabehaviour* in *Forum Sons*)

Re message: Yes, *aeriolabehaviour*, you're right, everything in my list is very mediatized, it dominates the tops all over the world, indeed...

Or even better, I would say that if it is mediatized (please tell me where) maybe it is because it has quality, right?

Ok, I confess that I don't like to listen to stuff that is not written about in the papers...

Well, but you can't guess from my list that I haven't been listening to much stuff (unless you have divine powers) – these are simply the 12 albums I have enjoyed most this year, so far.

(message sent by *nunosjorge* in *Forum Sons*)

While in the first message, *aeriolabehaviour* shows little concern in rationalising taste – it rather dismisses *nunosjorge*'s taste for being too mediatized - the reply has some underlying attempt at rationalising *aeriolabehaviour*'s dismissal of *nunosjorge*'s taste – for instance, by criticising the assumption that *nunosjorge* chose those 12 albums because he had not listened to enough music (or implicitly, to the music that *aeriolabehaviour* likes). This unpredictability means that, from time to time, one can expect a forum like this to be a reasonable complement to the papers in the creation of reasoned discourse on popular music. But some criticism and surveillance is required before we embrace the idea that online

forums like *Sons* may complement or even replace the papers in the public sphere.

To sum up, *Forum Sons* contributes to the fostering of a new public sphere for popular music by opening discussion on issues regarding popular music to public participation. It also complements the traditional press in offering a wide range of information regarding unknown artists, new releases, events, publications, websites, etc. Some pluralism is assured but not fully realised as the forum has, at different been stages, “colonised” by certain taste groups. Others remain unrepresented either because of a lack of a lack of interest or because they have been excluded by these hegemonic taste groups. It is also significant that while the forum was created as a space for discussion between the readers and different agents within the industry (journalists, artists, etc.), journalists seldom and artists even less so participate actively in it. It is assumed that many journalists and radio DJs are lurkers and use the forum regularly but there is no such thing as a regular and strong core group of journalists contributing to the discussion.

Where the forum is even more at odds with a fully realised public sphere, though, is in the limitations fostered by its own open possibilities for creating discourse. The forum favours a type of discourse which privileges information over reflection and leaves little space for argument.

Chapter Nine

Popular music journalism and the public sphere

In April 2003, the Portuguese public-funded television channel, R.T.P.¹, broadcast a three-hour debate on the crisis in Portuguese music. After years without devoting space to Portuguese music in its programme, the crisis was like a clarion call prompting the station to devote its evening schedule to a consideration of it. As seen in chapter seven, the past two years had been worrying with a fall of approximately 27% in revenues from domestic sales between 2000 and 2001.² Record companies decided to make cutbacks in local artists and radio was to blame with the alarming figure of 3% of Portuguese music airplay in August 2001. With so much concern spread through word of mouth, first, then through specialised channels (the press, music radio, websites), a live debate was necessary.

The host chaired four rounds of discussion each with five participants, all professionals from the music milieu including musicians, label managers, radio DJs and journalists. From the audience, another select crowd of professionals was allowed to

¹ Rádio Televisão Portuguesa.

² Source: A.F.P. (Associação Fonográfica Portuguesa).

intervene with questions and comments. The discussion was interspersed with live performances by acknowledged Portuguese artists, some of them recent but most being legends of Portuguese music. With much discussion - and an awful lot of rant as well - the program went far past midnight taking a subject of undeniable public concern to annoying levels of indulgency. The morning after I logged on to *Forum Sons* and checked for reactions to the program. Most seemed to agree on two points: first, the program proved that a debate at a national level was useful to discuss the issue; second, the discussion as it was had failed to make justice to its central concern. It was pointed out how both the guests and performers did not cover the whole spectrum of Portuguese music. The independent sector was not represented, neither was rap and hip-hop which had shown clear signs of vitality in the last year. Instead, the spotlight was left for acknowledged and respectable artists, symbols in Portuguese music who were once important but whose careers are now in creative bankruptcy. And in the audience, many artists were more concerned with showing their contempt for the lack of attention they have in the media (especially on radio) than in addressing the general absence of Portuguese music in the media as a collective concern. Many felt that the program was either biased in its choice of guests or that the discussion was “colonised” by people with personal interests. As was noted in many critical comments, they

were more concerned with saving their careers than with saving Portuguese music.

Since this was a live, broadcast event rather than press coverage, the mentioned event does not exactly fit the subject of this research. However, it showcases the issue that I will address in this chapter: the possibilities and constraints on public reasoning about popular music and on the constitution of popular music journalism as part of a public sphere. While there has been an enduring tradition of studies that have considered popular music as a site of cultural struggle, there has been no evaluation of its impact in the social realm. Popular music is the subject of passionate argument in institutional contexts as well as in everyday mundane conversations. Yet, popular music theorists while creating reasoned discourse on popular music have shied away from addressing the possibilities for the creation of such discourse. Little has been said on how the field of popular music with its agents (artists, label representatives, promoters, journalists, the DJs, the fans) and institutions (labels, distributors, music press) can be mediated by a public sphere. Can popular music be relevant for debates in the public sphere? What effects do different discourses have in the broader field of cultural activity?

Having arrived at this point and drawing on the theoretical arguments and on the conclusions from the previous chapters, I will,

in this chapter, focus my attention on the notion of public sphere and assess its usefulness for an understanding of popular music journalism in Portugal. I will first consider the main theoretical debates on the concept of public sphere. Then I will examine how popular music as a subject has been considered in relation to the public sphere of culture. Thirdly, I will draw from some of the findings from chapters three to six to assess the possibilities for an understanding of popular music journalism as part of a public sphere. I will argue that the space of popular music journalism/criticism in Portugal is a domain in which, in certain periods mediated by particular contexts, popular music has been reasoned and articulated as part of a public sphere. Finally, I will introduce Bourdieu's reflexive notions of field, habitus and capital as an alternative model and his reading against notions of the public sphere.

The public sphere: Habermas and his revisionists

Although it has been the subject of much critical argument, the concept of *public sphere* (Habermas, 1962/1989) is useful to my understanding of popular music journalism. According to Lindberg et al. (2000), as a social institution, music criticism is a product of the "bourgeois public sphere" (Habermas, 1962/1989). It has its

origins in 18th century notions of civilised conversation between equals and is connected to the growth of the press (Lindberg et al. 2000). Few concepts in social sciences have been so open to debate and interpretations, while remaining a powerful tool within media and communication studies. From its former, precise, in-depth examination that we find in the work of Habermas, the public sphere has evolved into an idea that suggests as much as it reveals, triggering new meanings that shift between public sphere as an ideal and its concrete manifestations.

The concept of public sphere has become part of common language to express the set of issues that are of public interest as opposed to the private. In the context of the mass media, the public sphere has been used to describe “the issues of how and to what extent the mass media, especially in their journalistic role, can help citizens learn about the world, debate their responses to it and reach informed decisions about what courses of action to adopt” (Dahlgren, 1991, p.1). However, it is impossible to approach the concept comprehensively without reference to its original formulation in the work of Jurgen Habermas (1962/1989). Habermas conceptualises the public sphere as a realm of social life where common concerns are discussed and information exchanged so that public opinion can be formed.³ He claims that reasoned, critical

³ Subsequent authors went on to develop other comprehensive notions of the public sphere. Gimmler (2001), for instance, brings the notion of identity to a

discourse was central in creating a public sphere which was effective in its role of mediation between the state and civil society (Habermas, 1981/1984). The notion of public sphere as such was objectified by Habermas in its ideal form, the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which Habermas defines as “the sphere of private people come together as a public” (Habermas, 1962/1989, p.27). His claim was that a bourgeois public sphere emerged and was consolidated during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when private members of the *bourgeoisie* gathered together in cafes and salons to discuss the problems of the nation. This people’s “public use of reason” (ibid., p.27) should be separate from the public authorities and act as a form of regulation in modern societies:

They (the bourgeois) soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people’s public use of their reason (ibid., p.27).

definition of public sphere: “The political subject is also the subject who attains a personal and collective identity as part of a complex of relationships with other individuals. It is this fundamentally social identity which the subject constitutes and expresses in the ongoing struggle for recognition in the public realm. The public sphere, therefore, is an arena of political and social relations, a field where individual and collective identities both are expressed and become integrated.” (Gimmler, 2001, p.22). Schlesinger (1999) argues that there has been “a general failure to recognise that Habermas’s early theory took as its framework the European nation-state addressed as a political community.”

