

# MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DEATHS OF CONTEMPORARY POPULAR MUSICIANS (1993-2012)

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## **Abstract**

The published work on which this submission is based examines the ways in which deaths of popular musicians are represented in the media, offering a critical and problematic spotlight on social values conveyed through media discourse. In the title the term 'representation' is used deliberately, acknowledging a conceptual debt to Stuart Hall (1997: 15) who articulated the complexity of the relationship between language, culture and meaning. Going on to set out three theories - 'reflective', 'intentional' and 'constructionist' - Hall's latter perspective is one used here to argue that media discourse is distinct in relation to this data set. That is, that popular musicians are treated in several distinct ways in the coverage of their deaths. These narratives reflect social views and reinforce dominant discourses of lifestyles stereotypically associated with popular music. Underneath these recurring narrative devices operates a covert layer of morality and judgement, which is sometimes inaccurate, often misleading and potentially communicates unhelpful messages to distressed and vulnerable members of the public. At its most extreme, irresponsible reporting of suicide and acts of self-harm may be of risk to the public (Samaritans. 2013: 7).

It is this argument, anchored in supportive primary research and additional impact work (see Appendix ii) around best practice, which is presented as my original contribution to knowledge. This document constructs an imperative to probe the professional ideal of neutrality of journalism discourse in covering deaths of popular cultural significance. The number of cases covered in the papers and chapters provide the substantive empirical dataset (or equivalent). The submission publications have systematically identified, using concrete published examples explored with rigorous discourse analysis, instances of problematic practice in relation specifically to this data cluster. My findings make explicit the negative significance that a cumulative impact of such discourse has in social terms and suggests outcomes for future work. By collating the research of five years and using a commentary to weave the material into an integrated overview, this document presents the coherence of that body of work and also provides an authorial amplification to demonstrate the work's originality.

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## Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise indicated formally in the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other University for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Heasman', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Signed

Dated

Feb 2016

University of Brighton

DECLARATION OF CO-AUTHORSHIP OF PUBLISHED WORK

*(Please use one form per co-author per publication)*

Name of candidate: Paula Hearsum

Name of co-author: Dr Mark Duffett

Full bibliographical details of the publication (including authors):

Duffett, M & Hearsum, P. 2015. 'Alas, Poor Richard: fandom, personal identity and Ben Myer's novelization of Richey Edwards' life story'. *Volume! The French Journal of Popular Music Studies*. (forthcoming).

*Declaration by candidate* (delete as appropriate)

I declare that my contribution to the above publication was as:

Principal author  
 Joint author  
 Minor contributing author

Signed  (candidate) . . . . . 17/6/15 (Date)

*Statement by co-author* (delete as appropriate)

Either (i) I agree with the above declaration

Or (ii) I do not agree with the above declaration and I agree to be held responsible for the following reasons(s):

Signed  (co-author) . . . . . 1/7/15 (Date)

## **Publications included in the submission**

Hearsum, P. 2012a. '27 Forever: Kristen Pfaff and the Coverage of Death as the re-presentation of a Gendered Musical Life' in: Jennings, R & Gardner, A. (eds.) *Rock On: Women, Aging and Popular Music*. Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 103-122.

Hearsum, P. 2012b. 'A musical matter of life and death: the morality of mortality and the coverage of Amy Winehouse's death in the UK press'. *Mortality*. Vol. 17. No. 2 pp. 182-199.

Hearsum, P. 2013a. 'The Cultural Economy of Death: advertising and popular music' in: Wharton, C (ed.) *Advertising as Culture*. Bristol: Intellect. pp. 109-126.

Hearsum, P. 2013b. 'Music journalism: experience, engagement and meaning' in: Turner, B & Orange, R (eds.) *Specialist Journalism*. London: Routledge. Chapter 10. pp. 107-123.

Hearsum, P. 2013c. 'Zappa and Mortality: the mediation of Zappa's death' in: Carr, P (ed). 2013. *Zappa & the And: A contextual analysis of his legacy*. Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 201-216.

Hearsum, P. 2015a. 'Three faces of motherhood in death: Amy Winehouse, Whitney Houston & Donna Summer' in: Strong, C & Lebrun, B. (eds.) 2015. *Death and the Rock Star*. Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 119-133.

Hearsum, P. 2016. '27 Club: live fast, die young and sell papers' – a contributing case study to James, M. 2016. *Popular Music Journalism*. London: Routledge. (*forthcoming*).

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## The Critical Appraisal

### Introduction

An additional bonus in taking the route of a PhD by Publication has been the opportunity to critically reflect on the process of shaping these outputs in retrospect – a journey which demands a candidate demonstrate ‘pragmatic competence’ (Hyland, 2002: 1091). For me, such a journey was an opportunity to create a space to take stock and consider my own professional approach as an academic researcher as well as reflect on the influence of past professional experiences as a journalist. Five years of publications have taken organic detours. Whether that was because of an attractive proposition made, opportunities offered, strategic visibility breaks or collaborative writing/thinking prospects, what it has generated is an interwoven corpus of outputs. Between 2010 and 2015, there have been some notable deaths of significant musicians, and as a result, this has given further momentum to a growing visibility of my work and increasing opportunities. Whether the publications have been a result of a successful call for papers/chapters or picking up on a direct request to submit, the majority of the work here can be seen on one level as a set of case studies. However, the research design for a PhD by Publication requires reflecting on the appropriateness of the collection as a whole, a ‘meta-analysis’ (Hakim, 1987: 21). The overarching research questions that have driven this topic have primarily concerned the media representation of the deaths of contemporary popular musicians. In doing this the research has connected with academic scholarship to better understand practice. This document embodies Schön’s ‘reflective conversation with the situation’ (Schön: 1991: 102) whereby as an academic practitioner I have transitioned myself:

... from involvement in the local units to a distanced consideration of the resulting whole, and from a stance of tentative exploration to one of commitment. (Schön, 1991: 102)

Additionally the scholarly rigour of the individual submissions in themselves invited a process of reflection, peer collaboration and occasionally dissent, and not just in the course of individual and collaborative writing. In the publication process, the eight pieces here have been scrutinized over 25 times by

respected academic peers across disciplines and geographies. In originality, this body of work has through this process, also met the primary criterion of the UK Council for Graduate Education definition of a PhD by Published Work (UKCGE: 1996) by making a unique contribution to knowledge. Since registration the critical self-reflection embodied in this 'substantial supporting document... critically analyses the significance of the publications and places the work in the context of other research' (Powell, 2004: 19). This will be explored in subsequent detail here before being defended within the oral examination. Powell (2004) sets out to examine the robustness of this route towards PhD award by clarifying that it demonstrates:

... the contribution to knowledge... the impact on other work in the area as well as the appropriateness of the methodology to the project and the evidence that the candidate is an independent master of the relevant methodologies. (Powell, 2004: 25)

The *prima facie* stage of this process successfully addressed the six qualities the Doctoral College at the University of Brighton required for transfer from application to submission for PhD. This final submission sets out the intellectual merit of my work matching the requirements for PhD by publication (University of Brighton, 2013: 51). The contribution is to be found both within the submissions as well as in this accompanying narrative as my 'intellectual position' has been 'built upon those works and the production of [this] written document that seeks to explain and defend that position.' (Green & Powell 2005: 77)

The original intention of the works that comprise this submission was to begin with consistent analysis of material and then to take those findings into the public domain via publishing. However, whilst I have aspired to meet academic standards commensurate with doctoral criteria and expectations, I have consistently resisted the constraints of a purely academic focus. My overall research ethos includes a commitment to ensure that the investigations, analyses and subsequent findings also have some value outside the pure academic arena.

George Orwell suggested there were four motives in writing: *sheer egoism*, *aesthetic enthusiasm*, *historical impulse* and *political purpose* (Orwell: 1946). One can hardly dare to suggest that there is no egoism involved in striving to submit a PhD nor that crafting an overarching narrative retrospectively does not require some aesthetic enthusiasm. But it is Orwell's last two points that have driven me personally here. There has been a desire to leave a residue of helpful commentary on contemporary media artefacts for the future, using appropriate multidisciplinary methodological tools. For that is what our media, and potentially archived academic work like this itself, will be to archaeologists in centuries to come: insightful cultural relics. Additionally, and arguably most importantly, motivated by the last of Orwell's points, this work is a call to action to:

...alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after (Orwell in: Orwell & Angus, 1968: 27).

By taking the findings back into the education of future media professionals, crafting workshops for current practitioners, and through the public domain (through conferences, policy work and written publications), my findings are intended not only to take stock of 'bad practice', but also to provoke consideration and to suggest practical ways in which to do things better.

Relaying a public figure's death 'well' is more than good journalism, it can nurture us, something articulated by Jobes *et al.* (1996) in their data analysis of calls to the Seattle Medical Examiner's Office and Seattle Crisis Center following Kurt Cobain's suicide. Praising the 'high degree of professionalism and responsibility' (Jobes *et al.*, 1996: 264) in journalistic coverage of Cobain's death, they noted the supportive coverage as one of three key reasons why results of their analysis of suicide crisis calls demonstrated that whilst numbers of calls for support to the centres were up after Cobain's death, completed suicides were down. It is a positive litmus test, which I took into consideration when comparing the Cobain case with the coverage of the death, or lack of it, of Kristen Pfaff, a contemporary of Cobain's (Hearsun: 2012a).

This Cobain case resonates strongly personally as it was during this period that I was working in the music press. The night Cobain died, I was in the office overnight, typing up threads from news agencies as they were faxed through for a monthly music magazine. A far cry from current 24/7 news coverage. We hotly debated what images were ethically appropriate for our audience who, like the staff, had heralded the artist's 'authenticity' – it was, as Jones (1995) argued, a 'significant' death (Jones, 1995: 107) but what I realised, 20-years later, in academia, having switched into Jones's perspective in terms of academic analysis, was that I had played a part in constructing a narrative and 'part and parcel of that mythology' (Jones, 1995: 108). This body of work goes some way to address the concerns of the conclusion of Jones's early work, which urged us to consider the ways in which:

...journalism... incorporates public discourse and concerns with common experiences in an effort to understand larger issues surrounding a particular event. (Jones, 1995: 116)

My previous academic incarnations include an undergraduate degree in Communication and Cultural Studies with Public Media (BA Hons) and a Masters in Women's Studies (MA). My prior professional background is in music journalism and ethically rooted in purposeful writing. I have a current role in Higher Education which embraces applied Media Studies. These two professional roles and respective outlooks are the imperative arteries, which circulate the blood into the body of my research. I have an additional active research theme contemplating what practitioners and theoreticians can learn from one another to better their social contributions as 'trusted guides' (Hearsun, 2010: 119). Whether that be as facilitators, engaging students to undertake critical examinations of media texts, or as creators of them, the ethical considerations of how the world of music and text collide has been the focus of all my professional work to date. My specialisms, and therefore bodies of research interest, are in journalism, popular music and media practice within a Media Studies framework. Interestingly, the process of this work has led me to probe where my academic heart lies and the consequences of undertaking this journey have led me to recognise that it is rooted within Popular Music Studies. Therefore all the work presented radiates from that passion and whilst the way

in which it has been understood is through the multiplicity of journalistic formats, without the music none of it is meaningful. Much of my research and teaching has been inspired by an early academic encounter with John Blacking's notion of 'musical intelligence' which he defined as the:

... cognitive and affective equipment with which people make musical sense of the world. (Blacking, 1986: 259-60)

Let us concede then that understanding our relationship with music can help us make sense of our social lives: what, following this, is the purpose of journalism, a medium through which music can be conveyed to us? Dovetailing Blacking's ethnomusicological endeavours, Richardson (2007) employs critical discourse analysis to scrutinise the language of newspaper journalism. By doing so, he proposes it will expose five 'fundamental assumptions about language'; that it is *social*, it *conveys identity*, it is *active*, it has *power* and it is *political* (Richardson, 2007: 10-13). It is far too simple, he contends, to see journalism itself as merely entertainment or propaganda (Richardson, 2007: 6). His powerful argument, one I follow in my work across a wider journalism base than newspapers, is based on the premise that:

... journalism exists to enable citizens to better understand their lives and their position(s) in the world. (Richardson, 2007: 7)

I have used Blacking and Richardson's two impassioned outlooks as the underpinning philosophical foundations of my work. They appear attuned with my previous practitioner career, my current research outputs and within my teaching and learning tenet. However, as with any sustained research work, emerging opportunities have left an imprint and shaped the academic expedition's original intended destination. Only through this process have the detours and diversions been rendered visible. On reflection, they have been constructive and welcome. Outside interest in my work and consequent networking have seen smaller satellite pieces of investigation come to fruition and shape the presented collection into a body of material that I believe offers a unique contribution to knowledge, and I hope suggests possibility for positive change. With that in mind, the directions and publishing outlets, coupled with

conference engagements and professional activities, offer a narrative of original and sustained intellectual impact, which will be clarified in this submission/statement. Peer reviews of my outputs also complemented peer-review processes in writing the articles and chapters, my contribution having been received positively across several multi-disciplinary domains.

There is also a timely imperative that this research had a 'fitness for purpose' (Park, 2005: 190) to exist, and offer a practical contribution to the public domain to support ethically principled and socially responsible representation of mediated deaths of musicians. This is increasingly important at a point where the proliferation of media outlets has tested traditional revenue models (McChesney & Pickard: 2011) which has in turn led to cuts in investigative journalism (Siapera & Veglis, 2012: 4). The economic tension between the online consumers of journalism desiring free content, and producers of traditional journalism unable to configure an attractive subscription model, provides a context to explain why the data samples I have considered have crossed over several media platforms in the duration of this publication submission period. Those who write about dead musicians and those who read about them no longer conceive or consume them in a linear narrative via one media source. The voracity of media change, which Tony Blair described as a 'feral beast' (Blair: 2007) is also the site in which news media is subsumed with tacit knowledge and has become '...the primary forum for the conveyance and construction of public grief today' (Kitch & Hume, 2008: xiv). Whilst within the published pieces I have 'named and shamed' those interpretations of past events disguised as factual ones (Edy, 2006: 75) the intention had a purpose: to educate ourselves from past mistakes in order to make for better futures.

My work seeks to critique the extent to which the long-held journalistic bastion of objectivity is upheld when competing forms of reporting, in economically challenging times, jostle for readership. The imperative to do this is not to merely suggest where there was bad practice, to hold up good practice or even to grapple with the challenge of what objectivity means given that the term is 'fraught with meaning' (Tuchman, 1972: 660). The purpose is to illustrate and

reaffirm why objectivity is worth considering in the first place. Indeed, to write about a death well, I argue, helps us live life better.

When public figures die the ensuing media coverage can operate as part of a 'strategic ritual' (Tuchman: 1972; Sumiala: 2013). Drawing on media anthropology, Sumiala draws on her own reactions to hearing about Michael Jackson's death and proposes that such mediatized events prevent us from disappearing into social chaos (Sumiala, 2013: 15-18). Moreover, they can symbolically bring us together through:

... what is told about the event (and what is left untold) and how the story is told. In this way strategic rituals reconstruct our everyday world and the notion that the media play a key role in building a connection to that shared world. (Sumiala, 2013: 79).

The research questions of these pieces are not discrete but interconnected. For instance, some critically explore how gender informs mediated representation of the deaths musicians (Hearsom: 2012a; Hearsom: 2012b; Hearsom: 2013c; Hearsom: 2015a). Several extrapolate the ways in which value judgments are implicit within journalistic discourse (Hearsom: 2012b; Hearsom: 2013c; Hearsom: 2015a). Additionally some reflect upon and assess the value of methodological application – whether that be CDA (e.g. Hearsom: 2016) or Psychological Autopsy (Duffett & Hearsom: 2016). In order to demonstrate how those research questions have been treated, the publications themselves (see Appendix iii) have been ordered chronologically by publication to mirror the intellectual journey whilst acknowledging the time between submission and publication can be lengthy and erratic with academic publishing. However, with the ability to make editorial revisions has on the whole worked in my favour. Whilst it was an opportunity to interweave ongoing thinking, publication dates may not progress, *seriatim*, as a true reflection of the portions of work. I will next identify the research questions of each publication, then situate my specific contributions to knowledge and clarify each submission methodologically before discussing the emergent themes in the following sections of the submission.

## Research questions

This body of work began as an observation that the obituaries of popular musicians drew on discourses of 'inevitability' that connected their profession to the cause of their death. In order to refine this into a research question, I initially limited the scope to a specific form of journalism, obituaries, and to, geographically, the UK (Hearsun, 2012b: 187). However, rapid changes in a globalizing media landscape during the duration of my research rendered this approach obsolete from an early publication point (Hearsun & Inglis, 2010: 239). In an encounter with burgeoning aca-Twitterers (Hearsun: 2013d) I concurred that our media ecology, most recently described as 'spreadable media' (Jenkins, Ford & Green: 2013), has created:

...a world where citizens count on each other to pass along compelling bits of news, information and entertainment, often many times over the course of a given day. (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013: 13).

My work observes that this precipitous dissemination can be problematic (Hearsun, 2015) morphing death into a 'cultural commodity' (Hearsun, 2013a: 122) generating posthumous record sales, and has been acknowledged by Hamilton (2014) as developing an argument in this area (Hamilton, 2014: 381). The prolific rise of '#RIP' flags a new position for the citizen journalist and news propagator to be the first to tell news, spread news and express emotion about news (Goh & Lee: 2011), something that is all too pertinent in a world where 'celebrity deaths are the fastest spreading news on Twitter' (Petrović, Osborne & Lavrenko, 2010: 181). Indeed my first published piece, a co-authored short article (Hearsun & Inglis: 2010), initially located my work within the emerging field of Celebrity Studies. The topic of celebrity has its roots in the fourteenth century theatre, its more modern roots in the 'canonical texts' in Cultural, Film and Media Studies (Boorstin: 1961; Alberoni: 1972); but as an academic discipline in its own right, the launch of the *Celebrity Studies* Journal was as recent as 2010. A forum piece for this journal was commissioned, with a brief to 'provoke discussion', and stimulated what has since become a substantial segment of my research, bringing the consideration of the mediation of popular

musician deaths into this academic field, and opening and shaping the debate. The work was housed in only the second issue of the very first journal in this area and has been later cited both within the journal (Davies, 2012: 185, 190) and also by University of Brighton colleagues (Frith, Raisborough & Klein, 2013: 420) who utilised the work for a sociological analysis.

It has been gratifying to note both the inter- and intra-disciplinary impact of published writing but for the purposes of a PhD by Publication equally importantly has been the recognition of my worth in contributing to a new field, extending the knowledge within others and expanding the research questions in a connected and deepening way. Research questions should be of value – not just to the researcher as an individual but also to the wider public sphere. That during this time period of my research new academic texts in the field emerged (Strong & Lebrun: 2015), and within the media profession journalists have reflected on how to better their practice, has supported this endeavor.

