

# Self, Song, Other:

## Identity at play in song

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**Submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy**

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This work is entirely original and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

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**Ethics statement:** This research project does not involve research participants. As such, on advice from the Macquarie University Ethics Committee, no ethics clearance has been deemed necessary.

52,856 words

**Acknowledgments:** Special thanks to Julian Knowles, Carl Barât, and Liam McKahey for their support, thinking, passion and creativity.

## Abstract

This is a practitioner-based enquiry into the way original songwriting artists construct their public identity through songs. It views original songs as vehicles that introduce and sustain public impressions of original artists, and seeks to elicit the means by which songs perform this function. Based upon a portfolio of three commercial albums written and produced by the researcher, the thesis develops a model with which to anatomize those song variables with bearing on the public impression of the original artist. These high-profile projects provide the sites from which insights into the inner workings of creative practice emerge. Practitioner based enquiry places the professional in immersive situations, mobilising experiential knowledge to hone observational data. This methodology deploys the analytical autoethnography method for its ability to document professional situations so as to transform lived experience into theory with utility for both songwriters and scholars. Observational data witness key variables emerging in the constructions of identity within portfolio songs, and analysis is then structured by the principles of optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991). This is the social identity theory that suggests individuals make social choices seeking a balance between drives to assimilate and drives to differentiate. This theory has also been adapted and utilised by product designers balancing typicality and novelty in consumer products. Optimal distinctiveness theory is adopted here to underpin a conceptual framework for understanding aspects of similarity and difference active in song, as well as assimilation and distinction in relation to peers, audience and gatekeepers. A model emerges of a range of creative choices negotiated by original artists seeking to communicate distinctive identities through songs in the Pop Rock genre. UK singer Carl Barat, and torch song balladeers CousteauX both achieved levels of prominence sufficient for industrially sourced data to triangulate both process observation and portfolio outcomes.

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## Chapter One: Introduction and Thesis Outline

### 1.1 Introduction and research rationale

Questions of identity are central to the strategies of any original artist attempting to establish or maintain a presence in the popular music marketplace. I am a university educator who teaches aspiring young artists, and this study arose from a desire to inform pedagogical practice. What follows consolidates thirty years of experience as a professional and semi-professional songwriter, and aspires to build upon tacit knowledge through the application of systematic enquiry. My pedagogical focus is on original performers and the development of their public-facing identities. Motivation for this research arose through observations of educational practice whereby songwriting teachers would conceptually remove the song from its performer, effecting a conceptual separation of song and singer convenient for facilitating theoretical song study. However, approaches such as these, by which songs are considered in a manner removed from the public impression of performer, are at odds with my professional experience. Instead, my practice has observed successful original artists incubating a song's correspondence with salient characteristics of their unique identity. In a competitive bid for favourable market share, songs are multi-media amalgams that sum together assets constituting an artist's public profile. Experience indicates to me that a distinctiveness is sought so that an artist might stand out from competitors. Yet this distinctiveness is rarely radical or revolutionary; more often an artist will emerge from, and possibly refer to, a sub-culture, genre, sub-genre or movement. I intend to explore the inside workings of the songwriting process for scholars as I specifically examine the way artist identity is projected through original songs. What follows aims to generate a theoretical framework that may permit generalization within, at least, the Pop Rock genre<sup>1</sup> of popular music. In addressing this aim, I ask the specific questions:

- 1) What variables do songwriting artists deploy when constructing public-facing identity in original songs?*
- 2) How might we understand the way in which original artist identity interacts with the market ecology of popular music?*

These lines of enquiry have the potential to emerge with two dimensions of identity. The

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by AllMusic.com (2019)

first isolates those functioning elements within popular songs that construct performer identity. The second structures a view of song material in its relationship with the socio-cultural interactions of an original artist's public identity. Conversations about identity at play in song have the potential to increase the effectiveness of students and songwriters in their creative and marketing choices, as well as contributing to scholarly conversation in the field. As the literature review demonstrates, creative songwriter-orientated academic studies are rare, and there seems to exist a significant gap in the literature dealing with original song artistry. On the one hand, discussions of identity and popular music are substantial, but these tend to be sociologies or musicologies of reception. Song-craft instructional manuals are also plentiful, but these repeat an abstracted disconnect between song and performer identity. Practicing songwriters are only just beginning to inform scholarly discourse; yet a lacuna still persists, particularly within the study of the creative processes affecting songwriting's impact on identity and marketing. This thesis is in part inspired by Negus and Astor's (2015) call for working songwriters to develop new languages with which to describe songwriting from a creator's perspective.