Habermas also claimed that the public sphere should be independent of the instrumental laws of the market in order to prevent critical-rational debate from being threatened by consumption: “The public sphere in Habermas’s sense is also conceptually distinct from the official economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theatre for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling.” (Fraser, 1992, p.111). The foundations for the bourgeois public sphere, and for the subsequent ideal notion of public sphere that became the main concern of Habermas’ work, were met with his theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1981/1984). Habermas defined *communicative action* as that kind of interaction between two or more people whose sole purpose is the reaching of common understanding.⁴ To make this understanding possible the actors must share a common background that Habermas defines as the *lifeworld*. Lifeworld is a set of “unquestioned cultural givens” and “agreed upon patterns of interpretation” (Habermas, 1992) that create conditions for communicative action to be effective. The relation between the lifeworld and communicative action is, thus, complementary: while the lifeworld makes successful interaction

(Schlesinger, 1999, p.264), therefore, bringing the issue of national identity to the concept of the public sphere.

⁴ Habermas sets a contrast between communicative and strategic action. The purpose of strategic action is the successful attainment of private goals. Communicative action, on the other hand, requires that we respect those we communicate with as an end in themselves (Habermas, 1981/1984).

possible, communicative action reproduces the symbolic structures of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1981/1984).

The idea of public sphere is, therefore, based on two idealistic principles: that of universalism – because the problems discussed in the public sphere are meant to be of common interest for all social strata – and of reasoning – because reason is the “medium” for communication in the public sphere. Some critics have suggested that conceptualising the public sphere in these terms gives a single social group – the *bourgeoisie* – a privileged position in ascertaining the public interest and participating in reasoned discourse (Dahlgren, 1991, 1995; Fraser, 1992). Thus, the idea of public sphere is reduced to a dominant group – the *bourgeoisie* - while the popular, illiterate groups, although being represented did not actively participate in it.

In spite of these problems, Habermas regarded, not without a hint of romanticism and nostalgia, the public sphere of the eighteenth and first-half of the nineteenth centuries, as “authentic” (Habermas, 1962/1989, p.30) and became sceptical about the evolution of the bourgeois public sphere. He traces its decline in advanced capitalist societies as “tendencies pointing to the collapse of the public sphere are unmistakable, for while its scope is expanding impressively, its function has become progressively insignificant” (ibid., p.5). Habermas mentions the decline of critical use of reason in journalism in the “wake of advertising,

entertainment and public relations (...) Public relations is no longer a process of rational discourse but the result of publicity and social engineering in the media” (as quoted in Dahlgren, 1991, p.4). At the same time mass democracy opens the public sphere to a pluralism of voices where the public loses its exclusivity and less-educated citizens are allowed to participate (Dahlgren, 1995). This causes the state to be more interventionist, dissipating boundaries between private and public and, in the process, creating alliances with large organisations and interest groups (Habermas, 1962/1989; Dahlgren, 1995).

Subsequent authors (Fraser, 1992; Dahlgren, 1991, 1995) have been critical of Habermas’ notion of public sphere. Dahlgren (1991) contends that Habermas, “doubly overstates his case, that the discourse of the bourgeois public sphere even at its zenith never manifested the high level of reasoned discourse he suggests, and that the situation under advanced capitalism – dismal as it may be – is not as bleak and locked as he asserts” (ibid., p.5). He claims that Habermas idea of a bourgeois public sphere was grounded in the role of small-scale media and conversational interaction among a small sector of the population and proposes a revision of the concept under the present conditions of the spread of electronic media and mass publics (1991, 1995). The public sphere must provide concrete visions of society rather than remain a concept informed by its past

manifestations. It must be “an object of citizen concern, scrutiny and intervention” (1991, p.9) as well as being a “process of sense-making” at a micro-level (ibid., p.7). Thus, Dahlgren implicitly rejects a unitary vision of the public sphere in favour of one that encompasses a diversity of meanings and interests among a plurality of actors – citizens – who participate in it. He advocates a renewed notion of public sphere that “points to those institutional constellations of the media and other fora for information and opinion (...) which are relevant for political life” (1995, p.9).

Fraser’s argument questions more straightforwardly Habermas’ unitary vision of the public sphere. Such a position which is defended, for instance, by Garnham (1986/1992) is the source of much criticism in current thinking. An advocate of feminism and multiculturalism, Fraser defends a reconceptualisation of the public sphere in its multiplicity of forms so as to accommodate different, competing publics (such as gays, feminists, labour organisers and anarchists). Many revisionist approaches take into consideration the impossibility of a single, unitary public sphere and suggest a more contemporary approach that acknowledges the diversity of publics (Fraser, 1992; Calhoun, 1995; Habermas, 1997). Calhoun proposes the notion of *spheres of publics* as more realistic and feasible to understand public participation in late capitalist democracies (Calhoun, 1995). Habermas himself has recently retreated from his

former utopian model to embrace a similarly plural approach to the public sphere (Habermas, 1997). Arenas of public life overlap and assume diverse forms in a highly complex network. These arenas have multiple scales from the international to the local and the subcultural. The clustering of public spaces for debate is noticeable and is regarded with pessimism by some authors who see public opinion as becoming subdued to public relations (Eagleton, 1985; Lindberg et al., 2000).

From these approaches, we can see that the public sphere can only be grasped by taking into consideration these tensions: between its idealistic essence and its analytical power; or between a unitary vision that remains in line with Habermas' bourgeois public sphere and a fragmented one (Fraser, 1992).

Journalism and the public sphere

The concept of public sphere has been used extensively in media studies (see Sparks, 1988; Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991; Hallin, 1994; Dahlgren, 1995; Schlesinger, 1999; McNair, 2000). It is difficult to find another realm in social life where the concept of public sphere has been so central while remaining open to debate. The notion of public sphere has been a powerful tool in debates regarding the historical evolution of the mass media. Indeed, the importance of the media, and of the press in particular, was

acknowledged by Habermas in his depiction of the bourgeois public sphere (1962/1989). He claimed that the press played an important role in activating democratic controversy among individuals. His tracing of the decline on the public sphere from the mid-19th century onwards is related to a great extent with the evolution of media, especially in the transition from a literary journalism of private individuals to the mass media where private interests overlap with public ones. This argument is open to criticism as the media remain crucial in the mediation between the state (as well as the market) and civil society.

The centrality of the media in articulating contemporary notions of public sphere is seen in relation to the space of journalism (Sparks, 1988; Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991; Hallin, 1994; McNair, 2000; Haas & Steiner, 2001), IT (Rheingold, 1994; Stallabrass, 1995) or to both (Sparks, 1999, 2000). These approaches remain critical of the ideal public sphere and consider the privatisation of the mass media (in ownership and access), along with the fragmentation of publics and dependence on market forces, as requiring significant changes to the former model. Yet, they all remain more or less loyal to the idea that the media are the “principal institutions of the public sphere” (Curran, 1991b, p.29) or “the fourth estate of the realm” (ibid., p.29). Hallin (1994), for instance, claims that the professionalisation of journalism was a solution to the

decline of the ideal public sphere, turning the journalists into “a surrogate public sphere, autonomous both with regard to the state and with regard to private interests, including those of their owners and advertisers” (p.4). He further argues that journalists play an important and legitimate role in normative dialogue (ibid.).

However, as with most approaches to the notion of public sphere, depictions of journalism as a public sphere are mostly concerned with its political dimension (Garnham, 1986/1992; Sparks, 1988; Hallin, 1994; Dahlgren, 1995; McNair, 2000). In the British context, for instance, the historical split between the broadsheets and the tabloids has been addressed in terms of its consequences for the political public sphere (Sparks, 1988; Curran, 1991b; McNair, 2000). Sparks (1988) sees such split and the relative lowering of standards caused by the expanding tabloid market as a drift away from real political concerns in the press. This trend is coupled with a broadening of the notion of politics from the traditional concern with the state to a wider range of life experiences. Such a broadening causes problems as it leads to an undifferentiation of public concerns:

However correct it might be to argue that sport is deeply penetrated by chauvinism of various kinds, and however worthy it might be to attempt to constitute a public sphere in which this can be subjected to a rational critique, it is shockingly naïve to imagine that such an activity is a substitute for, or even comparable with, the classical questions of state politics, for example war (ibid., p.215).