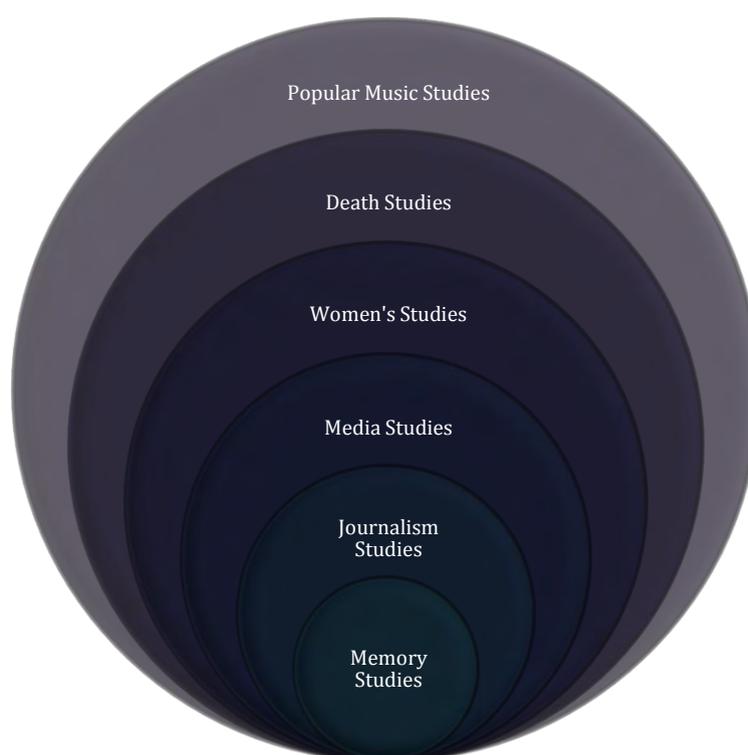
Therefore this body of work has addressed more than a single research question. Academic publications often address a question or topic set as a call for papers/book chapters, fuelled by another researcher's agenda, and some of my own publications have been developed and stimulated in such ways. I fully acknowledge that here, and what follows is a synopsis of what each output set out to research. And as the writings were also produced as a corpus of work, this narrative also confirms the overarching research questions that framed the pieces, however retrospective the articulation of these questions.

Publication	Research Question
Hearsun, P. 2012a. '27 Forever: Kristen Pfaff and the Coverage of Death as the re-representation of a Gendered Musical Life' in: Jennings, R & Gardner, A. (eds.) <i>Rock On: Women, Aging and Popular Music</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp.103-122.	How does gender inform journalistic narratives and what impact might that have on the shaping of popular music history?
Hearsun, P. 2012b. 'A musical matter of life and death: the morality of mortality and the coverage of Amy Winehouse's death in the UK	How are implicit moral values expressed in journalistic discourse, and what relationship do they have

press'. <i>Mortality</i> . Vol. 17. No. 2 pp. 182-199.	with professional journalism codes of conduct?
Hearsun, P. 2013a. 'The Cultural Economy of Death: advertising and popular music' in: Wharton, C (ed.) <i>Advertising as Culture</i> . Bristol: Intellect. pp. 109-126.	To what extent can Fiske's (1992) concept of a cultural economy illuminate the process of commoditisation of the deaths of popular musicians?
Hearsun, P. 2013b. 'Music journalism: experience, engagement and meaning' in: Turner, B & Orange, R (eds.) <i>Specialist Journalism</i> . London: Routledge. Chapter 10. pp. 107-123.	What are the key professional commonalities and disparities between popular music journalists and popular music scholars?
Hearsun, P. 2013c. 'Zappa and Mortality: the mediation of Zappa's death' in: Carr, P (ed). 2013. <i>Zappa &amp; the And: A contextual analysis of his legacy</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 201-216.	How can the social functions of journalistic coverage of dying and death be explored with reference to the application of 'news values' and what implications might this have on the resultant construction of a musical legacy?
Hearsun, P. 2015a. 'Three faces of motherhood in death: Amy Winehouse, Whitney Houston & Donna Summer' in: Strong, C & Lebrun, B. (eds.) 2015. <i>Death and the Rock Star</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 119-133.	In what ways is motherhood, as a linguistic device, applied as a framing narrative of morality?
Hearsun, P. 2016. '27 Club: live fast, die young and sell papers' – a contributing case study to James, M. 2016. <i>Popular Music Journalism</i> . London: Routledge. (forthcoming).	How can CDA can be applied as a method to examine the '27 club' trope and its problematic social impact in relation to mental health issues?
Duffett, M & Hearsun, P. 2016. 'Alas, Poor Richard: fandom, personal identity and Ben Myer's novelization of Richey Edwards' life story'. <i>Volume! The French Journal of Popular Music Studies</i> .	What is the value of the psychological autopsy method in investigating the potential closure for a popular music fan?

## Fields of Study

The front cover of this submission holds the image used for my research poster (Hearsun: 2013e). The illustration, in which I collaborated with an alumnus from this institution, encapsulates the five key academic fields in which my research has been situated, contextualized and disseminated: Popular Music Studies, Journalism Studies, Death Studies, Memory Studies and Media Studies. These disciplines or fields of study, as shown in the schematic below are not as distinct as they may appear in a list, and indeed much of my published work has drawn across fields in order to further extend arguments or exemplify uncharted territories. There are six below if you include Women's Studies.



**Fields of study schematic**

This approach requires extensive understanding across bodies of previously published work pertinent to each area. Within the publications, the types of literature I have engaged with have included 'theoretical', 'research', 'practice' and 'policy' (Wallace & Wray, 2011: 95), examining strengths and limitations in order to situate my own positioning. The aim in each case was to be 'exemplary' not 'exhaustive' (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2015: 79-80). That is, to extend

existing knowledge in order to ratify the identified issues of popular musicians' deaths being covered by the media in unique and discernible ways compared to other well-known public figures. Admitting to not being exhaustive, this approach, rather than setting out with parameters, aspired to be, as Hall puts it, 'right but not rigorous' rather than to be 'rigorous but wrong' (Hall, 1985: 94).

The way in which I have undertaken the examination of this contention is through the journalistic text and therefore drawing on literature from Journalism Studies has been imperative. My first commissioned journal paper was expanded after a presentation at a Death Studies conference and therefore the draw to publish in an exemplary journal in this field was strong (Hearsun: 2012b). In order to understand the longer impact of public articulations of death from past experience, it was helpful across many pieces to learn from and situate work within, Memory Studies. My current academic home, within Media Studies, has been most helpful to strengthen the impact of the changing landscape in which institutionally this discourse creation operates.

Finally this contemplative process has clarified my own grounding - my three most recent publications (Hearsun: 2015a; Hearsun 2016; Duffett & Hearsun: 2016) have been placed firmly in the Popular Music Studies arena. It has been, as I articulated earlier, a journey in which I have also found my academic spiritual home although, liberatingly, I now know that I am not confined by it; as Laing & Marshall (2014) put forward, popular music is a:

...fragmented area of study. Intellectually it retains something of a magpie nature, borrowing from many different disciplines and acting as a meeting place for scholars - and practitioners - of varied backgrounds. (Laing & Marshall, 2014: 2)

This self-retrospection exercise, here having had the advantage of having already been published, has sharpened my awareness of this liberating propitiousness, that is to have the intellectual freedom to roam with the solidity of an academic anchor, which, as the illustration shows, has Popular Music Studies as its foundation.

## Identification of specific contributions to knowledge

Here I offer a schematic to verify what each output offers as original contributions to knowledge as an overview before critically reflecting on the explored method and resultant emerging themes which make up the remaining part of this narrative.

Publication	Contribution
Hearsum, P. 2012a. '27 Forever: Kristen Pfaff and the Coverage of Death as the re-presentation of a Gendered Musical Life' in: Jennings, R & Gardner, A. (eds.) <i>Rock On: Women, Aging and Popular Music</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp.103-122.	Implementation of discourse analysis probing '27 Club' trope to demonstrate through comparative case study a significant gendering of moral discourse in journalism coverage of popular musician's deaths through reckless behaviour. The application to Pfaff had not been academically undertaken previously.
Hearsum, P. 2012b. 'A musical matter of life and death: the morality of mortality and the coverage of Amy Winehouse's death in the UK press'. <i>Mortality</i> . Vol. 17. No. 2 pp. 182-199.	The first published discourse analysis of UK news coverage of Winehouse's death and funeral. Combining Celebrity Studies, Media Studies and Popular Music Studies in a Death Studies context ( <i>Mortality</i> is leading Death Studies journal) to examine the commodification of a 'celebrity' musician's death.
Hearsum, P. 2013a. 'The Cultural Economy of Death: advertising and popular music' in: Wharton, C (ed.) <i>Advertising as Culture</i> . Bristol: Intellect. pp. 109-126	Identifies and provides a codification of 10 observable types of economic frameworks of advertising in a posthumous musical economy.

Hearsum, P. 2013b. 'Music journalism: experience, engagement and meaning' in: Turner, B & Orange, R (eds.) <i>Specialist Journalism</i> . London: Routledge. Chapter 10. pp. 107-123	A comparison of professional practices and values of music journalists and popular music scholars drawing on primary research conducted through interview.
Hearsum, P. 2013c. 'Zappa and Mortality: the mediation of Zappa's death' in: Carr, P (ed). 2013. <i>Zappa &amp; the And: A contextual analysis of his legacy</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 201-216.	Elaboration of existing model, Galtung & Ruge's news values, to reveal a hierarchy of illnesses in analysis of press coverage of dying and death. First application to the artist and first cross-cultural comparative analysis of this aspect.
Hearsum, P. 2015a. 'Three faces of motherhood in death: Amy Winehouse, Whitney Houston & Donna Summer' in: Strong, C & Lebrun, B. (eds.) 2015. <i>Death and the Rock Star</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 119-133.	Demonstration of gender analysis of three musicians in UK newspaper obituaries, evidencing 'motherhood' used as a journalistic trope.
Hearsum, P. 2016. '27 Club: live fast, die young and sell papers' – a contributing case study to James, M. 2016. <i>Popular Music Journalism</i> . London: Routledge. (forthcoming).	Application of CDA to demonstrate '27 club' as a journalistic trope, through analysis comparing three types of journalistic writing.
Duffett, M & Hearsum, P. 2016. 'Alas, Poor Richard: fandom, personal identity and Ben Myer's novelization of Richey Edwards' life story'. <i>Volume! The French Journal of Popular Music Studies</i> .	Re-contextualisation of existing method, psychological autopsy, to show the role of the media as a mechanism of closure for fans. Undertaken only once previously in a popular music context, but not through role of novelization.

## Methodologies

The work in this submission has been published, presented and positioned across multidisciplinary areas including Death Studies, Memory Studies, Popular Music Studies, Women's Studies and Media Studies and Journalism Studies. Intellectual and methodological discreteness might create a neater box, but to consider death and the media, Hanusch argues that the next step is to undertake a wider approach (2010: 168). This body of work stands testament to that scholarly call to arms.

I acknowledge my approach is from a social constructivism perspective, which informed my epistemological position and an interpretivist stance which guided the research throughout. Taking this understanding of 'social constructions' (plural intended) I view media text decoding as polysemic whereby audiences play an active role in making meaning through their consumption and indeed into 'prosumption'. My work considers the ways in which media texts can be read and their impact on society and human relationships and social values. However I have examined media texts rather than audiences and how professional systems in production shape the discourses and I acknowledge that my own background played a part in my approach.

For clarity below is a table relating each submission to a consistent overall methodology, and appropriate applied method(s):

Publication	Methodology	Method
Hearsum, P. 2012a. '27 Forever: Kristen Pfaff and the Coverage of Death as the re-representation of a Gendered Musical Life' in: Jennings, R & Gardner, A. (eds.) <i>Rock On: Women, Aging and Popular Music</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp.103-122.	Interpretive	CDA
Hearsum, P. 2012b. 'A musical matter of life and death: the morality of mortality and the coverage of Amy Winehouse's death in the UK press'. <i>Mortality</i> . Vol. 17. No. 2 pp. 182-199.	Interpretive	CDA

Hearsum, P. 2013a. 'The Cultural Economy of Death: advertising and popular music' in: Wharton, C (ed.) <i>Advertising as Culture</i> . Bristol: Intellect. pp. 109-126	Interpretive	
Hearsum, P. 2013b. 'Music journalism: experience, engagement and meaning' in: Turner, B & Orange, R (eds.) <i>Specialist Journalism</i> . London: Routledge. Chapter 10. pp. 107-123	Interpretive	Interviews
Hearsum, P. 2013c. 'Zappa and Mortality: the mediation of Zappa's death' in: Carr, P (ed). 2013. <i>Zappa &amp; the And: A contextual analysis of his legacy</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 201-216.	Interpretive	CDA
Hearsum, P. 2015a. 'Three faces of motherhood in death: Amy Winehouse, Whitney Houston & Donna Summer' in: Strong, C & Lebrun, B. (eds.) 2015. <i>Death and the Rock Star</i> . Aldershot: Ashgate. pp. 119-133.	Interpretive	CDA
Hearsum, P. 2016. '27 Club: live fast, die young and sell papers' – a contributing case study to James, M. 2016. <i>Popular Music Journalism</i> . London: Routledge. (forthcoming).	Interpretive	CDA
Duffett, M & Hearsum, P. 2016. 'Alas, Poor Richard: fandom, personal identity and Ben Myer's novelization of Richey Edwards' life story'. <i>Volume! The French Journal of Popular Music Studies</i> .	Interpretive	Psychological autopsy

I will next expand upon my methods of media texts in order to demonstrate the rigour behind the published pieces. Given that CDA was by far the main tool employed the following subsections reflect the number of applications in their length.

## Critical Discourse Analysis

Methodologically the body of work consistently draws on content analysis. Typically I have looked at text as 'words' but have also considered the relationship with associated images using discourse analysis (Critical Discourse Analysis [CDA] or Multimodal Discourse Analysis) to probe, reveal and explicate the dominant ways in which differences around gender, mental health and age are (mis)understood. As Horner (2015) asserts, images offer an interpretation or 'point of view' rather than being 'faithful representations of reality' because: 'The very act of selection somehow vitiates the authority of the image' (Horner, 2015: 143) and my work both in conference papers and published material has considered photographic choices accompanying journalistic words. Their power as 'flashbulb memory' triggers have been studied elsewhere but the editorial importance in choice of accompanying imagery has been considered here only in relation to the accompanying journalistic text rather than in its own right.

From my first publication and throughout the submitted items up to the most recent pieces (Hearsum: 2015) there are notable shifts in my own articulation of a deeper and more textured rationale for the use of Critical Discourse Analysis, not only to deconstruct what is already in the public domain but to purposefully shape how we might better construct texts in the future. My body of work not only uses CDA to make visible inequalities within 'single projects' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 51) but also to make suggestions to right those problematic wrongs or as Fairclough (2013) more eloquently puts it:

Whilst it is not in itself a political praxis and strategy for achieving ... social changes, it can be a part of and contribute to such a praxis and strategy in that praxis requires theory, knowledge and understanding to achieve its strategic goals.... CDA can contribute. (Fairclough, 2013: 21).

The analysis of words delivered through any media format now commonly reverts to a type of discourse analysis rooted in the work of Linguistics. Fairclough's position is that language is understood as the social relation of power and ideology where discourse is a transformative element of social life (Fairclough, 2013: 9). The term 'transformative' here needs some consideration

in terms of intention – for Fairclough argues that language can be used negatively but in becoming conscious of its power it is also ‘the first step towards emancipation’ (Fairclough, 1989: 1). Therefore discourse analysis has two very attractive enabling possibilities as a methodological proposition. It can be used to detect, and then acts as a springboard for, change.

As set out in the introduction, my personal political intention in this work and in relation to my facilitative role as a media educator, is to not ‘name and shame’ in itself, but to distinguish good media practice from that which is problematic. As my work has evolved from what I do for a living, and has now come full circle to research-informed teaching, it is pertinent to consider that the fostering of a critical study of media (the ‘day job’) also requires teaching media literacy. Not merely to support students to examine their topic with systematic investigation for assessment purposes, but so that they might, as our next generation of media practitioners, construct their texts with some intelligent and ethical acumen. That ‘higher purpose’, Shapiro (2005) argues, has a dual function ‘as both society’s servant and society’s critic’ (Shapiro, 2005: 15).

With these points in mind I therefore acknowledge, as noted above, a research paradigm that is informed by social constructivism. An argument across my work is that the journalistic texts considered within the publications, even if they are news articles or obituaries, are by their very nature interpretations rather than empirical facts. The issues I have raised concern the repetitive reoccurrence of discourse which may inculcate, enact and construct a particular pre-determined narrative for the life and death of a popular musician. The publication collection is both separate and has an interconnected focus. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method interlocks neatly with a scrutiny of both the media texts examined and the self-reflection of my own publications. I acknowledge that my own socio-cultural position, which informs my scholarly self, is not separate from the work I have investigated; it is the same social structure in which those media texts I have examined are produced and consumed within. As van Dijk contends, those using CDA should consider that academic research is:

...inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction. Instead of denying or ignoring such a relation between scholarship and society, they plead that such relations be studied and accounted for in their own right, and that scholarly practices be based on such insights. (van Dijk in: Tannen, Schiffrin & Hamilton, 2001: 352-353)

A powerful strength of this particular method is that it can unpack how discourse is reproduced, contested or resisted and also reveal socio-political disparities. In my work it aided the revealing of ethical and moral elements at play in the coverage of popular musicians' deaths and was used in conjunction with Fowler's approach to Linguistic Criticism where language is viewed as 'not neutral but a highly constructive mediator' (Fowler, 1991: 1) and can serve unacceptable ends. To explicate the wider institutional power dynamics at play, it is helpful to consider not just the media practice itself but also those who create those texts, the practitioners. One piece of research included in this submission involved undertaking ten primary interviews with other 'hybrid' music journalists/academics, to consider what music journalism professionals and popular music academics could learn from one another (Hearsum: 2013b). By doing this I examined the relationship between language and social power and between a journalist, as a 'cultural intermediary', and their reader. A vital component for the construction of a cultural community, in this instance one orbiting around music journalism, is the creation and sharing of common discourse (Hearsum, 2013b: 109). This piece, described as a 'critical text' (Jacke, James & Montano, 2014: 1), took three moments at which music journalism is understood as a discourse (experience, engagement and meaning) to demonstrate that the role of a music journalist has shifted from gatekeeper to cultural intermediary. The musical death discussed here was that of the so-called 'golden age' of music journalism rather than a musician *per se*, but the underlying argument in which the contextual shifting sands of the field in which the rest of my work is situated, is helpful to draw on in order to understand the environment in which such discourse operates. We are at a point where the viable future of the profession is in economic peril and, more challengingly still, this contested domain is not easy to pin down.