In designing an approach with which to address this gap in knowledge, some methodological challenges are posed, because insights into this process must necessarily be obtained through investigations of professional songwriting processes in all their complexity. This requires a practitioner to act as a participant and research instrument in order to deploy a songwriter's tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1967), knowing-in-action (Schön, 1991), or habitus (Bourdieu, 1996). These are intuitions accumulated over the course of a career, and provide valuable tools with which to deepen systematic enquiry. To this end, I have chosen to draw upon the practitioner-based enquiry (Murray and Lawrence, 2013) methodological approach designed to research professional situations. Through this approach, a portfolio of songs, their working notes, critical reviews and journalistic responses together comprise an evidence base for analysis, as well as exemplifying core concepts in action. In adopting this approach, access is provided to the inner workings of the songwriting process situated within commercial projects with some impact, and valuable materials become available for analysis and deployment within the argument.

## **1.2 Thesis overview**

This research is presented through a portfolio of eighteen songs written, performed and/or produced by the researcher across three commercial album releases. These songs provide sites from which to observe creative choices with direct bearing on public-facing impressions of identity. Analysis of identifying variables proceeds in a manner triangulated



by third-party critical responses, underpinned by a conceptual framework provided by 'optimal distinctiveness theory' (Brewer, 1991). This theory predicts that effective artist identity will have achieved a balance of familiar and novel qualities, and is demonstrated as a neutral yet nuanced tool with which to structure original song analysis. Portfolio songs were released by commercial artists Carl Barât (2010, 2015) and CousteauX (2017). These projects serve as a platform from which to examine principles at play across two distinct professional contexts, specifically: writing for other identities, and writing for one's own project. This allows for a point of comparison to see if differences arise from the two creative contexts. It also allows for a modest test of generalizability in the principles that survive this shift of context.

### **1.2.1 Research scope**

Focused primarily on songs and their constructions, this project is designed to inform songwriting discourse and practice. Yet contemporary popular music identities are increasingly comprised of multiple impressions within multi-media, multi-modal creative artefacts. The focus of this enquiry would become too broad were it to include detailed analysis of videos, artist interviews, promotional clips, concert performances, memes, vines, etc – all of which arguably impact upon public identity. Whilst six portfolio songs have videos on YouTube, informed critical responses to these are rare. And so the triangulation vital to this research by tastemakers and critics is, on the subject of YouTube videos related to the albums, insufficiently rigorous. Granted, moving picture's relationship to song is an increasingly powerful part of contemporary meaning making, and one worthy of its own study. Yet it is also one in which the songwriter's power to drive the creativity is often limited. On the other hand, album artwork and album promotional photos included in the study below, are present because they impact directly on the research questions within the creative song-production side of the process. These signify intent and afford a level of control in respect of identity. This does not come without complexity, as real-world commercial projects necessarily entail a range of industry actors all of whom exert influence on the product. For this reason, a variety of projects is used in the portfolio, ranging from those with a high level of songwriter/artist control, to those with larger, more diffuse teams involved in decision making.

Because professional songwriting practice necessarily involves a level of genre specificity, there are natural restrictions to the degree to which findings may be generalized outside of the genre fields of the projects under examination. The aim of this research is to develop a range of insights and a solid conceptual model that relate to the Pop Rock and Alternative

Rock sub-genres to which the portfolio acts belong, whilst suggesting an approach that might later be tailored to the cultural specificities of other genres. However, applicability to the broad Alternative Rock sub-genre is the only claim this thesis can make, and it accepts that genres such as Metal, Hip-Hop, EDM and R&B are likely to require adaptations to these findings as appropriate to their cultures.