This “politicisation of the apolitical at the expense of the depoliticisation of the political” (ibid. p.215) is in line with the atrophy of the classical public sphere. It is further argued that such phenomena say more about the state of the bourgeois democracy and how it persuades people “to opt out of effective participation in the public sphere” (ibid., p.218), than about the intrinsic relevance of the popular press as a public sphere. Others, though, argue that entertainment should be part of the public sphere (Curran, 1991a; Connell, 1991; Hallin, 1994) and that news does not exhaust it (Hallin, 1994). The commercialisation of the press and the recent blurring of the line between information and entertainment should, therefore, lead to a broader and more inclusive notion of public sphere. Connell (1991) argues that popular music should be taken seriously and suggests that the concept of politics should have a broader scope: “We have forgotten that politics is about all and any manifestation of power, whether or not that manifestation assumes

the dominant forms available within parliamentary democracies.”
(p.242).

These approaches raise important questions of what is of public interest. To put it more straightforwardly, why is politics as such more central to the public sphere than culture and entertainment or, contrawise, why should these two areas be part of the public sphere. However, there is little empirical research which would allow us to answer these questions in a satisfactory manner. In what respects can coverage of culture and entertainment be politicised in order to make it part of the public sphere? The debate has remained grounded in ideas, rather than in empirical research with the consequence that culture is either assumed to be once and for all a part of or excluded from the public sphere.

Popular music and the public sphere of culture

In the same way that the notion of public sphere has been excluded from popular music debates, so popular music has been excluded from debates on the public sphere. The first barrier that precludes popular music from debates on the public sphere is implicit in McGuigan’s argument on the distinction between art and politics: “The logic of art is different from the logic of democratic politics since there is no need to terminate critical discussion of

artistic culture with a rational agreement on the meaning and worth of any particular aesthetic expression.” (McGuigan, 1996, p.178). Being a form of aesthetic expression, it is well understood that, in the case of popular music, there is no need to reach an agreement over its aesthetic value. Indeed, both Habermas’ notion of the public sphere and the subsequent authors who have expressed a critical view of the concept have mostly approached public sphere as a realm where political concerns are expressed. Yet, Habermas conceded that a public sphere of culture was possible and desirable as he traced the progressive depoliticisation of the public sphere during the course of the nineteenth century with the change from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public (1962/1989). It is quite striking that Habermas’ considerations on the public sphere of culture were given so little attention in subsequent depictions of the public sphere.

If culture has seldom been considered in approaches to the public sphere, even scant attention is given to popular music. Being primarily an artistic expression, popular music is seen as something that induces an emotional rather than rational response. Therefore, music, like other popular culture forms, has been excluded from debates on the public sphere at the expense of more straightforwardly political concerns. However, not all forms of art and culture are dismissed from the public sphere. Mitchell (1992),

for instance, draws on Habermas' ideal of the public sphere as "an all inclusive site of uncoerced discussion and opinion formation (...) that transcends politics, commerce, private interests, and even state control" (p.3) in his approach to public art as an utopian ideal. Though he critically examines such an ideal, his approach to the public sphere of culture is at odds with the "publicity" of popular culture. More important than the barrier pointed by McGuigan, between art and politics, is the distinction between high and popular culture (Frith, 1978/1981, 1991/1995, 1996) and the devaluation of popular music as "entertainment" in opposition to classical music as art. As Frith points out,

Entertainment is always just entertainment. There are two implicit contrasts involved here. One rests on an aesthetic judgement: entertainment (fun of the moment, trivial) is being contrasted to art (serious, transcendent, profound). The other rests on a political judgement: entertainment (insignificant, escapist) is being contrasted with reality, with truth. (Frith, 2000, p.201)

What this devaluation implies is that popular music is neither serious nor relevant enough to be discussed. While high culture/art music genres – e.g. classical, erudite, avant-garde – have been a longstanding subject for discussion in music departments, concert halls and public forums, popular music has, traditionally, been seen as the subject of like/dislike. A classical music fan is

someone knowledgeable. Someone knowledgeable in popular music is a fan. High culture/art is autonomous - it exists only for artistic reasons and is valued for its form. Popular culture is functional - it serves a commercial or hedonistic end (Adorno, 1941/1990; Frith, 1996). Age also figures as an important reason for this division: classical music is adult music, music that requires intellectual skills to be fully appreciated, while popular music is primarily youth music, music rooted in body rather than intellectual response (Frith, 1996). A further distinction is related to status: classical music is serious music, music conceived in terms of aesthetic values (Adorno, 1941/1990), hierarchies and canons. Popular music, like all popular culture, is “flat” (Thornton, 1995a).

The aesthetic worth of popular music rather than being defined by its inner qualities must, thus, be seen as the product of social and institutional contexts. The position occupied by popular music in the arts and cultural spheres has to be explained in historical and sociological terms rather than aesthetic ones. This distinction between serious and popular music is rooted in the more traditional and acknowledged arguments over cultural status. The distinction between high culture and popular culture and the struggle over the line between these two notions has been a central concern in sociology of culture and cultural studies (Gans, 1974; Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1993a; Santos, 1988; Frith, 1991/1995, 1996; McGuigan,

1992, 1996; Fornas, 1995). Many studies on popular culture, including the ones addressing popular music have been, explicitly or not, concerned with this struggle.

The populist approach to popular culture suggests that there are no aesthetic values which, themselves, distinguish high and low culture and that the meaning is conveyed in the uses people make of cultural commodities (Fiske, 1989; Willis, 1990). However, as other authors have suggested (Frith, 1978/1981, 1996; Regev, 1989; Trondman, 1990; Thornton, 1995a; Lindberg et al., 2000) distinctions are still there and they exist not only between high and popular culture but within popular music itself. Lindberg et al. (2000) claimed the non-static divisions between high and low culture, as each category has its own divisions:⁵

At any point in history, “high” and “low” culture will subdivide into two minor categories (currents, schools, genres, oeuvres, etc.) each endowed with its specific cultural status, leaving us with two poles on a scale rather than with two monolithic bodies” (Lindberg et al., 2000, p.18).

⁵ Indeed, popular music has always been marked by its own divisions. Frith (1978/1981) noted a clear separation in the 1970s’ popular music market between pop and rock “By 1972 (...) the rock/pop division seemed absolute, and the division of musical tastes seemed to reflect class differences: on one hand, there was the culture of middle-class rock – pretentious and genteel, obsessed with bourgeois notions of art and the accumulation of expertise and equipment; on the other hand, there was the culture of working-class pop – banal, simple-minded, based on the formulas of a tightly knit body of businessmen.” (pp.213-214)

A concern with taste cultures based on music tastes can also be seen in other contemporary studies (Lewis 1987, Trondman, 1990, Thornton, 1995a; Lindberg et al., 2000). The term *taste culture*, first used by Gans (1974), in his pioneering though now dated book on taste, has been used by Lewis (1987) to examine the correlation between music preference and social class. He claimed that taste cultures should be equated with other determinants rather than just social class.