Conboy argued that journalism, more broadly, is best understood as a negotiated 'site' of discourse. That is, a site that could support or quash alternative views (Conboy, 2005: 3). He maintains that celebrity news is not just about 'prurient gossip, sensation and revelation' but can also 'be used to drive an alternative and highly moralistic agenda' (Conboy, 1995: 190). Silverstone's (2007) concept of the 'Mediapolis' is helpful to consider the responsibility and social morality in an increasingly globalized media world which my work has exemplified, not only in traditional newspapers (red tops, mid-market and broadsheets alike) but also in magazines, broadcast, online and social media, demonstrating that journalism isn't a 'neutral window'. In my first academic publication this premise was clearly stated:

Texts are never neutral, innocent documents; they reflect social structures and beliefs. (Hearsum & Inglis, 2010: 240)

I have gone on to further articulate that this in turn relays media's problematic power in its ability to 'shape social reality by shaping our *views* of reality' (Richardson, 2007: 13). To paraphrase Curran & Seaton (1981/2009), with that power there should also be a responsibility. This seminal text, with many editions covering media proliferation, was last updated with the rise of 'new media' in 2009 but was not able to consider the impact of social media (although its 8<sup>th</sup> edition is due out in 2016). This is something I have considered in my own contribution in relation to the coverage of Amy Winehouse's death (Hearsum, 2015a: 128) by constructing a notion of what I have termed 'socialcasting' (Hearsum: 2013f) to explore the voracious speed at which the syndication of stories is now held in a public domain harnessing technological possibilities. The duration of my publications in this area has seen the terrain change from broadcasting through narrowcasting and now, I argue, into socialcasting. One premise of my contributions is that, whatever format in which they are conveyed, the discourse of journalism used to articulate a death also should stand accountable. It is not simply a personal stance but a social responsibility, and therefore why my contributions have also considered and contributed to policy around mental health and wellbeing (Hearsum: 2010; Hearsum: 2013f), as well as best practice (Hearsum, 2012a: 109; Hearsum,

2015a: 15). For instance, a Governmental White Paper, *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation* (1999) put out a framework to:

...work with the media to ensure responsible reporting of suicides which neither glamorizes the event nor publishes the method used. (1999: 62).

The resulting Department of Health's Suicide Prevention Strategy (2002) picked up the mantle and named improving the reporting of suicidal behaviour as one of its six goals, stating the media 'can make an important contribution to prevention' (2002: 16). According to The Samaritans, the link rate between mental health issues (known or not) and suicide is 90% - and their advice is to be clear and explicit about mental health issues. Unfortunately, my research findings demonstrated this is not the case with popular musicians, even if depression is a known factor (Hearsum, 2012b: 183).

Underlying mental health issues were rendered less visible in the coverage of the popular musicians' deaths I have examined of those who had taken their own lives or died through reckless behaviour. A notable tranche of work within my publications has considered musicians included in the so-called '27 club' – referring to a media hook, the origins of which are 'unclear' (Bennett, 2015: 65), which is utilised to cover many musicians who have died at the age of 27. In preparatory work for a chapter on the '27 club' (Hearsum, 2012a) but edited out of the final version, I compared the coverage of the deaths of Kurt Cobain, Michael Hutchence and Richey Edwards in the UK press to the coverage of others outside the popular musician focus. I had specifically researched the assisted suicides of Joan and Edward Downes and explicated an implied moral hierarchy covering suicide. Whereas, with the coverage of the three popular musicians, their deaths (Edwards is missing and now presumed dead), whether intentional or unintentional, were covered as an inevitable and expected part of the rock'n'roll narrative (Hearsum, 2012b: 189; Hearsum, 2015a: 126). This point around discourse of inevitability was additionally explored in a case study for a popular music journalism text (Hearsum: 2016 in: James: 2016). Here a small data set of articles were taken to compare and contrast the use of the term '27 club' across three types of writing: news, features/columns and

obituaries for two different artists – Kurt Cobain and Amy Winehouse (differentiating in gender, musical genre, location, type of death and almost two decades apart), a use of CDA evidenced:

... the powerful way in which particular types of celebrity deaths can be both gendered and positioned. (Hearsum: 2016 in: James: 2016).

The lack of this illumination is important by its very omission. It signals a societal discomfort with mental illness in real terms. Wahl suggested mental illness is 'everywhere in the mass media' (Wahl, 2003: 12). However, Spelman (2012: 13) suggests mental illness is actually only visible in the coverage of musicians when it is discussed in a stereotypical form. The unrealistic stereotype has rendered it so implausible as to be powerfully absent:

...news discourse in particular, is often defined by the unsaid. Information that could (or should) have been given is selectively left out. (Van Dijk, 1986: 178).

A 'culturally proximate tragedy' (Pantti & Wieten, 2005: 301), creates a springboard for moral discussion which:

...brings to the surface the values and assumptions that are most central to a particular culture, but it may also have the effect of silencing other values and alternative perspectives. (Pantti & Wieten, 2005: 302)

Media texts are highly constructed, whereby editorial constrictions of space, time and cost mean stories are chosen and many passed over. Here, deciding which deaths are significant and which events within their lives should be articulated. Obituary writers and editors operate within a locus of power as our memory curators of musical history. The production processes reinforce the gatekeeping concept and play a fundamental role in constructing discourse – whether deliberately or inadvertently. Examples I have used demonstrate woeful misjudgment and using value-laden expressions. For instance, a *Guardian* obituary of Amy Winehouse originally described another musician, Pete Doherty, as a 'junkie' but this was later revised to the term 'addict' in the online version (Sullivan: 2011a). Indeed the UK Drug Policy Commission report

(Lloyd: 2010) had already suggested the term 'junkie' stigmatized addicts unhelpfully and exacerbated the issue when used in the media (Lloyd, 2010: 49).

Another strength of CDA is that it assists with textual and, whilst the parameters are in debate, also with 'contextual' analysis (Carvalho: 2008). For instance, other usages of CDA in my work have exposed religious cultural ignorance as charged by Alderman (2011) in the coverage of Amy Winehouse's death and funeral. However, this poor basic journalistic research practice (Hearsun, 2012b: 194) should also be understood in the wider context of institutional change as a result of technological and economic imperatives. Delano (2010), in giving a historical overview of shifts in journalistic working process, noted that the internet evolution correlated directly to the changing expectations demanded of a new breed of multi-skilled journalist. Moreover this can also be related to the erosion of the recognition of the worth of sub-editors, in terms of best process practice (Delano, 2010: 266), which as a related profession within the quality assurance processes of journalism has taken much of a hit in recent years. Redundancy rounds at UK newspapers have targeted sub-editors - Express Newspapers (2008), The Independent (2009), The Mirror (2010) - which is why a simple 'name and shame' approach doesn't take the wider institutional processes and economic environment into account.

My desk research across the body of work drew on previous studies around memory and mourning, such as Schudson's (1992) analysis of Watergate and public collective memory, and Kear & Steinberg's (1999) examination of Princess Diana and the spectacle of public mass mourning, which forms part of a production line of 'significant moments' (Kear & Steinberg, 1999: ix cited in: Hearsun: 2012a: 107). The 'mediation' of these events is my critical concern, as the death of a well-known person also operates as a site of collective memories, these later being:

...the ways in which group, institutional, and cultural recollections of the past shape people's actions in the present. (Schudson, 1992: 3).

Fowler (2004) argues an obituary is an influential form of collective memory because it can both reveal and actively shape how societies remember, and that these media artefacts ‘... do not do so neutrally’ (Fowler, 2004: 148) but create an ‘interpretive community’ (Zelizer, 1993) which can be observed by common narrative themes across publications. Unsurprisingly therefore, dominant narrative discourses such as the ‘27 club’ hook rise to the surface, recirculate and embed themselves in public awareness, whether based in reality or not. Musicians, as Parker (2011), who is both a ‘stand-up mathematician’ and holds a position as a Public Engagement in Mathematics Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London, discovered in some statistical comparative analysis, are disproportionately ‘over represented’ if they die at 27 years old simply because it ‘captures the public imagination.’ (Parker: 2011, cited in Hearsum, 2012b: 185). These collective memories are digitally captured in accessible memory banks as ‘prosumption of commemoration’ (Recuber: 2012).

Starck, a journalist-turned-academic who has researched obituary writing for many years since his own PhD in the area, said in discussing editorial judgment, that:

It is widely accepted that the emphasis in obituary composition should be on capturing life rather than describing death. The matter becomes complicated, though, when the circumstances of death are in themselves of compelling interest. (Starck, 2007: 373)

An advantage of CDA is that it renders visible symbolic powers at play and Fowler (2004) reminds us that not only can we use obituaries to collectively remember, we also need to be mindful that they can also reinforce a way to collectively forget. (Fowler: 2004, cited in Hearsum, 2012a: 114). Although my work has not examined journalistic intention I have been attentive to the role of editing and production – the institutional processes of power. I have considered what is said, what is unsaid, what is inferred and that this is always a constructed text and, in turn, a cycle of contested interpretations.

In the UK, members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) abide by the union’s ‘code of conduct’. At the time of writing, they have just produced a new

set of professional principles regarding reporting mental health, mental illness and death by suicide have been published (NUJ: 2015). This document stresses the ethical responsibility of the journalist particularly around cases covering celebrity suicides (NUJ, 2015: 15). Complementing the code of conduct, this new guidance urges journalists to steer clear from salacious details of methods employed and emphasizes the responsibility to report facts in order to limit intrusion into grief as well as to avoid any encouragement of copycat deaths. I welcome this new publication as during this cycle of research I have several times referred to the ways in which health professions and academics have discussed unethical reporting in regard to the 'werther effect' (Phillips: 1974), which can be seen in two of the publications here (Hearsum, 2012a: 109; Hearsum: 2012b: 188). Phillips examined the statistical correlations between media coverage of suicide and copycat behaviour between 1947-1968 in the UK and USA. There is an interrelationship, of course, with legal obligations but these should not be conflated.

The body of my work employed discourse analysis to reveal journalistic narratives of expectation created about popular musicians that they will have their lives cut short with some inference that this would have been of their own making. I suggest that as readers of that discourse, we play a part, keeping this stereotype alive through our cultural and economic appetite in consuming these stories as they are recycled and mythologized. I have referred to this through the use of the 'journalistic mechanism' of the '27 club' (Hearsum, 2010: 185; Hearsum, 2012a: 113).

Drawing on the coverage of Stephen Gately's death compared to Michael Jackson's, I argue that texts are 'never neutral innocent documents' (Hearsum & Inglis, 2010: 240). Examining these 'documents' as a socio-cultural snapshot in time, CDA was the lens with which I chose to capture that picture. This was also true of the small data sample in which I used CDA to demonstrate its value as a tool to deconstruct journalism (Hearsum: 2016). Employing CDA with such specific focus exposed shifts in media ethics over time and geography when comparing the employment of the term the '27 club'.

CDA offers more than a lens; it also asks of those who employ it to be purposeful. Its scholars, van Dijk demands, should ‘be social and political scientists, as well as social critics and activists’ (van Dijk, 1993: 253). For an academic this can take place in many forms – not just the written outputs such as those presented here but also in conversations within networks, presentations to peers or beyond; and the wider reach of this work is considered in the impact section of this document (see Appendix ii). In my research-informed teaching the application of CDA as a methodological tool is one I have used in the classroom at undergraduate and postgraduate level, with the intention of imparting a practical application of the method. Combining popular music, media and death is an enticing way in to CDA for undergraduates; as a review of one chapter (Hearsum: 2013b) noted this research output was one that was ‘likely to be well-thumbed by students’ (Clark, 2013: 85).



Figure 1: Various UK newspapers covering Amy Winehouse's death\*

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\* All known sources used in the key body of work have been acknowledged in the extended readings in the submissions. Any missing acknowledgements please do contact the author.

Making visible the ‘workings out’ of final publications in the classroom is possible but in the publication processes this ‘evidence’ was, all bar one submission (Hearsun: 2016), edited out. So hereby is the challenge with a PhD by publication: how to demonstrate the way in which essentially a collection of cuttings (figure 1) and weblinks (see bibliographies of the submissions) used discourse analysis, and to ratify that the method applied was rigorous.

I include, by way of example, a visualisation of the example I have used often of Michael Jackson’s obituary in *The Guardian* by Caroline Sullivan (2009a) (figure 2). This particular obituary was the catalyst for this trajectory of consideration in the first place. I considered the image used (Hearsun & Inglis, 2010: 240), and my articulation was that there was a built narrative of inevitability (Hearsun, 2015a: 126) cited later by Davies (2012: 185). I have more recently evolved into the consideration of the journalistic construction of a psychological autopsy (Duffett & Hearsun: 2016).

The image shows a screenshot of the Guardian website's obituary for Michael Jackson. The page layout includes the Guardian logo, navigation menus, and the article title 'Michael Jackson' by Caroline Sullivan. A photograph of Michael Jackson holding a chimpanzee is the central visual element. Several text annotations are present:
 

- 'Choice of image and caption online compared to print' points to the photo and its caption.
- 'Suggesting unnatural causes?' points to the text: 'The self-styled King of Pop, whose musical gift was overshadowed by his private life'.
- 'Personal life to be remembered over musical legacy' points to the text: 'Fame, from the age of 11, when he was lead singer of the first black boy band, the Jackson Five, had such a damaging effect that his life was permanently affected'.
- 'Psychological autopsy' points to the text: 'A combination of dysfunctional family and invasive fame are away at the essentially private singer, whose initially minor eccentricities escalated into grotesque changes to his appearance and lifestyle. Ultimately, he led to accusations of paedophilia and a criminal prosecution'.

Figure 2: The anatomy of an obituary – Michael Jackson (online) (Sullivan, 2009a)

Whilst the text has been highlighted (and key themes referenced) the variation in images chosen for each platform are intriguing signifiers of implicit readings. The online version (figure 2) makes reference to Jackson’s pet chimpanzee

'Bubbles' and the print version to his changing facial features and cosmetic surgery (figure 3).



Figure 3: The anatomy of an obituary – Michael Jackson (print) (Sullivan, 2009b)

The work of the same journalist was interrogated again for an examination of Amy Winehouse’s obituary (Sullivan: 2011a). Figure 4 is a screen grab of the online obituary with highlighted words and phrases pertinent to the discourse analysis of recurring narratives.



Figure 4: Amy Winehouse-obituary (Sullivan, 2011a)

Whilst revisiting the work I noticed in the print version (figure 5 and table 1), that as with the Jackson obituary a different image was used as well as variations with the standfirst and captions.

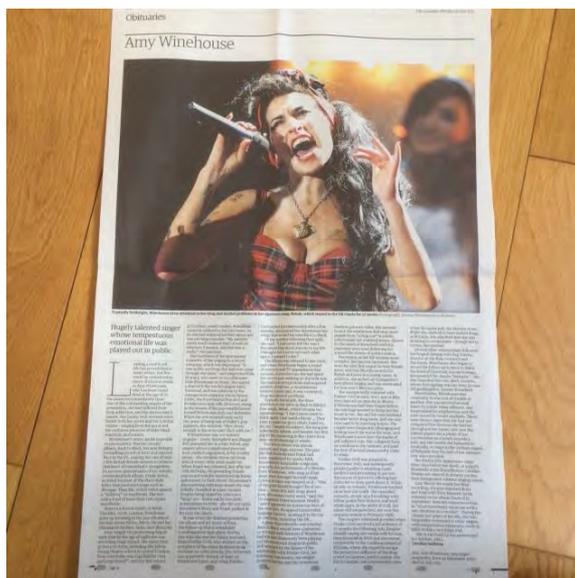


Figure 5: Amy Winehouse-obituary (Sullivan, 2011b)

	Standfirst	Picture caption
<b>Print</b>	Hugely talented singer whose tempestuous emotional life was played out in public	Amy Winehouse sang as if her heart were damaged beyond repair.
<b>Online</b>	Singer with a soul-steeped voice whose instantly successful Back to Black album reflected her tormented experience of love	Typically forthright, Winehouse drew attention to her drug and alcohol problems in her signature song, Rehab, which stayed in the UK charts for 57 weeks.

Table 1: Amy Winehouse, Guardian - contrasting platform coverage (print and web)

From this small analysis a more complete consideration was undertaken by extracting the full text. Table 2 is an example of significant lexical patterns emerging from the foundational CDA work on this particular obituary of the artist. It became the underpinning of two of the submitted publications (Hearsun: 2012a; Hearsun: 2015a). The full analysis is also included for reference (see Appendix ii) but here are the findings from the first paragraph.

The words highlighted in blue were considered by hand/eye rather than utilising any technically sophisticated corpus analysis software – qualitatively rather than quantitatively driven.

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
Singer with a soul-steeped voice whose instantly successful Back to Black album reflected her	<b>tormented</b>	experience of love
Amy Winehouse sang as if her heart were	<b>damaged</b> beyond <b>repair</b>	
Leading a	<b>rock'n'roll life</b>	
has proved	<b>fatal</b>	to many artists
but few could be considered as much of a	<b>loss</b>	to music as Amy Winehouse,
who has been	found <b>dead</b> at the age of <b>27</b> ,	the cause not immediately clear.
One of the outstanding singers of her generation, she had	<b>suffered</b> from <b>drug addiction</b> ,	
and the	<b>destruction</b>	it causes.
Her husky, soul-steeped vice belied both her youth and her London origins – singing from the gut is not the exclusive preserve of older black American performers.		

Table 2: Amy Winehouse obituary – Critical Discourse Analysis of first paragraph

It should be reiterated these examples were never intended to be the consideration of a single journalist and their individual belief system. Cultural intermediary occupations inhabit a position within a complex media production cycle, and any journalistic output is more than the combination of individual endeavours (commissioning editors, sub editors, photographers, designers etc.)

gatekeeping what is included, excluded and shaping that proposition (Hearsun, 2013c: 202-203). This delicate ecosystem's existence has been a constant consideration as a researcher-practitioner. As an academic on a mission to scrutinize that media ecology, the methodological approach needed to be flexible enough to explicate any resultant ideology. It also needed to be able to view any reflection, establishment or reinforcing of 'social beliefs shared by members of social groups' (van Dijk, 2011: 382).

## Interviews

For qualitative research, which informed a particular study (Hearsum: 2013b), I returned to my professional roots to explore experiential reflections between two seemingly desperate professions. This method was appropriate as I was seeing 'ideas, opinions and attitudes' (Stokes 2013: 92). Indeed, Stokes goes on to argue that because it is familiar in particular to media practitioners, given its use in the industry, it is an apt tool. I had already undertaken desk research for a conference paper, which this book chapter was based upon, and the feedback from that audience also elicited both suggestions that I undertook the interviews to complement the underlying hypothesis (that the two professions could learn from one another and were not that dissimilar in their analysis of popular music) and some offers to be interviewed. In a relatively small arena of Popular Music scholarship the overlap with those academics that have also been music journalists was one that could be ascertained through my own network.

For the purposes of the length of the chapter commission I felt that 10 semi-structured interviews would be appropriate to cover a breadth that addressed the following:

1. Those who had been music journalists and now were music academics
2. Those who were music journalists and had been drawn up by academic scholars but would not consider themselves as such
3. Those who taught on popular music journalism courses specifically
4. Those who were working simultaneously in both fields.

The sample group was relatively small but it was representative in terms of publication records (newspapers, books, online, music press) and time span of industry but less so in terms of gender (one female music journalist). The majority took place over the telephone and were recorded before being transcribed. As time-consuming as transcription can be it was again something I had been used to doing. As well as having attuned to nuances in response that could be detected, I undertook that process myself. Doing this allowed me to annotate where responses could be used to 'illustrate [and] confirm' (Hansen, &

Machin, 2013: 248) the research hypothesis before undertaking transcript analysis looking for repeating frames and arguments. Two interviews were conducted entirely by email (due to time differences with one interviewee in Australia and the other in America). The research and interview format was explained to each interviewee to contextualize the study and recording and use made explicit for further use. All interviewees were sent transcripts for checking and after publication the final chapter also sent as courtesy.

Question design was simple and clear for comparability in replication and time was built in to allow for any required steering for clarification and additional discussion and therefore semi-structured to allow for some flexibility. Questions were not double-barreled to avoid confusion and conflation. In application whilst conducting the interviews, particularly over the telephone I was mindful of Kvale's (2007: 81-82) ten criteria for my own role as interviewer (to be knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering and interpreting). After transcription and in receipt of emails any verification required was followed up with interviewees by email before the final write up and submission.

I am mindful that in practice a by-line attributed to a journalist does not mean they are solely responsible for what appears in a media piece. There are layers of intervention from other 'players' in the production process and there is much to be gained from Gilbert Ryle's 'thick[er] description'. Geertz, who adapted the concept, argued for further 'intellectual effort' (Gertz, 1973: 6) and here, it would allow a more holistic consideration of the practices of media production. As someone who has also written about the deaths of musicians in the past as a media practitioner, I have been careful not to either over-determine my results or 'contaminate' (Bryman, 2012: 578) findings with any previous first-hand experience. The media process landscape has changed significantly between my own practice and current academic analysis. Whilst I have kept up to date with such significant shifts I have done so more as an academic than a practitioner.

## Psychological autopsy

My final submission (Duffett & Hearsum: 2016) introduces the method of psychological autopsy as a method to aid understanding of the human condition for completion. The context for this was based in collaborative research for a joint paper at the Crossroads conference in 2012 with another practitioner-turned-academic. In conversation we had discovered that as media practitioners we had both been at the last gig Richey Edwards had performed at the Astoria (Dec 21<sup>st</sup> 1994). With our current academic hats on we realised a mutual interest in a novel, *Richard*, concerning the last days of Richey Edwards (Myers: 2010); Duffett, from his specialism in popular music fandom, and myself in the liminal space the musician occupied as 'missing presumed dead' (Duffett & Hearsum, 2016: 7). We discussed a popular music fan's desire for etiological cause to be articulated. My contribution within this joint research was to build on Duffett's notion of fandom, parasocial interaction and textual poaching, and cogitate what together with media reporting this novel's fictionalised consideration added for fans.

The term psychological autopsy, first used by psychologist Edwin Shneidman in 1958, describes a method for coroners looking to consider if a death was suicide or accidental by using interviews with family, friends, associates and other documents from the dead person, to try and construct their state of mind. The method was famously applied to the case of Marilyn Monroe by the psychiatrist, Robert Litman (1996). It is a widely varied methodological tool (Brent, 1989: 43-57), and often framed for those conducting the technique rather than those analysing the application of it. However, a more recent publication by William Ronan, a clinical social worker, applied this approach to a popular musician and built a psychological profile of Elvis Presley (Ronan: 2011).

In our conference paper (Hearsum & Duffett: 2012) I argued that the majority of readers of the novel would also be aware of, and take to their interpretation, any previous media coverage of the build-up to the Edwards' disappearance. This is presented in the written text as explicit or inferred discourse alluding to an

'inevitability' of the death, and in previous papers I have drawn on Moir's (2009) character aspersions around Stephen Gately's death (Hearsum & Inglis, 2010: 240) as a comparative example. This suggestion that his death as a younger popular musician would be through reckless behaviour, resonates with my other work themes including the '27 club' (Hearsum & Inglis, 2010: 240; Hearsum, 2012b: 185; Hearsum, 2012a: 104), overdose (Hearsum: 2012a; Hearsum, 2013a: 116; Hearsum, 2015a: 121), and suicide or assumed suicide (Hearsum, 2012a: 106; Hearsum, 2013a: 104; Duffett & Hearsum: 2016).

The market for this form of novel was deemed worthwhile by both author (literary gap) and publisher (economic viability). In terms of academic analysis we were interested in ascertaining what the basis for that readership appeal was. We assumed the power of consumption would lie in particular with fans of Richey Edwards and/or the band that 'remain the most visible and dedicated of any audience' (Lewis, 1992: 248). I drew on the concept of a psychological autopsy to deliberate that thirst for consumption – what it offers a fan in filling knowledge gaps in a celebrity narrative that otherwise leaves us uncomfortable. It requires an understanding of socio-cultural mediations of death with special attention paid to the importance of a body and, in this instance, the very absence of a body. When a person is declared dead, but there is no body, as in Edwards' case, it is called 'death in absentia'. I argue this novel is the equivalent of a cultural psychological autopsy, which draws on the remediation of Edwards' life to construct a literary haven of cultural capital for hungry fans whose relationship with their idol had been cut short. Fandom does not need to end when a musician dies; indeed, I have argued elsewhere that whilst Edwards was still missing, but before he was declared legally 'presumed dead', his remaining lyrics had been utilised by his band (Hearsum, 2013a: 116) packaged as part of a 'cultural economy of death' (Hearsum: 2013a).

Myers, like previous media coverage of Edwards, focuses on his body in discussing the musician's self-harm, anorexia, mental health and 'sightings' (often by fans) after Edwards' disappearance, as covered by the press (national, local and music). Edwards was understood as a spectacle in life and an absence of spectacle in disappearance.

Our cultural appetites surrounding the deaths of musicians are such that our cultural intermediaries attempt to give 'access all areas' to final details both written and visual in an increasingly mediated consumption of death: Kurt Cobain's legs visible through a doorway after he had shot himself (Whitely: 1994), Michael Jackson's coffin and 'extravaganza' funeral beamed globally (Gumbel: 2009), Amy Winehouse's penultimate concert in Belgrade (Bloxham: 2011) and the National Enquirer's sensationalist and unverified 'Whitney's Final Minutes! What really happened in hotel' (Anon: 2012). This trajectory isn't as new as it appears in terms of the role of the media capturing and circulating the spectacle of death; just consider Robert Capa's 'Falling Soldier' photograph of 1935. The significant shift is that we want details of what happened to a person before they died and, in our celebrity gossip driven world, increasingly after death too. As Myers echoes:

There can only be a head stone if there is a burial and there can only be a burial if there is a body and there can only be a body if that body is dead and laid out for all to see. (Myers, 2010: 254).

Dark Tourism, that is the '...phenomena which encompass the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites' (Foley & Lennon, 1996: 198) and Death Studies, also shine a light on this by suggesting a way of 'using the relational dynamic as a cultural creative force...[as]... culture perpetuates itself through the power of the dead' (Harrison, 2003: ix). Therefore the narrative use of 'sightings', coupled with spaces associated with the true Richey Edwards story, become doubly powerful to fans reading the text who can draw on the powerful imagery of references to 'room 516' in the Embassy Hotel (the last place Edwards was checked into), the Severn Bridge (a known suicide spot and where Edwards' car was found) and a literal and symbolic 'very edge of a cliff' (Myers, 2010: 141). The novel recreates a fan's ritual pilgrimage by taking the readers in Edwards' unknown footsteps. The actions between the musician leaving the hotel and the declaration of him as 'missing presumed dead' are what Andrews & Roberts (2012) call the 'spaces in between'. This liminality is uncomfortable – we don't know if Edwards is alive or dead in reality or in the book:

...perhaps I want someone... to acknowledge my existence... that I am actually alive, because right now I can't otherwise be certain. (Myers, 2010: 166)

Our dis-ease with death's uncertainty when there is no body is evidenced in this novel in considering journalists writing of Edwards' disappearance at the time:

That sad fact is, the speculation is more interesting than the reality. (Myers, 2010: 192).

This work also represents a continuation of my own research into this particular artist and the band, which began with a non-academic biography (Shutkever<sup>†</sup>: 1996) followed by an adaptation into an academic research example for media studies (Shutkever: 2003). It is pertinent therefore to recognise the 'inter-textual fabrication' I undertook as my biography was commissioned before Edwards went missing, but completed a year after the musician's disappearance. The introduction acknowledges that this was a shared telling of history, which included the words of both the musicians and those of journalists who mediated them. This approach, in reflection, was not dissimilar to Myers. Using Edwards' own words suggests a more authentic voice seemingly compared to supposition of journalists.

After a news story, it is typically an obituary which follows when newspapers cover a death. Starck (2006) has described obituaries as an 'exercise in instant biography' (Starck, 2006: 236). Obituaries, Starck (2006) says, can encapsulate a life's cultural importance whilst succinctly summarizing a conclusive death. However, for Edwards, no obituary ran until November 26th 2008 when he was legally declared 'presumed dead'. Within *Richard* (Myers: 2010) the protagonist talks about his own unsatisfactory obituary and towards the end of the book as we are led to suppose that Edwards is moving towards that mediated 'closure':

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<sup>†</sup> Please note, Shutkever is my maiden name and Hearsun my marital surname.

...obituary writers the world over are uncapping their pens. (Myers, 2010: 267).

But what remains unanswered in reality and in this novel, is what actually happened to Edwards. The Edwards character can't say the 's' word: 'you can't say it can you... you know what. Death... Self slaughter' (Myers, 2010: 245-6) and neither can society. More challenging, once more, is discussing the mental health of a person before hand. Is this because, as the protagonist says:

...no one wants to probe too deeply when death is involved lest they unearth something rotten? (Myers, 2010: 183)

So I propose the purpose of this book is to fill in a narrative gap in terms of the grieving process, particularly for fans. Although not definitive in its own conclusion readers are once again left in a liminal, uncomfortable space. In order to appreciate the value of reading this text, the psychological autopsy analogy allows us to consider the audience who can 'read' this text using their knowledge of the artist. Myers drew on band interviews and influences, which resonate with those who already have an attachment (fans or industry). Particularly pertinent literary signposts in *Richard* are the symbolic musical references. This echoes the way in which the band the musician was in, Manic Street Preachers, are known for their own musical references to death and in interviews making connections with other 27 Club members and other 'troubled' artists such as Ian Curtis. They have meaning beyond a biographical nod, and serve as tools to unpack unknown events performing the literary equivalent of a psychological autopsy – combined with press interviews given by Edwards, this approach creates an internal dialogue of Edwards' mind.

Edwards' case is of an equivocal death, that is, one that is open to interpretation, which Boss calls 'ambiguous loss', when someone is presumed dead but their body has not been found. (Boss: 1999). Boss's interest is as a professor in family therapy whose work revolves around those missing through warfare or disaster, but I extended her notion of family to consider the rituals of farewell from a musical family (or fan community) who are looking for 'closure'. *Richard* operates as a way of offering an insight into Edwards' state of mental

health to suggest what may have happened to him. Just as a psychological autopsy attempts to answer the 'why' of suicide, so *Richard* addresses the artist's fans to fill their gap of 'what' happened next. That role can be connected through the cultural economy of fandom which goes beyond the end of visible life into the public domain for fans and industry alike. The album *Everything Must Go* (1996), the first to be released after Edwards' disappearance, remains the Manic Street Preachers' most successful to date and an example of the powerful economic extension of posthumous sales that I have discussed elsewhere in my submitted work (Hearsun, 2013a: 111).

## Themes emerging from findings

### Gendered discourse

Three of the presented outputs have overtly considered the gendered nature of discourse used to describe the deaths of female musicians (Hearsum: 2012a; 2012b; 2015a; 2016). The work revealed a gendered tonality of language used in comparison with male musicians. I have additionally also considered masculinity in pre-death illness (Hearsum: 2013c). Gender stratification in media coverage of death has been the subject of previous research work, particularly in Death Studies starting most notably with Kastenbaum, Peyton & Kastenbaum (1977). Their quantitative findings demonstrated that four times more men had been covered in USA newspaper obituaries than women, and that the coverage tended to be lengthier and often carrying a visual element cementing that disparity. However, as diverse as this field has grown since then, the focus on popular musicians and obituaries has been untouched, which is where my unique contribution to knowledge fits. Having drawn on Kastenbaum *et al's* work previously (Hearsum, 2012a: 107, 113) to look at one particular musician, I returned to their data sampling as the basis to scrutinise the ratio of coverage of three female musicians (Hearsum, 2015a: 2) compared to their male counterparts. In a nine-month period only 8.3% of popular musicians covered in UK broadsheets were women (Hearsum, 2015a: 119).

The body of my research has not been quantitative therefore what follows is the additional qualitative thematic layering that my research has revealed. There are two recurring topics. The four women musicians considered - Amy Winehouse (Hearsum 2012b; 2015a; 2016), Kristin Pfaff (Hearsum: 2012a), Whitney Houston (2015) and Donna Summer (Hearsum: 2015) - also pick up on a theme of gendered morality around the hierarchy of values relating to the manner of death. More explicitly, in a comparison of three of the musicians (Hearsum: 2015a) I scrutinised how the notion of gendered reporting motherhood is used as a trope and recurring term to embody a morality-driven stereotype of expectation for women. As such, its reiterative use in turn becomes part of a common cultural discourse through media usage.

## **Gendered hierarchy of values**

Jaworski's (2008) comparison between the representations of the deaths of Michael Hutchence and Paula Yates in 1997 and 2000 respectively noted a gendered difference between coverage of their suicides. Where Hutchence's death was framed as 'active' and 'glamorous', Yates's death was said to be 'reactive and passive' (Jaworski, 2008: 786) and suicide was presented as a 'masculinist' act. This work informed my research around Kristen Pfaff (Hearsum: 2012a) in which her death through overdose was articulated by a comparison to a more sensationalist coverage of Kurt Cobain's suicide.

Strong (2011) noted of the grunge scene in which Pfaff was situated, that women were 'technically forgotten' (Strong, 2011: 399). Hole, Pfaff's band, did not themselves associate with Riot Grrrl but were placed in that gender specific category by the media and therefore operated in the same genre as Cobain's band, Nirvana. Like Janis Joplin's death compared to Jimi Hendrix (who also died at 27 years old) within a few weeks of one another, Pfaff's death was paid relatively little attention (Hearsum, 2012a: 104) and in that coverage was a visibly constructed 'gendered perception' (Hearsum, 2012a: 106) of the way she lived her life. Therefore, 'gender continues to haunt the ways in which female artistry and musical contribution might be represented and undervalued.' (Jennings & Gardner, 2012:10). This work has been described as a 'stand out chapter', which 'activates studies of decline, suicide and death, but also remembers the history of female musicians rather than singers' (Brabazon, 2013: 317).

What differed in terms of framing the coverage of the deaths between Pfaff and artists such as Kirsty MacColl (Hearsum, 2015a: 126) or Aaliyah, were the references to the manner of their deaths, rather than their differing musical genres. Aaliyah, who died in a plane crash aged 22, was seen as:

... a tragic loss because she was not living recklessly. It exposes a pecking order in using the cause of death. An accident brings out sympathy. (Hearsum, 2013a: 114)

Similarly my findings around the coverage of the deaths of Donna Summer (Hearsun: 2015a) and Frank Zappa (Hearsun: 2013c), whose deaths were both from cancer, demonstrate that their medical conditions were viewed compassionately. Summer, whose self-identified cause of lung cancer was inhalation of fumes from 9/11 (Hearsun, 2015a: 124) and Zappa (Hearsun: 2013c), whose prostate cancer I examined in relation to masculinity (Clarke, 1999) and drew upon gendered heroics in cancer 'battle' language (Hearsun, 2013c: 206) through a cross-cultural comparative. My research on Zappa was described by Graham (2015) as 'fruitfully and forensically' undertaken and of 'high standard' (Graham, 2015: 150) and as 'essential reading' and 'remarkable' (Beaudoin: 2013). Beyond this example, the social morality hierarchy in manner of deaths is one I have observed across this work (Hearsun, 2012a: 115; Hearsun, 2013a: 110, 113, 123; Hearsun, 2014a: 3; Hearsun, 2015: 7).

## **Gendered reporting – Motherhood and morality**

Findings from earlier published work on Winehouse (Hearsum, 2012b: 187) revealed the negative language surrounding her intentions to adopt. This was revisited in later outputs where I compared this with Whitney Houston's and Donna Summer's identities as parents primarily at an IASPM conference (Hearsum: 2012) and then revised for a book chapter (Hearsum: 2015a). Collectively it represents media-gendered stereotypes of the:

... three faces of motherhood: the good mother (Summer as the role model), the bad mother (Houston as the type to avoid) and the ugly mother (Winehouse – where even the thought of her being a mother seems abhorrent). (Hearsum, 2015a: 127).

Using Negra & Holmes's (2008) work around motherhood as a 'social type' I focused on obituary journalism with a mindful awareness of the convergent media landscape, contextualizing the way in which news is now consumed. As Iqani (2012) suggests, in an era of late capitalism with media technology saturation as it is:

Data... should not be considered separate from a corpus of texts; rather they should be understood as two parts of a larger set of data which represents a garment of mediated consumerist discourse sourced from a set of public spaces of consumption at a particular moment in time. (Iqani, 2012: 59)

This involves building on connecting journalistic 'hooks' with readers in four ways, which are not mutually exclusive but can compound to create a pre-formed interpretation of events.