Music does not just reflect social structure. It is dynamic, charged with subjective meaning, and may dramatically cut across the standard social structural variables such as class, age, or education, in creating groupings with common musical expectations and symbolic definitions, yet with members in widely divergent positions in the social system. (p.204)

However this was a static approach as it did not consider the ideological effects attached to taste cultures, especially how they positioned themselves within cultural hierarchies and distinctions. Trondman (1990) considered that music tastes expressed *social distance* between social classes. They are “conceived and maintained in the symbolic struggle between the classes” and are “often expressed in terms of *us* and *them*” (ibid., p.71):

What might happen were the dominant class, its representatives and supporters to discover that the vulgar masses had actually acquired “good taste”, i.e. their taste? They would, of course, switch to something else, rediscover some part of “heritage”, turn to something more esoteric, more serious, “meaningful on a deeper plane”, something more cynical or perhaps more playfully “camp” or *kitsch* – all in order to maintain vital social distinctions. (ibid., p.72)

Not only are music tastes markers of social difference but “certain tastes are singled out and accorded legitimacy, considered ‘right’, ‘good’ and of ‘worth’” (ibid., p.72). Furthermore, Trondman claims that taste in rock works as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1986, 1990) whose investment must have a social utility. Taste in rock facilitates an approach to legitimate culture:

Those who have an avid interest in the “right” kind of rock can develop their taste into a “learned discourse” or “scholastic jargon” on the periphery of legitimate culture. For some, this form of assimilation can offer a port of entry into legitimate culture, and preparatory schooling in the tradition of assimilation. (Trondman, 1990, p.81)

The importance of taste cultures in popular music was further explored by Thornton (1995a, 1995b), who focused on the British club cultures of the late 1980s/early 1990s to examine the distinctions within those social spaces. She conceives of club

cultures as taste cultures whose ideologies “fulfil the specific cultural agendas of their beholders” (1995b, p.201). In order to solve the clubbers’ concern over status, club cultures “embrace their own hierarchies of what is authentic and legitimate in popular culture – embodied understanding of which can make one ‘hip’ (1995a, p.3).⁶

The hierarchies pointed by Trondman and Thornton go in hand with other general oppositions within the popular music field. The opposition between music as commodity and music as art or “the common view that sees an opposition between standardisation, mass production and economic interests, on the one hand, and musical art as a personal statement (emotional or intellectual) about different aspects of social reality, on the other” (Regev, 1989, p.146) has been addressed in several key studies (Hebdige, 1979; Frith 1978/1981; Stratton, 1982; Negus, 1992). Like the opposition between high and popular culture, these oppositions within popular music and popular culture, in general, have undermined its integration in a democratic and plural public sphere.

⁶ Thornton identified three main distinctions on which those hierarchies are sustained: the authentic versus the phoney, the ‘hip’ versus the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘underground’ versus ‘the media’ (ibid., 1995a).

Portuguese popular music journalism and the public sphere

Having given an account of how the public sphere has been considered in relation to journalism and how popular music has been “politicised” in academic debates, I will now address the question of how and to what extent can Portuguese music journalism be considered part of a public sphere?

There are from the outset a few limitations which hinder a full realisation of music journalism as part of a public sphere. It is well understood that journalists and rock critics do not have to worry so much about their value judgements about a new release or a gig in the sense that such judgements do not have a normative effect. There is no need to reach an agreement over the value of a song, an album or an artist. Indeed, music criticism is arguably at its best when there are different opinions and when consensus is disrupted. The aesthetic worth of popular music is not a political matter in itself. The relevance of popular music journalism within the public sphere, in this instance, has less to do with making value judgements or valid claims over the quality of popular music, and more with the fact that between artists and the public there are mediators who have the power to decide what is released and how it reaches the audience.

Second, and deriving from popular music's lesser importance in public matters, one suspects - though without reception research to prove it - that music journalism is not read by a wide audience and is important only for a niche readership (Frith, 2001; Forde, 2001b) and for the music industry. If this assumption holds, music journalism is not coextensive with a single, overarching public sphere. Conversely, and as suggested in chapter four, taste also emerges as being an important filter in journalistic practices and one that often displaces music journalism from the public sphere. While the taste of the journalist/critic is always a referent in music journalism, the privileging of personal taste over public interest alienates music journalism from a wide readership. In this sense, music journalism is often closer to the notion of *taste group* than to that of public sphere.

It is also important to note that popular music is not necessarily a concern which relates to the affairs of the state in the same way that it relates to the market. The mediation between the state and civil society on popular music, in the Portuguese case, is insignificant simply because there is no state policy over popular music.⁷ At times, the opposite can happen as with the recent concern with the crisis in Portuguese music and the call for state intervention over public radio. But mostly, music journalism has been, ideally, a sphere of mediation between the market and the public.

While the aforementioned factors limit a full acceptance of popular music journalism as part of the public sphere, there are other factors that conversely make feasible such an idea. Music journalism is a space where different interests are met and expressed. First, the interests of the music consumers who wish to be informed about the latest releases and events in order to make decisions (which album to purchase, which gig to attend). Second, the interests of the music industry as represented by the artists, the record companies, the concert promoters and the retailers, who wish to see their products written about and advertised. Third, the interests of the news organisation (newspaper, media group) that wants to be sure that what is written about attracts readers and advertisers. And fourth, the interests of music journalists' themselves who, with their own aesthetic ideals and principles, aim to write about the music they feel passionate about.

That popular music journalism is a site of cultural struggle where different interests and perceptions on the value of popular music meet is beyond contest. Therefore, it can be broadly placed in that wider realm of politics which concerns cultural matters. Music journalism is a site of mediation between the industry and the consumers and whilst there is a lot of compromising in order to cater for both sets of interests, the journalists/critics are not passive pawns and are expected to play an important gatekeeping role. Popular

⁷ See Santos (org.) (1998).

music journalism has played a small yet important role in influencing tastes, creating trends and supplying information and knowledge on popular music.

In the Portuguese context, throughout the 1980s, a generation of journalists who became acknowledged for their work with *Blitz* and *Expresso* was arguably responsible for two important gatekeeping phenomena. On one hand, by bringing new trends in Anglo-Saxon music to the public domain. On the other hand, by covering new local artists who were not getting the attention they deserved from the media and the record labels. In these instances, journalists played an important ideological role, positioning themselves critically towards the conservatism of record labels and the status quo that prevailed in the industry.

Habermas' tracing of the evolution from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public seems rather useful to our understanding of the evolution in music journalism, especially considering the transition from a journalistic culture engaged in ideological arguments to one concerned with access. It is not that music journalism has ever been a space independent from economic or cultural interests, and arguments were solely conducted in terms of that ideal of communicative action between equals (Lindberg et al, 2000.). Indeed, it was noticeable that the type of coverage seen in *Blitz* throughout the 1980s often allowed the intrusion of emotion,

and the overuse of simplified “us and them” constructs (the discerning audience/selective crowd versus the masses and the industry) over rational discourse.⁸ Blitz became part of a taste ideology which developed through the 1980s and which had its offshoots in subsequent ventures, such as the legendary radio station, *XFM*: an ideology of difference beheld by a minority.

In this sense, the former proposition that Blitz promoted a type of coverage in line with an idea of public sphere (or with a culture-debating type of journalism) must be considered. We have to look at other types of coverage to contend that music journalism is workable as a public sphere. In the 1990s, *Pop/Rock* and later *Sons* were closer to that ideal because of the type of discourse (searching for objectivity, detached from emotional analysis) and because of the editorial line (inclusive and pluralist). Around this time, music journalism (including *Blitz*) had started to lose its militant edge and inevitably became compromised by the music industry. However, that did not prevent journalists, especially those with editorial powers, to assume a critical stance while addressing what was of public interest. Notions of public interest were never “scientific” in music journalism (as in others, one suspects), but writing for a general newspaper (*Público* and *DN*) means that one should be inclusive towards different genres and try to voice many opinions when issues concerning the market/industry were addressed.

⁸ See Stratton (1982).

In the early 1990s, significant changes had occurred within the Portuguese music industry as well as within journalism. The incorporation of *Blitz* in a media group and its professionalisation meant that it became more concerned with profit and, therefore, more dependent on advertising and readers. At the same time, the industry expanded as large, multinational companies were now well-established in Portugal, signing Portuguese artists while promoting global ones. There was far more pressure upon journalists both from the media group (who wants the title to be profitable) and from the record companies and concert promoters, whose promotion departments became central to the companies' strategies. The most visible consequence in music journalism was that publications became consumer guides, strongly focused on new releases and upcoming events and following a rigid interview/review format.⁹ As independence from market interests is a marker of an operative public sphere, these shifts posed a challenge to music journalism. How could it remain an autonomous space when it became increasingly dependent on the promotion departments in record companies?

My depiction of the journalist/press-officer nexus¹⁰ in chapter five and its application to the case of Portuguese music coverage in chapter seven, led me to conclude that opposing the music

⁹ Therefore challenging Hallin's claims that the professionalisation of journalism reinforces its status as a public sphere (Hallin, 1994).

journalists to the music industry is not the best way to claim the autonomy of the former towards the later. With the evolution of the Portuguese music industry and its gradual integration in the global market throughout the 1990s, this nexus was institutionalised through a set of practices and routines which involved consent, compromise and resistance on both sides.¹¹ If music journalists can still, therefore, be active agents in a public sphere, such a role is inevitably framed by their relationship with the market.