In observing the way those musicians, living with addictions in the public eye, I noted a role the audience plays in consuming these noted 'car crashes' as 'rubberneckers' (Hearsum, 2012b: 182). Their 'thirst' for a public demise begins with the consumption of such associated coverage before their deaths. The socially acceptable roles of parenting, whether as fathers, mothers or prospective parents, was also contemplated in relation to expected gendered roles. Parenting has become an increasingly 'visible preoccupation[s]' (Jermyn, 2008: 164) in media coverage, creating a 'cult of celebrity motherhood'



## Commodification

Whilst the way in which death is packaged as an economic commodity was illustrated most explicitly in a consideration of posthumous advertising (Hearsum: 2013a) as a thematic, and on reflection, it visible in all of the submissions. The publications have all sought to explicate the ways in which journalism, in competing for audiences, has attempted to speak to its reader: how various discourses and tropes have emerged as a short cut to a number of news values. Moeller's (2002) journalism studies consideration of the use of sensationalism to combat 'compassion fatigue' has been helpful. Where Moeller ends with an optimistic vision of how solutions may alter this cycle, so my work also makes an explicit attempt to show both where there have been demonstrations of good practice, and what is unethical about commodification of musician's deaths (particularly around gender and mental health). In this context I have also sought to show where my work sits in working towards improving practice.

My published work for this submission has been focused on UK and USA media and journalism (although extended to online forums I acknowledge that media packages are a global phenomenon). Whilst I have not yet undertaken cross-cultural comparatives of obituaries using discourse analysis, in interviews conducted with other academics specializing in obituary analysis, it was suggested this might prove fruitful (Fowler: 2011; Starck: 2011). I had discussed two obituaries of Michael Hutchence for music magazines – one published in the UK for the publication I had formerly worked for (Mueller: 1998) and the other in Australia (Creswell: 1997). I had noted the differentiation in journalistic tone, the first full of speculation about cause of his death and the second attuned to mental health issues. A light-touch transatlantic comparative for Frank Zappa (Hearsum, 2013c: 211), and drawing on the work of others (Hearsum, 2012a: 113) around the coverage of Kurt Cobain's death, support this assertion. The packaging of death as a commodity is something that has cultural specificity and yet is often available on a global platform which means that comparative linguistic discourse differences between obituaries of musicians of differing music genres, for instance, a contrast between rap and

rock musician's deaths, where the former is stereotypically associated with 'traumatic injury' (Ball *et al*: 2013) and the latter with death through their own volition (suicide, overdose etc.), are consumed differently by audiences.

From my first publication (Hearsum: 2010) to the last in this submission (Hearsum: 2015a) references have been made to the impact of social media in commoditization of death, and others have interrogated the twitterstorms of 'RIP' hashtags, when news dissemination bypasses traditional journalists - a point that was in its infancy when most prevalently discussed around TMZ's 'scoop' on Michael Jackson's death. I first discussed this in more depth in a conference paper (Hearsum: 2013d) and developed it further in a published version with the notion of 'socialcasting' (Hearsum: 2015: 18). It requires some quantitative excavation in how it is gathered and used by journalists, rather than the work already published on its use by social media grieverers (Garde-Hansen: 2010; Goh & Lee: 2011) in order to improve social understandings, as Burke (2012), President of the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators suggested when considering the coverage of Whitney Houston's death:

The problem with all of this coverage is that the most important point is seldom addressed by the media, and that is the examination and dissection of substance abuse. The focus should be the study of how a person with incredible talent and fortune could tragically be snuffed out due to the inability to shake an addiction. This is a person who, with [sic] her huge wealth and ability to enter into any rehabilitation program in the world, was still unable to overcome this demon.

Celebrity deaths from addiction should give the media an opportunity to educate the public about the substance abuse... (Burke: 2012)

Over the course of this research I had noted where questionable ethical misjudgments had been made and not corrected (Sullivan: 2009a cited in: Hearsum: 2014b), mistakes had been made and corrected (Sullivan: 2011a), where self-regulation called for improvement (Freedman: 2011a in: Hearsum: 2014b) and acknowledged where responsible reporting had been undertaken (Jobes *et al*: 1996: 264 cited in: Hearsum, 2012a: 109). My 'cuttings' research folder of musicians and their 'death' stories have been varied and my body of

work has attempted to address the key ways in which it is constructed and packaged as a media commodity.

## Conclusion

The narrative here, considering my previously published work, constitutes, along with the publications themselves and supportive peer reviews of my work, my original contributions and extensions to knowledge. I have identified key themes that have emerged through works and excavated the underpinning methods to make explicit the rigour of each piece.

Undertaking this work has been an iterative, rather than recursive process whereby this overarching narrative sets out accumulative understandings of interrelationship. There has been no comparison with the coverage of deaths of non-musicians within my own work but it has been referenced within various literature reviews in the submission, particularly those who have undertaken quantitative research (Fowler & Bielsa, 2007 in: Fowler: 2007). The qualitative approach to this profession was an omission, according to Fowler (2011) and Starck (2011) and something my body of work has addressed.

In terms of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba: 1985), the narrative around the submission has addressed the four criteria: '**credibility**' by including peer reviews with a 'prolonged engagement' and 'persistent observation' (1985: 304), '**transferability**' where my work has been used in other contexts, '**dependability**' as methods have been applied across case studies and '**confirmability**' whereby acknowledgement of professional practice has sparked personal interest but not tainted the results as data and process have been reconstructed.

The key findings of the individual publications have been presented above (for which see: '*Identification of specific contributions to knowledge*' section). As a body of work these demonstrate distinctive contributions to knowledge about the mediation of popular musicians deaths by:

- Illustrating that discourse used to describe musicians is gendered in the exemplifications both for women (Hearsun: 2012a; Hearsun: 2012b; Hearsun: 2015a) and men (Hearsun: 2013c).

- Identifying significant patterns from analysis of the media coverage of deaths and extending discussion into 'omitted' area of social discussion, specifically concerning underlying mental health issues (Hearsum: 2012a; Hearsum: 2016; Duffett & Hearsum 2016).
- Critically commented upon the application of specific theories (2013c) and methods to this topic whether that be CDA (Hearsum: 2015a; Hearsum: 2016) or Psychological Autopsy (Duffett & Hearsum: 2016).

The validity of this body of work lies both within the individual submissions addressing each specific topic, as well as in this document which pulls them together to demonstrate a measured consideration of emergent thematic discourses around popular musicians. Whilst this research has some predictive validity within the timeframe covered, I would hope that in the future such a predictive dimension is of minor, even marginal, importance. For the purpose of research is not just to understand what is in the world but also to seek ways in which to better it. A key value of this institution, and a commitment of my own, is 'research-informed teaching' where the findings and suggestions of research can be disseminated. Annually I give a lecture where students are asked to write the obituary of a popular musician currently alive. I spend an hour going over NUJ guidelines and the Samaritans' support. We have an hour seminar where I've presented my own research and discuss the application of method. The students have looked at Sullivan's (2009a) problematic obituary of Michael Jackson as a cautionary tale. Will they emulate this or do something better? Will they talk about the discourse of mental illness that is omitted? Will they choose to use a first name to describe a female musician in a way that they wouldn't if it was a male musician as *The Telegraph* did with Winehouse (Hearsum: 2014b)? Let's hope I taught them well, for it is indeed - and I pay a cultural debt here - a matter of life and death.

Paula Hearsum

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**Appendix i - CDA – Winehouse obituary**

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
Singer with a soul-steeped voice whose instantly successful Back to Black album reflected her	<b>tormented</b>	experience of love
Amy Winehouse sang as if her heart were	<b>damaged</b> beyond repair	
Leading a	<b>rock'n'roll</b>	life
has proved	<b>fatal</b>	to many artists
but few could be considered as much of a	<b>loss</b>	to music as Amy Winehouse,
who has been	found <b>dead</b> at the age of <b>27</b> ,	the cause not immediately clear.
One of the outstanding singers of her generation, she had	<b>suffered</b> from <b>drug addiction</b> ,	
and the	<b>destruction</b>	it causes.

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
<p>Her husky, soul-steeped voice belied both her youth and her London origins – singing from the gut is not the exclusive preserve of older black American performers. Winehouse's music spoke to people so persuasively that her second album, <i>Back to Black</i>, became Britain's bestselling record of 2007 and reached No 2 in the US, making her one of only a few British female soloists to achieve that level of transatlantic recognition. Its success spurred sales of her initially overlooked first album, <i>Frank</i> (2003), so titled because of the diary-style lyrics that produced songs such as <i>Stronger Than Me</i>, which railed against a "ladyboy" ex-boyfriend. The two sold a total of more than 12m copies worldwide.</p> <p>Born to a Jewish family in North Finchley, north London, Winehouse grew up listening to the jazz albums of her taxi-driver father, Mitch. He and her pharmacist mother, Janis, later</p>	<p><b>divorced.</b></p>	
<p>Amy caught the performing bug so early that by the age of eight she was attending stage school. She spent time at three of them, including the Sylvia Young theatre school in central London, from which she was</p>	<p><b>expelled</b></p>	<p>for "not applying herself", and the Brit school in Croydon, south London. Rebellious instincts surfaced in her mid-teens</p>

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
by 16, she had acquired her first later.	<b>tattoo</b> and was smoking <b>cannabis</b> .	"My parents pretty much realised that I would do whatever I wanted, and that was it, really," she said later
Her boyfriend of the time passed a cassette of her singing to a record company, which was impressed. "It was unlike anything that had ever come through my radar," said songwriter Felix Howard, who went on to collaborate with Winehouse on Frank. She signed a deal with the world's largest label, Universal, and was taken on by the management company run by Simon Fuller, the force behind Pop Idol and its television spin-offs. However, being in the bosom of the pop establishment turned Winehouse	<b>surly</b> and <b>defensive</b> .	
When she was accused early on by the press of being one of Fuller's pop puppets, she retorted:	He's clever enough to know he can't fuck with me.	
If Winehouse was not entirely singular – Dusty Springfield and Maggie Bell preceded her as white British pop singers whose	<b>complicated</b> personal lives	yielded unguarded, richly soulful music – she certainly stood out from almost every other artist under 40.

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
<p>When Frank was released, just after her 20th birthday, the prevailing female pop sound was the manicured slickness epitomised by Girls Aloud. Winehouse's disconcerting sultriness meant she was initially classified as a jazz vocalist. Despite being tipped by critics as a "buzz" act – borne out by two Brits nominations in 2004 – she did not catch the public's fancy, and Frank peaked at No 13 in the charts.</p>		
<p>It was when she finished promoting the album and set about writing the follow-up that a remarkable</p>	<p><b>transformation</b> took place.</p>	<p>During this time she met her future husband, Blake Fielder-Civil, who worked on the periphery of the music business as an assistant on video shoots.</p>
<p>The attraction was apparently instant, at least on Winehouse's part, and when Fielder-Civil ended the relationship after a few months, she poured her</p>	<p><b>depression</b></p>	<p>into songs that would become Back to Black.</p>
<p>Of the months following their split, she said: "I had never felt the way I feel about him about anyone in my life. I thought we'd never see each other again.</p>	<p>I wanted to <b>die</b>."</p>	

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
The album was released in late 2006, and when Winehouse began a round of concerts and TV appearances that autumn, it was obvious she had spent the recent past walking on the	<b>wild</b> side. She had lost several stone and acquired armfuls of tattoos, a mountainous beehive hairdo and, it was rumoured, drug and alcohol problems.	
Typically forthright, she drew attention to the latter in Back to Black's first single,	<b>Rehab</b> , which became her <b>signature</b> song: "I don't never want to <b>drink</b> again, I just need a friend ... They tried to make me go to rehab, I said no, no, no."	Despite its subject, the song was infectiously upbeat, and became her first top 10 hit, remaining in the charts for a near-record-breaking 57 weeks.
The whole album was also an instant, and huge, success. The jazz-lite that characterised Frank had been supplanted by sparky R&B, immediately hummable songs and, crucially, the performance of a lifetime from Winehouse, who sang as if	her heart were <b>damaged beyond repair</b> .	Critical acclaim was heaped on it – "One of the great breakthrough CDs of our time ... when this lady sings about love, she means every word," said the US magazine Entertainment Weekly – and it appeared on numerous best-of-the-year lists. Its appeal transcended language barriers, sending it to No 1 in 18 countries, including the UK.
A great imponderable was whether Back to Black would have connected so strongly with listeners if Winehouse had not simultaneously been playing out her	<b>emotional</b> dramas	in public.

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
Still	<b>wracked</b>	by
the	<b>failure</b>	of her relationship with Fielder-Civil
her	<b>behaviour was erratic</b>	
her	weight <b>dropped</b>	further
and the	<b>monstrous</b>	beehive got even taller.
She seemed to	lack the inhibitions that stop most people from "acting out"	in public, which made her a tabloid dream.
Drawn by the scent of	disturbed	celebrity, paparazzi were soon following her around the streets of north London.
Perversely, as her life became more	complex,	her success increased. She won the 2007 Brit award for best female artist, and Ivor Novello awards for Rehab and Love Is a Losing Game. In addition, she picked up Q magazine's best album trophy, and was nominated for that year's Mercury prize.
She unexpectedly reunited with Fielder-Civil in early 2007, and in May they married on	impulse	in Miami
If Winehouse had been	fragile	before,
the marriage seemed to bring out the	worst	in her.
She and her new husband became	heavy drug users,	
and she was soon said to be	injecting heroin.	
The couple were frequently photographed looking much the	worse for wear,	

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
and Winehouse's arms bore the marks of	self-inflicted cuts.	
She collapsed from an	overdose	in the summer,
and paid the	first of several unsuccessful visits to rehab.	
Fielder-Civil was	arrested	in November 2007,
and subsequently pleaded	guilty to attacking	a pub landlord and attempting to pervert the course of justice by offering him £200,000 to keep quiet about it.
While he was on remand, Winehouse	<b>lurched</b> on	as best she could.
She	<b>cancelled</b> concerts,	
struck up a friendship with	<b>fellow addict</b> Pete Doherty	
and	<b>tried rehab again.</b>	In the midst of it all, her talent still unquenched, she won five Grammy awards in February 2008.
The couple's relationship ended when Fielder-Civil received a	<b>jail</b> sentence	of 27 months the following July.
Despite initially saying she would wait for him, they	<b>divorced</b>	in 2009
and she moved temporarily to the Caribbean island of St Lucia, where she hoped to escape the	<b>pernicious</b> influence of the <b>drug</b> crowd	in Camden, north London.
Her flat in Camden was	<b>conveniently</b> close to her favourite <b>pub</b> ,	the Hawley Arms.
While she	<b>claimed</b> to have <b>kicked drugs</b>	in St Lucia,

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
she admitted that she was	<b>drinking</b>	to compensate – though not to excess, she insisted.
	<b>Several other</b> relationships followed,	the longest-lasting with Reg Traviss, director of the films Screwed and Psychosis. Winehouse also began to record the follow-up to Back to Black; the head of Universal, Lucian Grainge, pronounced the demos "fantastic". She also launched her own label, Lioness, whose first signing was her then 13-year-old goddaughter, Dionne Bromfield.
Nonetheless, Winehouse was	constantly in one sort of <b>trouble</b>	or another.
She was	<b>arrested</b> several times for public order <b>offences</b> ,	
and	hospitalised for emphysema and the pain caused by breast implants.	
There were always signs that she had not	conquered the <b>demons</b> she <b>battled</b>	throughout her career:
last year the tabloid papers ran a photo of her	<b>unconscious</b> on a bench outside a pub,	

Body of text	Key word(s)	Body of text
and last month she	behaved so <b>erratically</b> on stage	in the Serbian capital of Belgrade that the rest of her summer tour was cancelled.
Her final public appearance came	three days before her <b>death</b> ,	at a gig by Bromfield at the Roundhouse, Camden.
Winehouse danced in	<b>dreamy</b> circles,	
then	<b>disappeared</b> without singing a note.	
Last March she made her	<b>final</b>	recording, the pop standard Body and Soul with Tony Bennett, to be released on his album Duets II in September.
Bennett remembered her as "an extraordinary musician with a rare intuition as a vocalist".	During the <b>chaotic last years</b> of her life,	
she was frequently compared to other singers	with <b>tempestuous</b> existences,	such as Billie Holiday and Edith Piaf.
She is survived by her parents and her brother, Alex.		
• Amy Jade Winehouse, pop singer-songwriter, born 14 September 1983; died 23 July 2011		
This article was amended on 27 July 2011. The original referred to	"fellow <b>junkie</b> Pete Doherty". <b>Junkie</b> has been replaced by <b>addict</b> .	

Table 3: Winehouse obituary (Sullivan, 2011a)

## **Appendix ii - Impact**

As my work has already been peer reviewed, and is already in the public domain I am now at a point in my research career where I can start to consider the use of my findings. Not only in the peer reviews and citations I have received, some of which I have mentioned in the previous chapters, but also beyond the publication domain. From this work I have taken four distinct research streams on which I am concurrently working:

### 1. The Society of Professional Obituary Writers

SPOW wish to disseminate the findings from my publications in order feedback into their guidance work on best practice to their international body. This came as a direct result of an interview conducted with the Director in 2010 for one of the submission pieces. (Hearsum, 2012b: 112)

### 2. NUJ Ethics Committee

I've had provisional discussions given my referencing to their code of conduct (Hearsum 2012a: 109, 112; Hearsum, 2012b: 108; 2013b: 110). We are considering how my work can support their policies around intrusion into grief potentially through workshops.

### 3. Childhood Bereavement Network

Invited to give a plenary after reading one of my articles (Hearsum: 2012b) at their national conference (Hearsum: 2013f), the CBN additionally asked me to make policy recommendations based on my research which I have done.

### 4. Winston's Wishes

I was approached by regional workers following the plenary at the CBN conference (Hearsum: 2013f) who had also read the Amy Winehouse article

(Hearsum: 2012b). We have begun discussions on how our work might overlap to create workshops for bereaved youth in the Sussex area.

## **Appendix iii - Works submitted**





















































































































































































































## Popular Music Journalism

### 27 Club: live fast, die young and sell papers

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Whilst death is a 'significant component of any news delivery system' (Hanusch, 2010: 20) the specific ways in which the deaths of popular musicians are represented tends to align most closely with Alfred Harmsworth's 'man bites dog' adage, particularly the further removed from death through old age the musician is. The collusion between journalists and readers to create a currency for musicians to 'live fast, die young and leave a good-looking corpse' has created a mythology and journalistic hook for covering such deaths, that of the '27 club' which has come to the fore particularly in the last 20 years to refer to a group of musicians who have died at this age. It has become so ingrained within popular culture that a film (*The 27 Club*: 2008), documentaries (*The 27 Club*: Radio 2), books (Segalstad: 2009; Milnes: 2011; Eliari: 2012 & Owen: 2012) and more recently a book series (Salewicz: 2012) have all picked up on it as a theme.

Going beyond traditional news values (Galtung & Ruge: 1965), covering a musician's death resonates most pertinently on a very human level because of our emotional proximity to music. Those very musicians who have bared their souls through their creative texts continue to do so beyond the grave as their expiration gives continuing, and in some cases increasing, cultural visibility in death than in life. Posthumous fame has even been termed a 'smart career move' as was said on Elvis Presley's death in 1977, as he went on to sell more music after his death than in his lifetime. Two musicians who straddle either end of the last two decades in which we have become very familiar with the '27 club' are Kurt Cobain (died 1994) and Amy Winehouse (died 2011). Other musicians have died at this age both before and since but it is these two artists in particular whose coverage of their deaths have had the turn of phrase attributed to them with significant voracity.

In writing about these musicians, and giving weight to the term requires all five Ws to be addressed (Who? What? Why? When? Where?). Given our socially increasing desire for salacious details, addressing 'how' the death was caused has also been part of the brief for a journalist to address. This can be in various forms: news, features/columns and obituaries so a comparison across all three types of journalism can show that this hook takes *music journalism* and *journalism about music* across a range of journalistic outputs but still arrive at some startling similarities across types of writing, publications and over time.

This case study took, as a small sample, 15 articles drawn from two databases (UK Newsstand and Rocksbackpages) across the three broad types of journalistic writing including a range of music specialist magazines (print and online), tabloids, middle market and broadsheets. The purpose was to demonstrate that the thematic hook of the '27 club' had used overtly in the writing to creating a discourse of inevitability, which equates musicians with a young death. A discourse created in media language is a reflection of social practice therefore a broader analysis would continue to reveal wider institutional, political, social powers at play.

With Cobain (see *Fig. 1*) drawing on the quotation from the musician's mother, Wendy O' Connor, is the leading way in which the 27 Club is alluded to: "I told him not to join that stupid club". How the club is framed within the texts is as one of a choice – *Melody Maker* suggests that Cobain's preference of suicide method, by gunshot, was also a choice open to him as a musician. *The Observer* describes it as an inevitable path by using the term a 'script' (Savage: 1994). This hasn't, however, been a typical cause of death amongst 27 year old musicians, but has of older musicians such as Del Shannon, Paul Williams and Joe Meek. However, what the specific age comparison allows however is to produce a list of other musicians who have also died at the same age, particularly those who died through reckless behaviour. Most often referred to are Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and Brian Jones who also died within three years of one another. Surprisingly, there is very little linguistic and structural difference between the three normally very different types of writing styles. So different are they, that normally different journalists are used. On the one hand is surprising given they function in very different ways. However, it also illuminates that rules around journalism house styles

and ethics, as I have argued elsewhere (Hearsum: 2012. b), that is one of the ways in which musicians, as a professional type, are treated differently. The more biographical narratives of Cobain's life tend to build up a picture of inevitability by chronicling the path into addiction and a previous suicide attempt; a typical construct of an obituary. The British press in the sample, did not look behind the visible destructive behaviours to the potential mental health issues behind as those actions. Those in the academic health fields have done just that (Manchip: 1994; Jobes *et al*: 1996) in order to expose the ethical responsibility and impact that covering such stories has for the profession and social awareness. Manchip's (1994) overview of the British press coverage of Cobain's death, which ran a month after the singer committed suicide, examined both newspapers and the music press, and argued that because they did not elucidate Cobain's depression as a mental health illness that "(t)his tragedy shows how much work in educating the media and public remains to be done" (Manchip, 1994: 1447). Yet in America, Jobes *et al* (1996) suggested that whilst there was a rise in the number of people contacting suicide intervention supports after Cobain's death, there was no statistical contribution to a Werther effect of copycat suicides. Given that the researchers also probed the advice given out by the crisis clinics to the media on how best to present suicide they concluded that at least in America, "... it seems much was done right by the media." (Jobes *et al*, 1996: 262)

**Fig. 1**

<b>Kurt Cobain – April 1994</b>		
<b>News</b>	<b>Features/Columns</b>	<b>Obituaries</b>
His death was what Cobain's mother, Wendy O'Connor, had always feared. When she heard the news she too drew comparisons with the deaths of earlier rock idols like Hendrix and Janis Joplin. 'Now he's gone and joined that stupid club. I told him not to join that stupid club.' (The Guardian)	Maybe you learnt one thing about being a rock star. Blowing out your brains was the most old-fashioned, rock star exit you could have made. That was playing the old rules, Kurt. The rules your music helped rewrite. (Melody Maker)	Referring to the fraternity of dead rockers like Jimi Hendrix or Jim Morrison, Cobain's mother, Wendy O'Connor, commented: 'I told him not to join that stupid club.' He was in no state to listen. (The Guardian)
Cobain's mother, Wendy O'Connor, said last night that her son had been missing for six days, adding that she had feared he would be found dead. "Now he's gone and joined that stupid club," she said, referring to the early deaths of other rock stars. "I told him not to join that stupid club." (The Independent)	Just like the Sex Pistols, Cobain became immersed in a struggle, trying to free himself from the self-destruction involved in the whole punk script. And now he's caught, like a fly in amber. The most popular media trope came from his mother, who referred to the 'stupid club' – Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin – the drear baby-boomer litany that serves to reduce Cobain's individuality. (The Observer).	
	Of course, it wasn't inevitable that he would one day commit suicide, but nor was it beyond the scope of what was publicly known about him. (Q)	And so, to quote his mother, the only person who appears to have been actively concerned about his well-being in the last few days of his life, he's joined "that stupid club" in the sky. (Melody Maker)

		Countless articles will appear mourning the death of grunge, and tossing in the suitable Sid Vicious comparisons, but this is just a sad little tale about a guy who never felt good about being alive, who channelled that screaming unease into a remarkable body of rock'n'roll performances and who then ended it all by shooting his face off. (Mojo)
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So the question is, with an evolving understanding of media ethics, had much changed in the coverage of Amy Winehouse's death in 17 years later in the UK? For the profession, one significant change was that in 2006 The Samaritans gained the agreement of the PCC to introduce a new sub-clause (see 5ii below) to the Editor's Code (Clause 5: Intrusion into Grief and Shock Provisions) to cover representation of suicide:

5i: In cases involving grief or shock, enquiries must be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and discretion. Publication must be handled sensitively at such times, but this should not be interpreted as restricting the right to reporting judicial proceedings.

5ii: When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used

There were very few high profile musicians who died through suicide to compare with Cobain in the intervening years. Musicians who had committed suicide such as Stuart Adamson, Jon Lee, Paul Hester, Tommy Marth and Bob Welch were not in the media spotlight. Those more visible in the public eye at the time of their deaths, such as Michael Hutchence, had coverage more focused on the manner of his death (auto-erotic asphyxiation) in the UK. The latter point says much about British social hang-ups to discuss sexual preferences compared to the corners report and subsequent coverage in Australia who recorded the singer's death in 1997 as suicide cause by depression. Artists such as Elliott Smith had their death barely covered at the time by formal broadsheet obituaries in the UK as their musical fame began after their death. Yet those who were well known, and had the '27 club' tag even if at the time they were 'missing presumed dead', such as Richey Edwards, whose disappearance was widely covered even though the formal obituary did not run until 13 years later.

The more morality-driven and journalistically contentious coverage of death through reckless behaviour began with the treatment of Michael Jackson's death in 2009 and culminated in the reporting of two particular musicians in just over a 6 month period - Amy Winehouse and Whitney Houston. Winehouse is the more obviously comparative in terms of her age to Cobain so whilst again the data is derived from the UK newspapers and music magazines, the sample was considered against the same narrative structures with the news value consideration of proximity (Winehouse as a UK resident):

**Fig. 2**

<b>Amy Winehouse – July 2011</b>		
<b>News</b>	<b>Features/Columns</b>	<b>Obituaries</b>
Amy belonged to the kind that found it impossible to save herself by changing her ways. When Kurt Cobain died at exactly the same age, his mother said that he had, "joined the stupid club".	"Now he's gone and joined that stupid club, I told him not to join that stupid club." These were the rueful words uttered by Kurt Cobain's mother, Wendy O'Connor, on hearing of her son's death by suicide on 8 April 1994. The "stupid club"	Leading a rock'n'roll life has proved fatal to many artists, but few could be considered as much of a loss to music as Amy Winehouse, who has been found dead at the age of 27, the cause not immediately clear. One of the outstanding singers of her generation, she had suffered from

(The Mirror)	she was referring to included Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones, Jim Morrison of the Doors, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, all of whom, like Cobain, died aged 27, having struggled with alcohol and drug addiction. Now, Amy Winehouse, the troubled wild child of British pop, has joined them. (The Guardian)	drug addiction, and the destruction it causes. (The Guardian)
Rock stars are no more likely to die aged 27 than at any other point in their lives, according to a new research study. (NME)	That she joins the "Forever 27 club" of musical talents who died at the same age, and is now in the company of Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Kurt Cobain, is no comfort. The Sunday Times)	Amy Winehouse, who was found dead on July 23 aged 27, ticked all the right boxes for a self-destructive wild child of pop, having bags of "attitude", a drink and drugs problem and a no-good man (The Telegraph)
	Perhaps her death at such a desperately young age will serve as a salutary lesson to her devotees. One that instills the knowledge that her depraved lifestyle was nothing to be admired and would inevitably destroy her. (Daily Mail)	

This time the '27 club' has taken root as a journalistic short hand. It may well be resolutely connected to Cobain's mother's original quotation in places (*The Mirror* and *The Guardian*) but it also, by nature of her death, connects Winehouse to other musicians who died through addiction with little differentiation between drink or drugs. For Winehouse the texts rely on prior knowledge of past coverage of her mediated demise, which I have referred to elsewhere are 'rubbernecking' (Hearsum, 2012: 182) – an audience's desire to observe the downfall. Winehouse's death was framed as inevitability building on previous treatments of her less salubrious moments, rather than unexpected and certainly less of a shock that Cobain's which indicates some hierarchy of news values in types of deaths.

Interestingly we note 6 months after Winehouse's death, *NME* (ANON: 2011), draws on academic research around the '27 club' phenomenon (Wolkewitz *et al*: 2011) to add credence to an argument that it there is no statistical spike for musicians at that age, and yet has at other points both run online photo gallery specials of the 'club members' as well as having dismissed the term as 'the so-called' 27 Club. Ironically, every mention, no matter the editorial inconsistency, reinforces its mythology.

There are many tools at the disposal of those interested in studying this area: Critical Discourse Analysis often used to deconstruct obituaries (Moore: 2002), Frame Analysis for audiences readings of celebrity death coverage (Van den Bulck & Claessens: 2013) and Debord's consideration of the spectacle (Jaworski: 2008) to suggest the powerful way in which particular types of celebrity deaths can be both gendered and positioned. Inwardly looking the media self-reflected, *The Guardian* ran two articles on poor quality and ethics of coverage (Freeman: 2011; Petridis: 2011) with Freeman (2011) offering a back-handed dismissal of the term and yet reinforcing it at the same time:

**“Yes, Winehouse died at 27. And so did some other celebrities! But how many died in the month of March? Or at 10:19pm? This 27 Club nonsense awkwardly hoiks separate individuals together and insinuates that their deaths are part of a great rock'n'roll tradition.” (Freeman: 2011)**

(N.B. the online version of this article includes a link to The Washington Post’s small overview of, you guessed it, the 27 Club).

Whether the term is here to stay for the foreseeable future or not, the more constructive question is how can we better support journalism that covers this area of music more responsibly?

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## **Alas, Poor *Richard*: fandom, personal identity and Ben Myer's novelization of Richey Edwards' life story**

In 1995 the Manic Street Preachers played their last show as a four piece before their rhythm guitarist and “minister for propaganda” Richey Edwards disappeared on the advent of a US tour. Although his body was never found, his car was discovered at the Severn bridge so it was assumed Edwards had committed suicide. Fifteen years later, in a novelization called *Richard*, music journalist Ben Myers wrote a fictionalized first-person account of Richey's life story in order to explore the troubled guitarist's mysterious last days. This article uses academic research on fandom to contextualize a range of responses to the publication of *Richard*. Comparing readings based around parasocial relationships and textual poaching, it shows that fans' understandings of literary impersonation go well beyond issues of personal intimacy to reflect a broad understanding of the inter-textual fabrication of celebrity images.

Keywords: popular music fans, parasocial interaction, textual poaching, psychological autopsy

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**Alas, Poor *Richard*: Fandom, Personal Identity and  
Ben Myer's Novelization of Richey Edwards' Life Story**

Manic Street Preachers' fan culture remains without the authenticating materiality that he [Richey Edwards] was indeed 'real', as opposed to only being known to them as a mediated construct.

Steven Gregson (2005: 144)

As Ruth Finnegan (1997: 68) has noted, identity is a site of struggle where power relations are reproduced. In a media culture, fans are viewers and listeners who discover loving connections with famous people that they do not personally know. Yet they also understand that performers are actively engaged in the construction of their own images, myths, and audience relations. The study of stars who die or disappear in the face of a continuing fan phenomenon can therefore indicate something about how fans make meanings and understand their heroes. In a hero's absence, his or her image and myth can become a site of struggle, a contested terrain on which the bonds of affect are privately established and publically performed. Creative interventions and reiterations can sometimes extend the star's image in ways that are not appreciated by the core of their traditional audience (see, for example, Marcus 1999). Whether deliberate or by accident, these interventions can function to explore and sometimes exploit specific aspects of celebrity and / or fan culture. Responses to them are worthy of academic attention as definitive instances of fan communities in action. Literary dramatizations of musicians have received much less attention than tribute artists (see Homan 2006 and Gregory 2011). By emphasizing the "truth" of the star's life as a form of (intertextual) coherence, rather than correspondence - by stitching together fragments of what is already known rather than holding up a mirror to a purported essence - semi-fictional books about dead musicians disrupt the idea of truth as intimacy that forms the kernel of each star's romantic myth. Ben Myers' account of the last days of Richey Edwards from the Welsh postpunk rock band the Manic Street Preachers provides an interesting case study.<sup>1</sup> We argue that the fans' general rejection of Myers' knowingly faked Edwards' autobiography was more than a blind response to its author treading on the hallowed ground of Edward's celebrity image or misrepresenting his fan base. Instead it reflected judgments about the author's critical distance from the fan role he claimed to inhabit.

Richey Edwards had a successful career as the Manic Street Preacher's rhythm lyricist and "minister for propaganda", but frequently stood accused of being a poor guitarist. As his fragile, creative persona emerged in public, a wide variety of people found themselves intrigued. According to celebrity theorist Chris Rojek (2007: 178), he "engaged in self-mutilation, suffered manic depression and alcohol problems, and in 1995 abruptly vanished and is presumed dead." It is important, therefore, to recognize that Richey's personal descent was not (just) a private catastrophe, but was creatively exploited by Edwards himself in his professional life to make a statement about the cultural direction of his band and the authenticity of its project. A romantic reading of Richey's actions is that he was impaired: vulnerable, exploited, and baring his suffering in art. Without denigrating the veracity of Richey's personal trauma or the pain that it caused, we can still say that it was *publically realized and mediated* through his music. An uncomfortable but key moment in Edward's simultaneous personal descent and media ascent came when NME journalist Steve Lamacq questioned his band's authenticity and values. Edwards famously cut the letters '4 REAL' on his arm and created a media controversy.<sup>2</sup> By that

stage Edwards had already become the focus for a wide variety of fans – often named ‘the Cult of Richey’ – a small but significant minority of whom found kinship with his struggle and a parallel escape in their own self-harm. Evidently, self-harming or not, his fans shared some of his value system and outlook on the world. One explained to Francesca Skirvin that he “did not consciously choose Richey but ‘just became attached to him because he is a manifestation of my ideals of humanity’” (2000). The Manics’ third album, *The Holy Bible* – which was heavily based on Edwards’ creative contribution - used quotations and media clips to evoke the darkest days of modernity.<sup>3</sup> The album had a melancholic atmosphere due, in part, to the inclusion of a song about the Nazi death camps. In 1995 the Manic Street Preachers played their last show as a four piece at the Astoria in London Richey disappeared on the advent of a US tour. His car was found near the Severn Bridge. Although Richey’s body was never recovered, it was assumed he had committed suicide. Two years after Edward’s disappearance, the body of a sixteen-year old fan called Christopher Goodall was found washed up on the tidal banks of the Severn. Summing up at the inquest, his coroner said that “clearly Christopher was influenced by this media pop idol and undoubtedly he was in a very disturbed state, probably following what he had read about this idol” (Skirvin 2000). Although it did not have a directly causative function on otherwise healthy individuals, Richey’s mediated suffering and presumed suicide became a social resource for vulnerable, depressed teenagers who felt a kind of kinship through their own suffering.

As carefully shaped spaces of audience empathy and projection, rock stars’ myths can sometimes become more engaging when their star bodies are dead or disappeared. Fifteen years after Richey’s disappearance, music journalist Ben Myers wrote a fictionalized first-person account of Edwards’ life story called *Richard*, designed to explore the troubled guitarist’s mysterious last days. This article is based upon a close reading of *Richard*, an interview with its author, and textual analyses of the online reviews written by Manics fans. The style and reception of *Richard* raises some complex issues. Was it parasitic? Simply a case of commercial exploitation? Commentators compared Myers’ book to a recent, exploitative, commercial dramatization that was infamous for twisting its subject matter: David Peace’s portrayal of Britain’s most colourful football manager Brian Clough’s spell at Leeds in 1974, *The Damned United* (see Jonze 2010). Since fans “remain the most visible and dedicated of any audience” (Lewis 1992: 248) we might expect them to form the target market for most books dedicated to particular celebrities. Posting after an interview with Myers was published online, one commentator said, “I’m no Manics fan, but I can spot a blatant cash-in when I see one. Go and write a proper book, Ben Myers.”<sup>4</sup> In reply, a poster called *chedonize* added, “As a cash-in this is a strange choice. The only people who are sure to buy it are the ones who are sure to hate it.”<sup>5</sup> Myers (2011) explained, “Perhaps the most common reaction has been ‘I hate this book – where can I buy a copy?’” Second, *Richard* was dismissed by many reviewers as bad biography. Reviewing it for *The Independent*, Johnathan Gibbs said, “True fans will end up skipping, especially if they have read Simon Price’s band biography, *Everything*.” (2010) Was Myers’s book nothing more than a poorly conceived biography? *Richard* was understood as something different to a biography. Its reception was marked in part by the question of respect for the dead. The book was subtitled “a novel,” but prefaced with a statement that it was a fictionalization written with respect to all concerned (Myers 2010: ix-x). It also contained end references to runaway and missing persons’ help lines (Myers 2010: 397). Extending the theme of respect, a comment poster who went by the name of Hoppo said after Myer’s *Guardian* interview was published online, “I hope and assume the

'certain people' he contacted were the Edwards family. Will Ben be sharing the profits with Richey's estate, as I believe the Manics have done with their royalties, or perhaps donating a proportion to a missing persons charity?" (Jonze 2010) The interesting thing about that demand is that it would not have been made of a music biographer like Simon Price, Rob Jovanich or, indeed, one of this article's own authors (Shutkever 1996). One theme running through fans responses was what other members of the band might have thought about the book. Bassist Nicky Wire found it too upsetting to read (Jonze 2010). Finally, suicide in many ways remains a taboo subject. At one point Myers describes Richey smashing up his hired guitar at the last Astoria gig as "a brilliant and unplanned act of auto-destruction", a phrase that lingers as it implies Richey's disappearance was a crucial element in the making of his legend (Myers 2010: 385). For some, *Richard* therefore raised media effects issues: "Obviously, there are dangers in representing a human mind set on suicide" (Gibbs 2010). This fictionalized story of Richey's last days was therefore worthy of further investigation, especially given its tendency to provoke such intense debate.