The recent crisis in the Portuguese music industry and the way it was addressed in music titles is particularly interesting as it brought issues of national identity and cultural protectionism to the fore. As Schlesinger argues (1999), the former model of the public sphere addressed the nation-state as a political community and, thus, regards the public sphere as being co-extensive with the nation. It is significant to our case that the decline of the public sphere and the contestation of Habermas' unitary model follows the decline of the nation-state as the main political-communicative space on the back of recent trends towards globalisation and multiculturalism (*ibid.*, 1999). As popular music has never featured prominently in discussions of national culture and identity at an institutional level, journalists can play an important role here in bringing the issue to the public domain, highlighting its importance and commenting

¹⁰ See Forde (2001b).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

upon it. What is the sense of covering Portuguese music when popular music is such a globalised site? That was the question that journalists were compelled to address either through commenting upon it or through reviewing editorial lines.

While there has not been consensus upon the matter, it was well understood that music journalism could play an important role in denouncing the causes and explaining the crisis by placing it in a wider context. As one of the editors who advocated an increased attention towards Portuguese artists in editorial policies explained, coverage of Portuguese music was a matter which concerned too many people within the music industry and, therefore, music journalists had a responsibility to address it.

While these arguments demonstrate that music journalism has in certain contexts been in line with the concept of public sphere, it is also clear that such an approach has to be complemented by a more systematic account of the ways in which, through its discourses and practices, popular music journalism deals with issues of taste and with the inevitability of being part of the music industry. In short, the argument has to be supplemented with an approach that is more grounded in institutional and operational considerations. Bourdieu's reflexive sociology of culture comes up as an useful tool for understanding the tensions within music journalism: between a type of music journalism more engaged with the politics of popular

music and one more in line with its role as a consumer guide; and between a music journalism that writes to an elite of knowledgeable music consumers and one that addresses the wider public.

Bourdieu and the field of cultural production

Bourdieu's reflexive sociology has been said to be a third way between the relativism/particularism of postmodern theories and the universalism of Habermas' public sphere (McGuigan, 1996). He departs from Kantian aesthetics by claiming that there is no such thing as pure aesthetics to define the worth of cultural objects. That is no absolute standard of value can claim aesthetic superiority over another. Instead, Bourdieu replaces aesthetics with *taste* as the site of cultural meaning. At the centre of Bourdieu's model is the notion of *field*. Field is defined as "a system of relations between positions occupied by specialised agents and institutions engaged in a battle over something they have in common" (in Lindbergh et al, 2000, p.22).¹² Although the concept applies to many realms of social life (thus, there is the educational field, the economic field and the political field), Bourdieu gave particular attention to the field of cultural production (1979/1984, 1992/1996, 1993a). He defines the cultural field as a system composed of agents and objective relations.

¹² Original quote from: Donald Broady (1990), *Sociology and Epistemology: On Pierre Bourdieu's work and the Historical Epistemology*, Stockholm, LHS.

By agents, he means not only the artists but also the mediators (editors, publishers, directors, critics, agents as such, professors...) whose practices are vital in structuring that field. The relation between the field and the habitus is that the cultural field (as all fields) demands a certain habitus in order to prevail (Lindberg et al, 2000). This is not a given property of fields as much as it is acquired by the agents in order to succeed in the struggles that happen within the field.

Here Bourdieu departs from structuralist approaches to cultural texts as they isolate the text from the field of production.

Bourdieu's objection to strictly internal analysis (...) is quite simply that it looks for the final explanation of texts either within the texts themselves (...) or within some sort of ahistorical 'essence' rather than in the complex network of social relations that makes the very existence of the texts possible. (Johnson, 1993, p.10)

Instead he emphasises the conditions of production. Such analysis requires an examination of the system of social relations that frame the production of cultural texts. He sees a complement in two sets of relations which interrelate: the space of works and discourses; and the space of the positions held by those who produce them (Bourdieu, 1993a). He also departs from simplistic class interpretations of culture, as those objective sets of social relations are not limited to class relations. Instead, he claims, in practice and

for analytical purposes, the relative autonomy of the fields. Although class and background are determinant here, they are refracted by the field's own conditions and remain at the background in the agents struggles within the field.

The field of cultural production is organised around two poles, the intellectual and the commercial:

The cultural field constitutes (...) an 'economic world reversed', in that the autonomous pole, based on symbolic capital and thus subject only to internal demands, is marked positively, and the opposite pole, based on subordination to the demands of economic capital, is marked negatively. (Johnson, 1993, p.16)

The more autonomous the cultural field is, the more the economic pole is subdued. That explains the disdain for public success shown among the highest cultural forms (Bourdieu, 1992/1996). Another sign of the field's autonomy lies in the increasing distinctions between the different genres. The more autonomous the cultural field is, the more the need for each object, genre, style, school or standard to assert its exclusivity and uniqueness.¹³ Perhaps, more important than anything, it produces ideologies based on taste. This is because rather than producing an

¹³ "To the extent that the field progressively gains in autonomy and imposes its own logic, these genres also grow more distinct from each other, and more clearly so, according to the degree of intrinsically symbolic credit they possess and confer, this tending to vary in inverse relation to economic profit" (ibid., p.115).

homogenous set of positions, the cultural field is organised around competing agents who align themselves to different positions linked to different categories of style, genre, texts and taste.

For a position to be recognised within the field of cultural production a certain “habitus” is required. The objective manifestation of the habitus is summed up by Bourdieu in the concept of *cultural capital* (1979/1984, 1986, 1992/1996, 1993a). By capital, Bourdieu means “all kinds of assets, not only economic, material as well as immaterial” (Lindberg et al., 2000, p.21). Cultural capital is the sum of material and non-material cultural assets (knowledge in legitimate forms of culture, possession of cultural items, level of education, communication skills) one has gathered through his/her upbringing and which are recognised within the field. Agents, thus, “are distributed in the overall social space in accordance with the overall volume of the capital that they possess” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.128).

‘Cultural capital’ refers to cultivated competence, knowledge of the classificatory schemes, codes and conventions of cultural forms and the ability to display such knowledge to social advantage with game-playing confidence (McGuigan, 1996, p.32)

Although cultural capital may be connected to other forms of capital, especially economic capital, it has intrinsic value within the

cultural field.¹⁴ What counts as cultural capital is shaped by the field's specialisation: it may be artistic, linguistic, intellectual, academic or literary. Cultural capital is related to larger groups such as class, but it is better objectified within the field, as it becomes an essential linchpin for legitimating the agents' position. When cultural capital is acknowledged within the field, it becomes *symbolic capital*. According to Bourdieu "symbolic capital is a credit, it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition" (1990, p.138). At this stage, cultural/symbolic capital become inextricably linked to economic capital as the prestige brought by the recognition of cultural capital is the condition for upgrading one's position in the field.¹⁵

Taste is one of the most important forms of cultural/symbolic capital (1979/1984). Rather than being a simple manifestation of aesthetic preference for certain objects, styles or genres, taste is a marker of distinction as value judgements play an objective role in the field's own structuring. Bourdieu claims that value judgements about cultural objects must be analysed from the perspective of social distinction and not, as Kant had claimed, as universally valid

¹⁴ According to Thornton, "high levels of income and property often correlate but the two can also conflict. Comments about the *nouveau riche* disclose the possible frictions between those rich in cultural capital but relatively poor in economic capital (like academics) and those rich in economic capital but less affluent in cultural capital (like professional football players)" (1995b, p.202).

(Lindberg et al., 2000). Taste “classifies the classifier” (ibid., p.24). It is both a form of cultural capital and part of one’s habitus in the sense that it is objectively (though often unconsciously) used by the agent and perceived by the field as a marker for inclusion and exclusion. Thus, good and bad taste become, to a considerable extent, objective constructs.

Rather than being the “given” result of experiencing a certain cultural object, taste is socially constructed, the long-term product of acquired dispositions that Bourdieu defines as *habitus*:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53)

Such dispositions are learned throughout one’s upbringing and strongly determined by social background and class. Education imbibed by family and school is the core referent for understanding how habitus is acquired.¹⁶ These institutions assure the reproduction of the habitus enabling, simultaneously, the adjustment of the agents to the social realm (from everyday conversation to the pursuit of a

¹⁵ Thus, confirming Garnham and Williams’ assumption that what ultimately defines cultural capital is its ‘convertibility’ into economic capital (Garnham & Williams, 1986).

career), and the maintenance of the social hierarchy. Habitus, thus, becomes “embodied knowledge, one’s taste, style and way with words” (Lindberg et al., 2000) which is, partly consciously and partly unconsciously, deployed to one’s advantage in the course of his/her life/career. In this sense habitus is, simultaneously, a structured and a structuring structure as not only is the product of the internalisation of class divisions but also it organises social practices (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). More than organising social practices, the habitus does actually classify them:

The habitus is at once a system of models for the production of practices and a system of models for the perception and appreciation of practices (...) the habitus produces practices and representations which are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated (...) Thus the habitus implies a ‘sense of one’s place’ but also a ‘sense of other’s place’. (1990, p.131)

It is a central concept in Bourdieu’s sociology of taste as it confers an objective status to what would otherwise remain in the realm of the subjective - taste.

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus bears a resemblance with Habermas’ *lifeworld*. Both are presented as (pre)dispositions that structure social life and make communication possible. But Bourdieu clearly departs from Habermas by giving a more accurate depiction

¹⁶ Thus, Bourdieu’s claim that only compensatory education can assuage cultural ‘disadvantages’ (McGuigan, 1996).

that rejects the illusion of a unitary public sphere. While for Habermas the idea of lifeworld is tied to the ideal of a unitary public sphere where rational agreement is possible, Bourdieu's habitus seems to reject the ideal of rational agreement as what prevails are one's interests and strategies in the field. While Habermas' public sphere is ultimately inclusive, not in the sense that all social strata participate in it, but in the sense that a certain group (the *bourgeoisie*) is entitled to mediate between the state and its citizens on behalf of the public interest, Bourdieu's articulated notions of habitus, field and cultural capital are predominantly exclusionary. Those groups (social, professional) which are in possession of more valuable resources (that is forms of capital) are the ones which are more predisposed (through habitus) to achieve better positions in the hierarchy and, therefore, to perpetuate the exclusivity of their own positions within the field.

However, in his work on the power of journalism (1996/1998), Bourdieu seems to suggest that a democratic public sphere is possible and desirable. Although he claims that the power of the journalistic field has been achieved on the strength of its increasing subjection to market demands, he makes clear that "it should not be concluded that (...) it is intrinsically impossible to work for a democratic redistribution of the achievements made possible by autonomy" (ibid., p.76). That is made possible by the work of

intellectuals within the journalistic field who can impose on the outside the values nurtured within the field. In this respect, Bourdieu does not diverge from Habermas in advocating a social space (a public sphere?) mediated by a particular group (bourgeoisie for Habermas, intellectuals for Bourdieu) but where cultural and scientific achievements are made accessible to the public.

Conclusion

As I have considered the institutional domain of public discourse on popular music, Bourdieu's model is a required complement to the notion of public sphere. His interrelated notions of "field", "habitus" and "capital" are useful in addressing the strengths and limitations of music journalism in the public sphere. While traditionally Bourdieu's model has been at odds with Habermas' ideal of a public sphere (McGuigan, 1996), I suggest that the two models may actually complement each other. But one must go further than Bourdieu's considerations on the power of journalism and attend to the intrinsic features of music journalism as a cultural and professional space within the wider fields of culture and journalism.

Music journalism draws from the journalistic field in respect of its dependency on advertising and readership but it also draws

features from the cultural field with respect to its taste agenda both within the space and in relation to other spaces (e.g. the music industry, highbrow cultural journalism). The features drawn from the cultural field place it closer to the intellectual pole. The features from the journalistic field tie it to the economic pole. This frames and partly explains the ambivalent position of the music journalist: between opinion-maker/gatekeeper of taste and employee for a commercial enterprise (the newspaper/magazine).

It can be argued, to some extent, that music journalism is, like other types of journalism and following Bourdieu's model, more powerful when subject to market demands. It is impossible for music journalism to assert itself as a field without a strong economic pole, acknowledged by the news organisation in which it operates and by the music industry. Music journalism cannot achieve autonomy if it does not attract advertisers or sell newspapers and records. This is something which was acknowledged in the first instance by the journalists themselves as their criticism on the state of music journalism was premised upon a much-commented upon decrease in the sales of certain titles.¹⁷ However, music journalism also needs the values from the intellectual pole if it is to remain credible to its readers. It is noticeable that *Blitz*'s past as a "militant" title is

¹⁷ The much-touted (though never confirmed) decrease in *Blitz*'s sales was constantly commented upon in interviews.

constantly evoked as a school and tradition in music journalism though this past is devoid of economic gains or achievements.

Bourdieu's considerations on the field of culture and journalism can be read against notions of the public sphere as they tend to favour exclusivity over inclusivity and particular interests over universal concerns. His considerations on the meaning of taste help us in explaining why it is important for music journalism as a social and cultural space to assert the superiority of certain taste groups against the undifferentiated masses. Music journalists are part of those taste groups and, more importantly, a taste group themselves – indeed, there tends to be more agreement and similarity than dissidence among journalists when it comes to their own music tastes. I tend to believe that such an agreement was crucial to the importance of music journalism in the creation of certain cult artists (who eventually became hugely successful) and to the status achieved by *Blitz* throughout the 1980s.

Agreement about tastes has been, to some extent, important to assert the autonomy of music journalism towards the music industry. It has also been important in its gatekeeping role. Music journalism would not have been influential in the 1980s had it not been for a group of journalists who were in agreement that there were particular local and international scenes in popular music which were not getting the attention they deserved in the media:

António Variações has largely benefited from a lobby (...) Many journalists, myself included, agreed to write about an artist who hadn't even released an album. This is a lobbying activity, no doubt about it. (...) We thought it was a very important artist, that he was a revelation in Portuguese music, that there was nobody like him, and we knew that he was bound by a four-year contract with EMI to make regional folk music when what he wanted to do was something totally different. So, here there was a convergence of interests, wasn't there? (former editor, weekly music newspaper).

But it is also significant that music journalists are often recruited for sharing similar tastes and interests or for mingling in the same social circles. It is worth considering to what extent do such features alienate music journalism from its role in the public sphere and I do not think there is a clear cut, straightforward answer to that.

My argument is that while the role of taste is ambivalent in music journalism, issues of capital are important for an effective role of music journalists in the public sphere. As argued in chapters four and six, cultural and social capital, which are tied to the journalists' habitus, are important assets for a proactive approach in music journalism:

In a competitive context as the one in which the mass media operate, the most precious asset for the journalist are his own sources of information whether they are sources in the traditional sense or the possession of a specialised and particularly important knowledge. Access and management of those sources and informations, his quantity and quality, allow the journalist to become a competent and useful professional and claim his credibility and status. (Correia, 1997, p.212).

While cultural capital is always a valuable asset once one has a position within music journalism, social capital is more crucial for a good management of the relationship with the record companies and concert promoters. High social capital coupled with the journalists' credibility (or symbolic capital) allows him/her to have a fuller understanding of the music industry and to assume a proactive role rather than being dependent on the record companies.

It was also argued in chapter seven that the habitus of the journalist as defined by his professional experience - sometimes coupled with his experience in the music industry - is key to his understanding of notions of public interest and to a better grasp of journalism's autonomy from private interests. Titles which draw music journalism in line with the notion of public sphere relied on the experience of their editors in advocating an inclusive editorial line. These more experienced journalists tend to be more critical about the state of music journalism and the upcoming of a new

generation of “desk journalists”. They have developed an habitus throughout the years which included a proactive use of sources (attending live gigs, contacting the artists directly, calling companies in advance to find out about a new release or gig) and a certain ideological framework (as one journalist has put it, “good journalists go in search of information, bad ones wait for it to arrive on their desks”). As music journalism is now a more fragmented space where different generations, professional ideologies and interests compete and comprehensive knowledge has been replaced with specialisation, the capital of the journalist remains an important asset.