Myers's book is an interesting test case in the study of fan culture. Media fans have – especially on mass – become represented with ambivalence as a janus-faced object of cultural projection, a receptacle for wider anxieties about the imputed social pressures and undeserved rewards of stardom. Outsiders sometimes describe fans as too involved with their chosen texts. Examining Bourdieu's notion of a 'bourgeois aesthetic' characterized by the spectator's critical distance from commercial culture, in a section of his first book titled 'Sitting too close?' Henry Jenkins (1992) noted that fans, in comparison, are sometimes seen as overly emotional, too engaged and drawn in to the affective drama of their texts. To outsiders they are immersed in the "pleasures of affective immediacy" and are unable to "access insights gained by contemplative distance" (1992, 61). On one hand they have been dismissed as blind loyalists: irrational individuals who are collectively able to coalesce in to an over-reaching mass. In this equation, the fans supposedly inherent Dionysian tendency means that they are perceived as liable to erupt in a dangerous display of vengeance if the myth of their hero is tarnished. To put it a different way, popular culture sometimes positions fans as a proxy for *fundamentalists*. In an alternative reading, however, fans are those who feel a special kind of empathy with their star. They become guardians of knowledge and form a community in celebration of the person's identity, life and creative contribution. Two hypotheses from the fandom literature - parasocial interaction and textual poaching - offer ways to frame *Richard's* reception.

## PARASOCIAL INTERACTION

The social inequality defined by celebrity – the fact that stars are better known as individuals than each of their followers - is accompanied by an informational, physical and affective divide that has the potential to simultaneously delineate a shared space and create a degree of mutual misunderstanding. Both academics and popular writers have attempted to formulate this gap in various ways. The concept of parasocial interaction, which stems from the mid-1950s work of psychologists Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956), is premised on the pseudo-interactive nature of celebrity culture in an era of broadcast media. It suggests that a star's emotive performance can misleadingly invite the audience to believe that they really "know" him or her. When fans build up personal connections to their heroes, these connections are interpreted as unrequited and one-way. Horton and Wohl's theory portrays fans as fooled by mediation into

entering a space of engagement that only they, in reality, occupy. In other words, when the association is realized in a close physical encounter the celebrity is cognizant that they do not know the fan, and also that the fan's knowledge of them has been shaped through analysis of their screen roles and publicity material (Ferris and Harris 2011: 30). Public knowledge of this imbalance locates fans as potentially intrusive. It posits stars as vulnerable to their misguided advances. Recent researchers in media psychology have attempted to separate normal parasocial from its pathological variants (see Giles 2002; Stever 2011). There are, however, reasons for doubting that Manics fans thought about *Richard* simply as a reflection upon their supposed parasocial attachments: its negative portrayal of fans and possible role as a means of closure.

If 'the cult of Richey' was based on parasocial interactions with Edwards, we might entertain the possibility that fans would resent portrayals – however fictionalized - that implied that Edwards dismissed his following. Myers's construction of Edwards' first person account creates an atmosphere that readers can recognize as a function of the star's own projections. In *Richard*, Edwards' worldview is inevitably tainted by his own lack of self-love. His pessimism is universalized to create a dismal portrait of fans. The negative portrayal takes a number of forms. First, Myers trawls through various derogatory stereotypes such as the notion of fans as bad poets, clones, teenyboppers, sex fiends (226), nerds and the mentally imbalanced:

Fans whose letters occasionally come with stamp of an institution on the envelope. Letters written in red ink that doesn't look like red in, but something altogether more sinister. Letters that set alarm bells ringing. Letters that make you consider hiring bodyguards for the first time. These form the smallest pile and are, increasingly, almost all addressed to you and you only. The fans for whom the Cult of Richey is just not quite dark enough, Nicky drily observes. (Myers 2010: 227).

One of the book's concerns is the genre association of punk fans specifically with independence from fannish servility and 'matey' masculine abuse: during the band's rise to fame, their audience is presented as a Dionysian mob that is out to attack them rather than enjoy their music: "The people of London clap and smile and don't try to kill you. It's the most applause you've ever had." (Myers 2010: 104) Reporting on another imagined gig he adds: "The room is nothing but murmurs, an airless post-gig void that has just seen forty paying punters throwing plastic cups and spitting at you like it's 1977." (Myers 2010: 154) In Glasgow, the audience is portrayed as rowdy, heckling, out for trouble, while the band fight back (Myers 2010: 143). Fans pretend not to approach Richey or verbally abuse him ("Nice shit-stoppers. Where did you get them, the Spastics shop?") (116). Richard's response to such hostility is to remain estranged from even the kind responses his fans might offer. On one hand, there are fictive fans who believe they 'own' the band: "In Germany, somewhere on the autobahn, a woman rams your bus before blocking two lanes of traffic just to get your autographs." (Myers 2010:247) On the other, fame gives Richey a supremely privileged position on top of the symbolic hierarchy of Manics fan culture. Myers uses the power relations between celebrities and fans to express Richard's pessimistic attitude. Manics fans are sometimes presented as sycophants who lavish praise just for the band turning up (Myers 2010: 220), or are "willing to practically degrade themselves" (Myers 2010: 227). When they offer themselves sexually, Richey feels apart from them ("It's a porn film") (117). Nevertheless, he also knows that he owes them a debt: "It is they who allow you the luxury of this lifestyle and provide occasional respite from the loneliness of it all. But more than

any of that, within them you recognize versions of yourselves.” (Myers 2010: 228). Quoting another lyric Richard explains, “I need a reflection to prove I exist” (Myers 2010:310). Yet he becomes horrified by fans that cut themselves (“because I feel the same way that you do”) or then expect self-mutilation as part of his performance (“Will you cut yourself tonight, Richey... during the show?”) (Myers 2010: 170). Drawing on a song Manics song lyric that contrasts spectators and the crucified, Myers adds in the next sentence, “They want you on the cross and you might just climb up there for them.” (Myers 2010: 307). When Richey’s fans say that the self-harmers who follow him share his pain or want to help him, he replies that they should think about their own lives (Myers 2010: 234). Myers adds that Edwards most respects his anti-fans: “The best missives come from those who hate the band” (Myers 2010: 236).

There is some evidence that Richey was stressed by his stage appearances in front of fans and his anxiety became connected to his alcoholism (see Price 1999: 124). What is much less likely is that he adopted the crass stereotypes of fandom Myers suggested. Surprisingly, though, none of the fan-reviewers actually mentioned the way that Richard portrayed the fan community. Consequently, the book’s portrait of fandom does not seem to be either the grounds upon which *Richard* was challenged nor the strongest reason for its rejection by the fan community. The issue here, of course, is that the portrayal of Edwards’ professional life as part of his existential predicament actually re-inforced the parasocial bond itself, because it allows fans to take pity on their hero. As well as recognizing the benefits of fame, media audiences have a strong understanding it pressures and perils (see, for example, Rojek 2001: 80; Couldry 2007: 357). In *Richard*, Myers was therefore able to use shared knowledge of parasocial relationships to explore stardom. As the two parties miscommunicate, Richey can only perceive his fans’ naïve enthusiasm as an affront to his own jadedness:

One of the fans. I’ve met hundreds over these past few years. Undernourished over-serious and hanging on my every word. Such devotion to or expectation from me can come to no good, but they never seem to believe me when I tell them this. (Myers 2010: 233).

*Richard* therefore offers a kind of ‘permissible’ questioning of the hypothesized excesses of the parasocial bond itself. For Richard (as opposed to his star persona Richey) audiences become a source of stress and grief. The extension of his fame becomes another alibi for his relationship to fans to emerge as tragedy. Encountering one follower, Richard notices that the parasocial relation ends in a let-down: “The sinking realization you get when you meet someone you have only previously ever seen onstage, on television or in the pages of a magazine.” (Myers 2010: 198). The guitarist imagines this fan going back to his friends and saying, “He was an arrogant bastard. Totally up his own arse. He looked at me like I was shit on his shoe. Like Newport wasn't good enough for him anymore. I fucking hate rock stars like that, me” (Myers 2010: 199).

There is a second, more definitive way to test whether Richard was accepted because it contributed to personal attachments developed by Manics fans. If ‘the cult of Richey’ was based purely parasocial interactions, we might expect that responses to the book would reveal the intimately personal, one-to-one, ‘authentic’ nature of fan attachments. Perhaps Manics fans might still be grieving their hero or affronted by a fictionalized account. A strong way to test parasocial interaction theory is by considering whether *Richard* aided fans in their hypothesized

search for closure over Edwards' disappearance. All celebrities are, to an extent, physically separate from the daily lives of their followers. Because a star's death or disappearance makes it impossible for fans to personally meet him or her, it clarifies the celebrity's social status as a lost but shared object, a person reduced to a media image. Talking about the relationship between stars and their fans, the late rock singer Ronny James Dio said, "Without them, we [stars] are nothing. Without us they [the fans] will always be."<sup>6</sup> Dio's dictum highlights a crucial point: because fans come to "know" their stars at a distance, celebrity fandom is premised on a missing object, at least from one perspective. Second, Edwards' demise emphasized this distance. In life he created a spectacle and his disappearance left a kind of void in people's lives. As Stephen Gregson explained in his PhD about performance, which featured Richey as a case study, "without his body being available, there is no authenticating materiality which can attest to the fact that the mediated Edwards was indeed 'real' (unmediated). What this resulted in was a persuasive sense in which Edwards' representation could be envisaged as existing at the 'threshold' between life and death." No obituary ran for Edwards until November 2008, the month that he was legally declared 'presumed dead.' Given such a tragic mystery, on one level *Richard* might have seemed like an act of creative closure. It is relevant here to mention 'psychological autopsy,' a term first adopted in 1958 by Edwin Shneidman and used, first by Coroners then dramatist, to piece together the inner life of the subject in the last few days before he or she departed. While the methodology guiding psychological autopsy is rather varied (Brent 1989: 43-57), the approach has been used to investigate the demise of icons from Marilyn Monroe to Elvis Presley (Ronan 2011). *Richard* was based on the known evidence about Richey's last days: room 516 at the Embassy Hotel (his last room), the Severn Bridge (where his car was found), and various 'sightings.' For reviewer Tim Jonze (2010) in the *Guardian*, the novel worked as a therapeutic insight into Richey's troubled mind. Jonze explained that "from an outsider's perspective the book approaches its subject with sensitivity and a real understanding of the tensions bands have to endure – both internal and external – in order to make it." Telling a story that was impossible to tell, Myers' book did not, however, become read in that way by the most vocal of its readers. When we conducted a research interview with Ben Myers in March 2014 he said, "Closure? I couldn't say. I suspect not. I'm not sure it's that simple."<sup>7</sup>

#### RICHARD AS AN INSTANCE OF TEXTUAL POACHING

As for the writing process it was a case of trying to find the right voice. The novel has two narratives running in tandem – Richey's early life and the rise of the band, then his final few days, told in the present tense. Finding and differentiating between those two voices and then weaving them together so that they were coherent was the big challenge.

Ben Myers (in Roxie 2010b)

Myers explained that he had constructed "a version of the truth" about Edwards.<sup>8</sup> He therefore began to position the book as a tribute: to use fan studies terminology, a form of 'real person fiction' that came from a phase of one fan's semiotic productivity (see, for example, Hellekson and Busse 2006: 13 and Jenkins 1992: 34). The problem with this interpretation is that Myers was a former Manics fan who was now a professional music critic and commercial writer. He described his degree of artistic license to *The Guardian*: "The period details, and the essence of the band, are accurate, but the dialogue exercises artistic license" (Jonze 2010). Jonathan Gibbs explained in *The Independent* that Myers "provides Edwards with an italicised alter ego to goad

him onto self-destruction” (2010). Myers was not just, therefore, collapsing two temporal moments together in the space of the prose narrative. He was also finding a mode of expression for Edward’s personal experience in a way that would portray the inner torment of the young performer. His novel partly used the second person singular voice to narrate Richard’s life with sentences like: “you definitely remember the day when...” (Myers 2010: 4). This device allowed Myers to create a voice that could signify the shift between Richard’s private self and his star persona: “Somewhere out here ‘Richey Manic’ is gestating... Richey Manic begins to encroach upon your day. And you realize that you actually like his company more than your own.” (Myers 2010: 8). Given our knowledge of the Richey Edwards’ story, use of the second person singular voice leads to a sense of anguished self-consciousness, dread and fate: “You weigh six stone” (Myers 2010: 364). The novelization suggested that Richard *became* Richey in order to escape himself. For at least one reviewer, however, the vexed dialogue between Richard’s internal voices was “far from convincing” (Gibbs 2010). Part of the problem with the second-person singular voice in *Richard* was that it read more like pre-ordained celestial injunction than a frustrated personal confession. By using such devices, Myers impersonated Richard Edwards, constructing Richey the rock star as a public mask, an incarnation that ultimately dissatisfied its owner. This section considers the literary strategies that Myers used to develop *Richard* and how, given their mixed reception, his book was seen as an instance of ‘textual poaching’ from beyond Richey’s fan base.

Since Myer’s work rested on his dramatization of Richard’s missing voice, it raised issues of authenticity. What was the ideal position from which to pursue such a project? Intrinsic to the question of recognition and misrecognition is the idea of emotional and critical distance. Commitment to authenticity was not something that Myers himself could, or did, claim. When Myers was asked if he was hurt that Nicky Wire had been critical about his book, he replied, “If I was him I would be skeptical of the book, too; I’m a nobody, an outsider. But Nicky Wire has also said that the band have mythologized rock’n’roll (and themselves) to such an extent that it would be hypocritical of them to put an embargo on this book” (Jonze 2010). By saying “I’m a nobody, an outsider” Myer’s located himself in the place of an outside analyst and rendered his own identity invisible by drawing on the view that only an ‘insider’ has the experiential right to speak about Richey. From this perspective, ultimately, Richey would have been the best person to speak about himself. For fans and reviewers, Myer’s ‘nobody’ status was judged as a lack of literary creativity, verified by the fact that he had not suffered similar mental anguish to Richey and was therefore in no position to discover a truth that might have authenticated his own performance. The author had to draw on shared reference points. He included Richey’s struggle to be taken as authentic by explaining his famous self-cutting incident with Steve Lamacq:

But it’s a quiet time, the NME need something to write about and this fits neatly with their whole Van Gogh / Iggy / Sid self-destruction-as-art lineage. You can’t pretend you didn’t think it would go unnoticed. Of course you can’t. That would be stupid and naive. And a lie. And you’re not a liar. You are many things, but a liar is not one of them. You are for real. (Myers 2010: 159)

On the next page Myers added, “You feel good confirming your commitment in cuts that spell ‘4 REAL’.” (Myers 2010: 155, 360)<sup>9</sup> The same could pledge of authenticity could not apply to the author himself. After all, Myers’ predicament was cemented by his medium: as a novelist, he

could never quite occupy *the same* stratospheric position as the famous but troubled rock star. In an interview with the 'Cult of Richey' fan website he explained:

Yes, I would consider doing a book signing... If I thought that anyone would turn up. I think I would feel strange doing readings, though, because so much of the book is first person and assuming the identity of Richey in some public way might seem too much.<sup>10</sup>

During any such reading, the author would have, in effect, been impersonating of a performer who still had an appeal but no longer had a voice. His natural reluctance to perform a public reading could actually be interpreted, however, as a concern not to fully expose a 'fake autobiography' as an act of *impersonation* - a process of cultural translation that raises issues of verisimilitude, critical distance, mediation and voice. Although Myers created was a literary portrait, not a musical tribute, what this idea highlights is that to assess the value of an act of dramatization does not just require an empathic leap of identification; factors such as the degree of apparent verisimilitude, the medium in which the portrayal appears, and its perspective, can all make a difference. *Richard* challenged its author to produce representation that readers with some knowledge of Richey would understand.