Conclusion

In so far as culture matters and is debated, popular music also matters and can, in certain contexts, be the subject of reasoned discourse, in line with the idea of public sphere. It has been argued throughout this thesis that, as a subject, popular music can be in line with the notion of the public sphere when it becomes more than a simple matter of aesthetic judgement and is articulated to express wider concerns rather than simply being considered as a form of entertainment. Political, cultural and geographic as well as aesthetic issues are articulated when popular music is discussed. In this sense, a sociological approach is required. One that takes popular music into the institutional domain of those agents who, while not being directly involved in music production and reception, are crucial in mediating between those two poles.

Popular music is a global industry that crosses geographical and social boundaries. Between the artists and the public are value judgements, choices and political decisions that play a key role in the sounds that become available to us. Among the institutionalised forms that mediate the artists and the public is popular music journalism. Popular music journalism is a site of unquestionable relevance in the articulation of popular music with wider concerns but it is also a cultural and professional space whose politics are

conditioned by its relation to the fields of culture and journalism and to its ambivalent relation to the music industry. This uncertainty makes music journalism ambivalent to the existence of a public sphere for popular music.

We have defined popular music journalism as a space where the concerns, interests and needs of the various agents that participate in popular music as a medium (the artists, the record labels and concert promoters, the journalists, the fans and the wider public) can be met and become the subject of reasoned argument. I have also argued that such a public sphere has to be pluralistic and must consider the tastes of many publics. Some (always relative) autonomy from market pressures, as represented by the commercial interest from record labels and concert promotion companies, should also be achieved

With this model in mind, I went through an historical analysis of Portuguese music journalism. I concluded that Portuguese music journalism has evolved over the last twenty years from a sort of ideological, militant journalism to a journalism more in line with the notion of consumer guide. This happened without a significant change in the formats available as serious coverage of popular music remained confined to a weekly specialised title and music/arts/entertainment supplements in general newspapers. The emergence and increasing importance of these supplements in the

1990s may partly explain the shift to consumer guides but we have to look somewhere else if we are to have the complete picture.

Over the last twenty years the music industry has evolved to the point where all major record companies are now based in Portugal and, with the exception of Warner, investing in national repertoire. At the same time, small, independent record companies, distributors and retailers have occupied a tiny, yet relevant share of the Portuguese market. The global music industry also had an impact on the concert promotion business as Portugal became progressively integrated in the live agenda of the most successful artists. Changes in ownership with the integration of *Blitz* into a large media group as well as the increasing dependency on advertising revenue also brought significant changes to music journalism.

The 1980s were still characterised by a militant journalism whose type of discourse often veered towards the ideological. A generation of journalists made their mark in *Blitz* and *Expresso* (and to a lesser extent in *Música & Som* and *Sete*). These journalists departed ideologically from the status quo upheld by the record companies and characterised by a too compliant culture/entertainment journalism. This new music journalism achieved significant autonomy by positioning itself against the set of dominant values. It promoted the new trends in popular music coming from abroad via the import circuit while being in track with

the emergent underground local acts. Journalists were participants in the scene, frequently attending gigs to search for new talents and writing about them long before they were signed.

An ideology of difference emerged through this new journalism. Long, reflective articles positioned the journalists and its readers against the undifferentiated masses, the established record companies and the status quo of the music milieu. To this, the journalists opposed an only vaguely defined, but often represented in discourse, selective minority more recalcitrant and demanding than the vast majority.

Although music journalism achieved a certain independence from the music market – a marker of its status as a public sphere – and popular music was the subject of reflection rather than simply coverage of the market, this new journalism cannot be fully in line with a notion of public sphere. Journalists quite often allowed the intrusion of emotion and of vague ideological constructs (the masses vs. the selective crowd, the conservative industry vs. the creative underground) into their discourse and established a set of conventions and values that were at odds with public reasoning on popular music.

Yet, music journalists played an important role as watchdogs for the then emerging music industry and assumed an important status as gatekeepers of taste. New talents were discovered and later

signed to major record companies and a new generation of national artists eventually made their mark on the history of Portuguese music. The unavoidable consequence was that this new journalism was somewhat co-opted. Music journalism remained a relatively weak space in the sense that it was still badly paid and was not professionalised. Journalists quite often went to work for the record companies or to write for other publications where they were better paid but far less committed to a militant journalism. This co-optation process culminated in the buying of *Blitz* by the large media group, *Grupo Impresa*.

The professionalisation of *Blitz* and of music journalism in general was made in strength of the acknowledgement of its importance for the expanding music industry. Record companies started to take the music publications as key outlets for their promotion strategies. The increasingly important role of press-officers in record companies meant not only that the press was essential to promote their records but that the professional relationship between the two sides required a frequent, daily contact. The pressures from the record companies and concert promoters were far stronger and more effective than before, if more subtle. Press-officers and journalists had to manage the relationship so that their own needs and interests were met. This was most evident for the journalists, since record labels and concert promotion companies

developed new strategies to make sure that their products were written about in the press.

While it is impossible for the journalists to operate outside of this nexus, issues of capital and, more obviously, professional experience, are important in the management of their relationship to the industry. Social, symbolic and, to a less extent, cultural capital bring the journalist recognition within the industry while professional experience gives him reflexivity in the management of such a relationship. Journalists who started their career within or under the influence of the “militant” generation are critical of the shift from a more reflective journalism to consumer guides as it reflects the growing influence of the global music market on editorial lines and journalistic practices.

In the first half of the 1990s, the *Pop/Rock* (later *Sons*) supplement reflected a type of coverage that, while more compromised with the music industry remained critical and definitely more objective and pluralist than *Blitz*. This was the type of music coverage more closely in line with the notion of public sphere. Popular music was placed in the wider context of production and rather than being limited to its aesthetic worth. There was not only a concern over giving a voice to all the participants in the now well established (if yet small scale) Portuguese music industry.

However, the journalists' authority was unquestionable and legitimated by his principles, not by the market's.

Later in the decade, the use of IT in music journalism practices added to what more recalcitrant journalists call "desk journalism". The old role of music journalism in discovering new talents by attending gigs and mingling in the scene disappeared almost completely as the web allowed easier and less costly access to information. The advent of desk journalism is seen as leading to a decrease in coverage of Portuguese music. In consequence, the recent concern raised by the acknowledgement of a deep crisis in Portuguese music happened following a period when airplay of Portuguese music dropped dramatically and music publications progressively shifted its status to consumer guides. This becomes a showcase for a certain conflict of ideologies within music journalism.

Some journalists claim that they bear no responsibility towards coverage of Portuguese music as they argue that such responsibility clashes with their commitment to make considered judgements on the artistic merit of popular music. Others assume a proactive approach to coverage of Portuguese music as they see themselves bearing a responsibility towards the local music industry. The first approach carries a false consciousness with it. Commitment to aesthetics does not bring autonomy to the cultural space of music

journalism. It rather decreases the journalists' awareness that they are reinforcing the status quo of the global music industry. The second approach accepts that music journalism is part of the music industry but advocates a proactive management of the relationship between the journalist and other agents within the industry.

The weakness of the approach that opposes the journalist to the industry lies in its conception of music journalism as an (ideally) self-contained space and in its emphasis upon the co-optation mechanisms used by the industry. Recognising the inadequacy of this approach leads me to suggest a more systematic and reflexive approach to the dynamics developed between journalists and other agents within the industry. The foundations for a stronger autonomy in music journalism and the contributions for its assertiveness as a cultural field must therefore be found in an inclusive and integrated view. A view in which a stronger involvement within the field of popular music in Portugal, not necessarily translating into a compromise or submission towards the interests of the industry, contributes for a journalism more aware of its social role.

The engagement of music journalism with a political issue as the preservation of national identity and of the local music industry tells us that a public sphere of national culture where music journalists play an important role has to be inclusive of the wider interests of the agents who work within the music industry in

Portugal. The journalists' own assets (or forms of capital) are crucial in the constitution of a fully realised public sphere whose effectiveness cannot be hampered by the interests of the global music industry.