Although Myers declared that he had been a Manics fan, he also, perhaps necessarily, highlighted his distance from Manics fandom as a way to qualify himself as an objective investigator. Its author explained, "The notion that somebody thinks they knew who he was... I mean, I thought I knew Richey, but maybe I didn't." (Jonze 2010) What Myers was also, perhaps, alluding to was that knowledge of celebrity personae emerges from cognitive processes that take texts as their starting point. In the *Guardian* he explained, "Some people have said, 'How can you write a book like this having not known Richey personally?' to which I have responded, 'If I had known Richey Edwards there's no way I could have written it.' I think sometimes it takes an impartial outsider to get to the heart of matters" (Jonze 2010). He added, "I also spoke to lots of people who knew Richey or were there at certain key events. Everyone had a different impression of him, though all spoke fondly of him" (Jonze 2010). In *The Guardian*, Myers located himself first as a historian ("I delved pretty deep to get minor details right") and second as someone aiming to get closer to the heart of Richey's story by contacting those who knew Richey. Even this move was a way to deconstruct the Edwards myth. The author clarified his 'impartial' role by saying:

I got into the Manics in 1991, when I was 15... I'd say I was a pretty committed fan for the next five years or so, though I never subscribed to the fervent levels of devotion associated with the band. I've always been suspicious of the nature of blind loyalty to bands anyway, because loyalty means you have to pretend to like their awful albums too. I can see the Manics' flaws. (Myers in Jonze 2010)

With this statement the author used his own biography to simultaneously affirm his credentials as a fan and his objective distance as a critic. He told one interviewer from the 'A Future in Noise' website, "I almost feel that I did a lot of research by simply being a fan of the band in the early days" (Roxie 2010b). As a 'pretty committed fan' who lacked 'blind loyalty,' Myers may have felt that he could both construct an accurate version Richey's life and empathize with readers from the fan community. Myer's own fandom could therefore be envisaged as a voluntarily evicted space, in some senses, not so much because of any critical distance to his subject matter,

but because of the persona he adopted as a writer. One of the interesting things about the reception of *Richard*, however, was that media audiences have become more sophisticated since Horton and Wohl's initial discussion of parasocial interaction.<sup>11</sup> The concept has become increasingly familiar in the media and has taken root within popular culture itself.<sup>12</sup> Almost everyone talking about the book therefore felt the need to explicitly distance their relationship to fandom as a way to position what they had to say. Some online reviewers aimed to step outside of their own fannish identities:

Although as a reader it has been tricky to distance myself from the heavy Manics listening and related exploration of the group I've done myself, I'd like to think that Richard could stand alone as a work not necessarily requiring knowledge of the band as a pre-requisite to reading. (Roxie 2010)

What is interesting about such statements is they do not raise the issue of fandom as *bias*, but rather of fans as *experts* – the idea that dedicated followers of Richey already know more about him. This begins to suggest a different view to parasocial interaction, one in which learning about a star is a process of piecing together knowledge, of constantly reformulating more and more complex assessments of his or her personal identity. Elsewhere, one of us has argued that biographies cannot deliver a pristine, unmediated truth, because in a sense there is no such true to deliver - only a self-referential series of reports spun around a kernel of whatever was thought to have happened (see Duffett 1999b). *Richard's* frequent focus on parasocial interaction illuminated a gap that continues to characterize star-fan relationships, a gap that was already apparent in Richey's media image. Manics fans appreciate their hero's creativity, but do not claim to "know" the "real" Richey:

When questioned as to whether they would like to meet him [Edwards], the majority of fans I questioned said that they would not because they have a high level of awareness of the chasm between their own personal fantasy image of him and the mediated image of him and him as an actual person: "It'd ruin my perception of him, which I'm aware is completely constructed. What he is like as a real person isn't important to me, because that's not what I know of him." (Gavin) (Skirvin 2000)

This statement opens up a completely different way to read *Richard* that transcends the assumptions of parasocial interaction - a term that tends to reduce the complex textual constellations that define celebrity images to relatively simplistic notions of 'authentic' and singular personal identity.

As Myers outlined in his book, Richey Edwards was an ambivalent but self-conscious agent in the construction of his own image and legend (see Roxie 2010). His 'original' performance was based on the elegant appropriation literary sources. Edwards' shortcomings as a guitar player were unimportant to the punk and post-punk fans that understood that musicianship was not the only way for a person to make a creative contribution to the project of their group.<sup>13</sup> Richey's use of literary quotation to define his own stance and personality was characteristically interesting and introvert. His identity was formed in the aftermath of literary canonization; Edwards was therefore a kind of sampler in the world of prose, quoting others to locate himself. His bricolaging arguably emerged from a postmodern, postpunk sensibility which use literary references could achieve significant kudos. As Helen Davies (2001: 306) explained,

“When the Manic Street Preachers, an all-male band, quote directly from Philip Larkin in both their lyrics and on their album sleeves, this is taken as a sign of their high levels of intelligence and education.” By the advent of the *Holy Bible* album, literary quotation had become central to the expression of Richey’s dark and nihilistic attitude.<sup>14</sup> An interest in literature represented one way for fans to develop and share their affective bonds in memory of Richey. Without Edwards’ input, the Manics turned into what one critic called a “meat and spuds” rock band, one less vibrant with intellectual intrigue.<sup>15</sup> Bassist Nicky Wire saw fans of *The Holy Bible* as “dedicated to the whole lifestyle, the literary aspects, the film aspects, the whole package really. It’s not just liking the music” (Price 1999:59).

In relation to self-identity, the use of quotation has an inherent ambiguity, because it can alternately be seen as the intelligent exposure of a projected attitude, or a carapace: a form of hiding by covering yourself over with the words of others. Defining his style like a suit made from the garments of others, Edwards became a kind of literary flaneur. At times, for Myers, this camouflaging is used to signify Richey’s precarious self-esteem: “I feel like I am made of the thinnest paper, I feel hollow, like a creature has crawled out of me and I am what is left behind.” (Myers 2010: 190) In this context, *Richard* locates fame as a form of hiding and self-denial, not least because it makes Richey “impervious to criticism” (Myers 2010:241). In *Richard*’s miserable world, fame is redundancy: “I have nothing to say. Nothing. I crave anonymity, peace. I want to be absolved of all responsibility for other people’s feelings. I don’t want any of this.” (Myers 2010: 198). Yet, of course, fans thought that for the span of his career, Edwards *did* have something to say.

*Richard* maintained the process of literary quotation within the remit set by Edwards. According to reviewer Johnathan Gibbs in the *Independent*, “Myers gives [Manics biographer Simon] Price a special credit in a bibliography that also runs to the likes of Yukio Mishima, Albert Camus and Guy Debord – all inspirations for Edwards himself.” (2010) Indeed, at one point we find Myers quoting Richey quoting Camus, saying, “What is called a reason for living is also a reason for dying” (Myers 2010: 92). Later Richey adds literary quotes to the set list when his band plays their final show as a four piece at the Astoria in London (Myers: 385). Quotation became a means by which Ben Myers could inhabit Richey’s persona and connect with fans. Myers told the NME, “A lot has been written about Richey Edwards, but I thought a fictional setting would be a better medium to explore his personality, especially because he was a particularly literate person who injected a wealth of literary influences into a fairly staid British rock scene that was lacking any true iconoclastic voices at the time.”<sup>16</sup> He used his own interest in literature as a way to structure his empathy for Richey and the band. To authenticate the book, Myers explained to fans:

I didn’t speak to any of the band or Richey’s family while writing the book... I do, however, have quite a few friends who knew Richey pretty well. Mutual friends, I think you could call them: people who worked with him in the music business... None of these fall under the archetypal ‘Richey Manic fan’ banner either – and some of them I only discovered knew him in passing. So I’d be talking to a friend on the phone and when I told them what I was working on they said, “Oh, Richey? Yeah, I knew him well...”<sup>17</sup>

The final quotation here is interesting because it reads like the famous soliloquy from Act five of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, where two grave diggers exhume a skull while preparing to bury Ophelia. Upon seeing it the young prince Hamlet nostalgically remembers his friend the jester: “Alas,

poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio.” The irony could not have been lost on Myers, who prefaced his chapters with quotes from Hamlet. One fan located this practice as a homage to Richey:

Mention of Richey and Shakespeare in the same sentence likely conjures up this interview quote from Edwards in the minds of Manics fans: “When I was 13, I did a Shakespeare project that was 859 pages long. Everyone else did six!” (Roxie 2010).

Myers’ use of Shakespeare is more ambiguous than just being a kind of in-joke for fans, however. If his first use of a Hamlet quote was simply to mythologize Edwards as an individual (2010: 2), its continued iteration links his novel to the theme of literature and quotation. In the *Guardian*, Myers defined his appreciation in terms of cultural capital by saying, “I think his [Richey’s] intellectual interests and his continued influence warranted a literary treatment... I value a lot of what they said as much as I value the degree I did in English literature” (Jonze 2010). Myers thought that the mediation of his work as prose was something that would allow him to acquit himself:

I completely respect and understand how upsetting a book about a real person can be, though the concept rather than the content is perhaps the controversial aspect of Richard. But it is not setting any literary precedents. Half of Shakespeare’s output took real people as starting points and then dramatized their lives. Writers such as Norman Mailer or Truman Capote have done it in the true crime genre, so have hundreds of film makers. Mailer can’t have possibly known what was going on in Gary Gilmore’s head, but that didn’t make *The Executioner’s Song* any less valid. (in Jonze 2010)

To this a comment poster exclaimed, “Christ, I thought he was bigging himself up by comparing himself to David Peace, but now I see he’s putting himself at the end of a line including Shakespeare and Dostoevsky! What about Virgil, Dante and Tolstoy Ben? Those not good enough for you?” (Jonze 2010). Another called CuthbertB put it succinctly, “Pseuds corner beckons, methinks.” Myers’ use of Hamlet is important here because the mediated testimonials of fans enact a public culture of loss that has helped to keep Richey’s image in circulation:

Of course, in the light of Edwards’ disappearance, the media has facilitated a greater degree of ‘interactivity’ which ensures an even deeper tie to the spectacle in the form of the discursive ‘sites’ where stories of ‘performed’ experience can be, and are, posited. At the same time, by circulating the media images Edwards left behind, these ‘sites’ are critical in perpetuating these images’ iconic power, thereby offering the potential for future fantasies to be created. (Steven Gregson 2005: 153)

In Hamlet grief for a departed loved one is mingled with moments of personal madness as their ghost is hallucinated. Mentioning the play may have been designed as a way for Myers to cement his own literary credentials, but it also framed the parasocial bond as hallucinatory, an insane fabrication. Despite his claims to rescue and interpret Richey’s story, the book therefore locates it *as myth*. Fans and reviewers’ issues with Myers’ style was that the author had been posturing in his use of literary references. They implied that *Richard* read as bad poetry in places, in a sense: Hamlet reduced to a series of sound bites.<sup>18</sup> What was interesting was that nobody who reviewed *Richard* registered any parallel between Myer’s use of quotation and any processes of adaptation inherent in *Edwards’ own* art. According to lead singer James Dean Bradfield:

A song like *Yes* is an observation on other people's lives and also he blurred the distinction between other people's lives and his own. And I can remember thinking: How am I supposed to get in the mindset of some of the people he's writing about and also the way he's feeling right now?<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, Myers' work was dismissed by fans and critics not because he had dramatically impersonated Edwards, but because his prose did not seem faithful enough to the original its inspiration.

Given the disjuncture between Myer's novel and fans' expectations of such a portrayal, it could be argued that he was, in a sense - to use Henry Jenkins' term - a 'textual poacher.' Just over thirty years after Horton and Wohl's piece, Jenkins developed this term to challenge the pessimistic popular orthodoxy about media fandom:

Fandom is a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, and so on) to pry open a space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations; fandom is a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a way that serves different interests... the fans often cast themselves not as poachers but as loyalists, rescuing elements of the primary text...

Jenkins (2006b: 40-41)

Jenkins' textual poaching metaphor, which was developed in relation to telefantasy fandom (not popular music portrayals), is now a relatively entrenched reference point in fan studies. Rather than dismissing readers as socially inept, it elevates their tendency to "queer" the text as part of everyday engagement. It assumes that media representations are both composite and contested. Readers bring their own unexpected agenda and take away their own meanings. In this context, the 'misrecognition' of famous people - who are first known, in effect, through the prism of various media texts - is something to be positively examined rather than summarily dismissed. The star's image becomes a social resource that facilitates a variety of different readings perhaps only confined by the contours of myth and the shared values of community.

*Richard's* problem was not getting too close to its subject, but failing to fully assume the register of his voice.<sup>20</sup> Myers' attention to highbrow sources frequently therefore became the focus of critique: "In the end, it's this sense of literary ambition that damns the book. You can't imagine Richey giving it the time of day." (Gibbs 2010) In that sense, it could be argued that *Richard* disturbed the protocols that governed how one star's image was appreciated. In that sense Myers was a 'textual poacher' on the margins of the fan community who traversed the space of myth that the fans shared in a way that they did not appreciate. To quote Henry Jenkins writing analogously about *Star Trek* fandom:

Fans respect the original texts yet fear that their conceptions of the characters and concepts may be jeopardized by those who wish to exploit them for easy profits... The ideology of fandom involves a commitment to some degree of conformity to the original program materials, as well as a perceived right to evaluate the legitimacy of any use of those materials, either by textual producers or textual consumers. (2006: 55)

To those who disapproved of what he was doing, Myers was an interloper traversing the legend of Richey Manic, a textual poacher of the wrong sort. When we asked him about this perception, he agreed: “I *was* a textual poacher trespassing on their various versions of Richey by offering / creating my own.” He added:

All I asked at the time is that people read it, and then offered an opinion. When they did, the critical responses ran right across the board, from people who really seemed to understand what it was I was trying to do – or at least saw the book in the context of literature rather than biography – to those who despised me on principal. I thought all responses were valid.<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, according to celebrity theorist Chris Rojek (2001: 19): “Strictly speaking, the public faces that celebrities construct do not belong to them, since they only possess validity if the public confirms them.” This article has used this critical response to *Richard* as an entry point to examine the cultural politics of ‘faked autobiography’ as a mode of celebrity portrayal that troubles the relationship between media mythology and music fandom. Edwards’ tragic personal descent inspired media representations that have secured the ascent of his myth. Although *Richard* may not have been the first time Richey had appeared in fiction, it was the first time he been given the lead role. To Tim Jonze in the Guardian, Myers said, “I actually see *Richard* as flattering; no one ever spent two years writing a novel about Shed Seven” (2010). *Richard* was an ambiguous intervention into the Edwards phenomenon that therefore marked its coming of age: “You wanted to be the tortured, detached artist and now you are.” (Myers 2010: 149) If Ben Myers was an interloper, his book and its controversy helped people to think again about Richey’s legend. In an interview with ‘A Future in Noise’, Myers explained his motive for writing: “I felt as if his story was getting lost within the myth that seems to have arisen in his absence” (Roxie 2010b). He went on to explain that the idea of the troubled, isolated rocker was incongruous with the fact that Richey sometimes enjoyed himself, chatted up girls and even moon walked drunk across a bar in Portugal. Elsewhere he noted that Richey had attended an East 17 concert just before his disappearance. In battling with what he saw as mythic misconceptions, however, Myers was, ultimately, helping to extend the legend of Richey the rock star.

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<sup>1</sup> A note on nomenclature: I am aware that Richey changed his real name to Richard James in his last few months of his time with the Manics, That change – which could be read as hastening his disappearance - is set aside in this piece. Here “Richey Edwards” refers to the real person (and sometimes, following Ben Myers, I use “Richey” for his stage persona). *Richard* refers to Myers’ novel and “Richard” to the character in the novel who speaks (albeit with a divided inner voice) as the “real” Richey. I have avoided the nickname that the press bestowed on Edwards – “Richey Manic” – as it does not contribute anything new to the argument. For an academic discussion of the split between the private and public self see Rojek (2001: 11).

<sup>2</sup> See David Pattie (1999) for more detail of the encounter.

<sup>3</sup> When the rest of the band were interviewed for the DVD of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of their *Holy Bible* album, Bradfield and Wire said that around three quarters of the album had lyrics written by Richey.

<sup>4</sup> This comment can be found online following Myers’ interview with the Times (Jonze 2010).

<sup>5</sup> A comment that followed on the same online page as Myers’ interview with the Times (Jonze 2010).

<sup>6</sup> This quote is taken from the DVD of Dick Caruthers’s 2006 documentary *Heavy Metal: Louder Than Life*.

<sup>7</sup> ‘An Interview with ‘Richard’ author Ben Myers’ can be found at: <http://pop-music-research.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/an-interview-with-richard-author-ben.html>

<sup>8</sup> See ‘Novel about Manic Street Preachers’ Richey Edwards to be released,’ available online: <http://www.nme.com/news/manic-street-preachers/52338> (retrieved 11/01/11).

<sup>9</sup> Academics have seen it as a strange moment of performed authentication too: “It is both a private act, a moment of bizarre intimacy between James and Lamacq; but it has a strongly public element to it - it is, after all the most visible sign possible that the Manics’ public image was an authentic one, and it is hard to imagine any other statement carrying the same emotional impact of James’ desperate, last-ditch assertion of authenticity” (Pattie 1999).

<sup>10</sup> From ‘Manics Fans Interview Ben Myers (part 1)’ available online: <http://cultofrichey.com/2010/08/15/manics-fans-interview-ben-myers-part-i/> (retrived 2/3/11).

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<sup>11</sup> Even when they break down the barrier between themselves and their audiences, popular performers are still seen as socially important people who do not have the time for all their followers. Recent updates to parasocial interaction theory have stressed that Horton and Wohl's work needs more elaboration (see Giles 2002; Stever 2009). The most dedicated fans also engage in staged and unstaged real life encounters with celebrities on a basis that is more frequent than imagined. They also suggest that fans are highly cognizant of the various social imbalances in their interactions with celebrities and carefully tailor their behaviour in real life (see Ferris and Harris 2011: xii). Finally, I have argued that all relationships are to some extent parasocial in so far that we all compile varying degrees of knowledge about each other in our heads. If every individual is, to us, an idea, then the notion of an absolute difference between mediated relationships and everyday ones is falsification (Duffett 1999a: 111).

<sup>12</sup> A good example of this is Adrian Grenier's 2010 feature documentary *Teenage Papparazo*, in which the cast of the USA TV series *Entourage* discuss parasocial interactions with their fans.

<sup>13</sup> If his version of the Sex Pistols story is to be believed, Malcolm McLaren showed that a non-musician could have significant creative input. To capitalize on his creative capabilities McLaren then emerged as a musical auteur in his own right.

<sup>14</sup> Ironically, Richey's quotation approach was the very reason Steve Lamacq "had accused them of traducing the spirit of the music, of shamelessly mining its history for their music and attitude, and of committing the ultimate crime of inauthenticity" (Pattie 1999: online). Lamacq's tired rockist ethos could be read as advocating a particular way of expressing identity (being who you are) when Richey instead *performed* his identity, in an alienated way, through quotation.

<sup>15</sup> James Dean Bradfield's 2009 collaboration with mainstream show singer Shirley Bassey could be read as an indication of the group's loss of edge.

<sup>16</sup> From 'Novel about Manic Street Preachers' Richey Edwards to be released,' available online: <http://www.nme.com/news/manic-street-preachers/52338> (retrieved 11/01/11).

<sup>17</sup> From 'Manics Fans Interview Ben Myers (part 1)' available online: <http://cultofrichey.com/2010/08/15/manics-fans-interview-ben-myers-part-i/> (retrived 2/3/11).

<sup>18</sup> An example of Myers' unfortunate literary heavy handedness: "You know what. Death. Departure. Dissolution. Demise. Extinction. Passing. Parting. Whatever you want to call it. Self-slaughter. Seppuku. Oblivion. Quietus. Curtains." (246) From quote this alone it is easy to see why commentators thought he lacked Richey's sensitivity and eloquence.

<sup>19</sup> Bradfield was interviewed by Keith Cameron for the DVD of *The Holy Bible's* 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition in 2004.

<sup>20</sup> This makes the reception of *Richard* similar to a film biopic, where fans and critics usually base their discussions on issues of verisimilitude.

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<sup>21</sup> ‘An Interview with ‘Richard’ author Ben Myers’ can be found at: <http://pop-music-research.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/an-interview-with-richard-author-ben.html>