In addressing the crisis in the local industry and its implications for issues of national identity and the maintenance of that same industry, the journalist is placing journalism in line with the idea of a national public sphere where culture is debated and reasoned decisions are arrived at. While the interests of the national industry are being catered for, this is a matter of unquestionable public interest which concerns many agents. It is well understood that record companies (from major to independents) expect journalists to write about their artists more than anything else. By bringing issues of national origin to the editorial line and addressing the place of Portuguese music within the national and global music industries, music journalists are assuming a proactive role of mediation between the global market and the consumers, and to a lesser extent, between the state and the citizens.

The case-study of the online forum for discussion launched by *Público* reveals the strengths and weaknesses of such a format in the constitution of a public sphere for popular music. Interactivity is desirable not only with readers but between different agents with an interest in discussing popular music. The previous page *Opinar* in

the printed version of *Público* has succeeded at times in engendering public reasoning mostly between journalists and readers. The online forum has been acknowledged not only by its participants but by some journalists as an important site for discussion. However, the forum favours immediacy and is more in line with the quick pace of the music industry and of popular music culture in general (fast turnover of styles and trends, daily release of new albums, availability of live gigs, etc.) than with the sort of reflection required to constitute a fully realised public sphere. In the end, the forum tells us more about the consumerist pulse of its participants than about the meanings they make out of their listening experiences.

My argument on the notions of public sphere, complemented with the more institutional approach to the fields of journalism and culture proposed by Bourdieu, leads us to the conclusion that the constitution of music journalism as part of a public sphere has been possible in certain contexts if not exactly in terms with the ideal, unitary model of the public sphere developed by Habermas. Music journalism can under certain circumstances play an active role in the making of a public sphere for popular music and simultaneously place popular music in the wider public sphere of culture. While journalists can no longer operate outside of the music industry and have acquiesced with the needs and interests of record companies and concert promotion companies, they can acknowledge such nexus

and play a proactive role in the management of such relationships. The journalists' own agenda should not interfere with his role in the creation of reasoned discourse on popular music. Indeed, it is possible for music journalism to achieve more autonomy as a cultural space while approaching popular music not simply as a commodity but as a site where meanings are articulated and citizens are informed and enriched.

For such achievements to be possible, the journalists' assets are crucial. The use of forms of capital ingrained in the journalists' professional habitus and which act as structuring structures in journalistic practices lead to an assertive type of journalism. A journalism which by means of inclusivity, reasoning and interpretation contributes simultaneously to the assertion of popular music in the public sphere and to the autonomy of music journalism as a cultural space.

This thesis addressed the case of Portuguese music journalism and drew from public sphere theories to assess its evolution over the last twenty years. While popular music and music journalism have both been taken seriously in academic research, little attention is paid to what seems to be a taken for granted assumption: that popular music is a matter of public interest. This research has aimed to shed some light on those gaps and open up avenues for further research. It has also, hopefully, contributed to a fuller understanding

of the status of music journalism as part of the public sphere. It has perhaps also raised as many questions as it has answered but in so doing opens up possibilities for further research. For instance, do the criteria for defining public reasoning about music apply to any national context? My suspicion drawing from my own experience of reading Anglo-Saxon titles in tandem with Portuguese ones is that writers in Britain, for instance, write about popular music with a very different frame of mind from their Portuguese peers. Their sense of reasoning is different - for instance, they pay much more attention to song lyrics and less attention to biographic details. But their tastes do not differ that much. Neither do those of the public.

Since public reasoning about music differs from a central market like the British to a peripheral one like the Portuguese, it is worth raising the question as to whether there is a place other than the national communicative space in which popular music may be discussed among other cultural forms. Or, conversely, how can we claim a discussion of popular music at a national level given that popular music is now such a globalised industry? Also, and perhaps more importantly, if music journalism offers the possibility of stimulating reasoned discussion then what exactly are the configurations of the public sphere in which such possibilities can be realised? Is there such thing as a public sphere of culture in

Portugal? Or are all the attempts at public reasoning in popular music in vain?

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Appendix

Appendix I

List of interviewees:

Andreia Criner – Media-officer, *Música no Coração*¹.

António Pires – News editor, *Blitz*.

David Ferreira – Manager, EMI-Valentim de Carvalho.

Fernando Magalhães – Journalist, Pop/Rock, Sons, Y.

Henrique Amaro – Radio DJ, Antena 3.

Isilda Sanches – Contributor, *DN+*.

João Fernandes – Executive editor, *Diário de Notícias*.

João Lisboa – Popular music critic, *Expresso*.

João Santos – Manager, Ananana.

Jorge Dias – Former contributor, Pop/rock, Sons.

Jorge Mourinha – Contributor, *Blitz*.

José Manuel Fernandes – Editor, *Público*.

José Vítor Malheiros – Webmaster, *Público*.

Lena Alves – Press-officer, Universal.

Luís Guerra – Journalist, *Blitz*.

Luís Maio – Former editor, Pop/Rock, Sons, Y; former contributor, *Blitz*.

Manuel Falcão – Former editor, *Blitz*.

Miguel Francisco Cadete – Journalist, Y.

Nuno Galopim – Editor, *DN+*.

Paulo Bismark – Concert promoter, Remedio Santo².

Paulo Miranda – Former press-officer, EMI-Valentim de Carvalho.

Pedro Gonçalves – Executive editor, *Blitz*.

Rui Miguel Abreu – Manager, Loop Recordings; former journalist.

Rui Monteiro – Former editor, *Blitz*.

Sónia Pereira – Editor, *Blitz*.

Tiago Luz Pedro – Journalist, Y.

Vasco Câmara – Cinema editor, Y.

Vítor Belanciano – Music editor, Y.

Vítor Junqueira – Former website editor, Musicnet.

¹ Concert promotion company.

² Idem.

Appendix II

Characterisation of the music titles:

Pop/Rock (1990-1997); Sons (1997-2000); Y (2000-)

Status: Weekly music supplement (Pop/Rock, Sons); weekly arts/entertainment supplement (Y)

Publication: Público

Ownership: Interlog/Sonae.

Circulation: approx. 80,000 (Y). Between 60,000 and 70,000 (Pop/Rock and Sons).

DN+ (1998-)

Status: Weekly arts/entertainment supplement. from daily newspaper.

Publication: Diário de Notícias.

Ownership: Lusomundo/PT.

Circulation: approx. 64,000.

A Revista (1978-); Cartaz (1990-2002)

Status: Weekly general supplement (A Revista); weekly arts/entertainment supplement (Cartaz).

Publication: Expresso.

Ownership: Impresa/Controljornal.

Circulation: approx. 140,000 (Cartaz).

Blitz (1984-)

Status: Weekly music newspaper.

Ownership: Impresa/Medipress.

Circulation: approx. 20,000.

Sete (1978-1995)

Status: Weekly culture and entertainment newspaper.

Ownership: Projornal.

Música & Som (1977-1989)

Status: Monthly music magazine.

Circulation: 12,000 to 15,000.

Mundo da Canção (1969-1986)

Status: Monthly music magazine.

Ownership: Tipografia Aliança.

Circulation: 19,500 (until 1973).

Appendix III

The four main economic groups in Portugal and its publications:

PT/Lusomundo - Jornal de Notícias, Diário de Notícias and a dozen other newspapers and magazines, including part of the regional press. It owns also TSF an important news oriented radio station; The group is also the major owner of movie theatres, which also has a quasi monopoly in films and video distribution, in alliance with Warner, and which also has business in Spain. It owns also important stakes in cable television and the Internet (information as well as other services), in cellular telephones.

Impresa - previously owned by the former prime-minister Francisco Pinto Balsemão owns Expresso, Visão, Telenovelas, A Capital, Caras and three dozen newspapers [including *Blitz*], women, people, economic, youth-oriented magazines. The group is also active in the free press, it also owns in alliance with the Belgian group Roulart. It owns also SIC, the television station with the largest audience share. The group is active as well in Internet technologies, publications printing and distribution.

Media Capital - owns Diário Económico and two dozen specialised magazines and newspapers, the group has a very significant presence in the economic press. It owns also TVI, the second channel in terms of share, four radio stations, two of which are among the largest in share and is active as well in Internet technologies.

Impala - owns Maria, Nova Gente and two dozen popular and feminine magazines, some of which are amongst the largest in circulation throughout the country. The group is active in Internet services, it runs businesses also in Brazil and Spain.

(Source: The Portuguese Media Landscape in www.ejc.nl)