In order to examine this songwriting context with clarity, a set of basic working assumptions must first be established. Popular music is a vast and diverse field, making it necessary to let explicit underlying assumptions define the focus of this research. This is in order to delimit the scope of this study and also to clarify the field of practice in which the investigations are taking place. The working assumptions that underpin this thesis are:

*a) Original popular music artists create commercial commodities*

Because Western popular music operates within the structures of market capitalism, the careers of original songwriting artists require substantive commercial transactions in order to professionalize their work. These commercial transactions commonly take the form of streaming, vinyl, CDs, DVDs, concert ticket sales, books, clothing, and multi-media synchronization. In defining musicians as suppliers of commercial artifacts, we need also accept there are many hobbyists, amateur or semi-professional musicians at work in the same field, each working at various levels of what might be seen to be a professionalization spectrum. We must assume with some certainty that the majority of practitioners are likely to aspire to a full-time career in original song, and their work can be seen to exist on a spectrum of impact, from the obscure through to the commercially prosperous. This thesis works on an assumption that that the original artist seeks to generate income, industry or market engagement in order to professionalize their craft. The aim of this research then is to open out the conversation into the creative choices an artist is able to deploy in pursuit of this goal.

*b) Original popular music artists market themselves*

Original artists are subject to the same conditions as any other product category in attempting to establish market share. The original songwriting act seeks visibility, impact, 'brand' recognition and consumer loyalty, and s/he is dependent to a substantial degree upon media exposure for repeat market impressions. The original artist must generate an attractive proposition to which audiences must respond by investing in merchandise, concerts, and streams. The contemporary original artist is an identity engaged in competition for survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's crowded *economics of attention* (Lanham,

2006, p.42), where consumers are saturated with choices and options, though limited in the time available to appreciate music. Successful marketing is therefore paramount in order for visibility, engagement and professionalization to occur. For these reasons, this thesis can be seen as a study into how original artists design and project themselves as products.

*c) Original popular music artists are categorized by genre and style*

Genre and style define music taxonomies in most significant physical, online shops and streaming services such as iTunes, Spotify, Deezer, Amazon and physical stores such as HMV and Fnac. Similarly, print and online music discourse, live venues and broadcast channels are invariably defined by differentiations in genre and style. Electronic Dance Music, Metal, Folk, Hip-Hop, R&B, Pop, Rock and Alternative genres (Apple Music, 2019), all have their own cultures and discourses reflected in genre and sub-genre categories at the point-of-sale. By default, the consumer experience is channelized so an original artist will likely find him/herself defined as a stylistic variation of sub-genre within a genre inhabiting a specific section of the popular music marketplace.

### **1.2.2 Chapter summaries**

In order to explore artist identity as constructed in song, the chapters below are organized as follows:

#### **1.2.2.1 Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Scholarly discourse around songwriting and identity is surveyed initially to demonstrate that what exists currently is largely reception-based sociology or reception-based musicology that each fails to account for those creative songwriting choices with bearing on identity. Song-orientated academic studies have, to a respectable degree, paved the way for considerations of identity, many of which this project seeks to repurpose. These broadly conform to two traditions. First there are musicologists who analyze and critique songs and creative outputs for their musical, literary, performance and production qualities. Then are sociologists studying popular songs for the way they mediate and inform identity, cultures and behaviors. Idiolect, personage and becoming are closely related alternatives to problematic concepts of authenticity and originality, and these are the gateway concepts this thesis ties into its model. Scholars discuss how identity is perceived, yet the realities of songwriting practice are rarely methodically unpacked. 'Prosumer' instructional publications such as *Murphy's laws of songwriting* (Murphy, 2013) or *Six secrets of songwriting success*. Blume (2004) amongst others, address technique, although their generic, normative assumptions fail to acknowledge the original artist's

challenge to project their identity through their songs. Songwriting has accumulated a substantial body of literature, although this literature is largely silent on song's correspondences with the marketing of original artist identity.

#### **1.2.2.2 Chapter Three: Methodology**

To understand original songwriting in a manner relevant to songwriters, a constructionist epistemological position is taken whereby knowledge is understood as being socially and culturally constructed. An argument is made for practitioner-based enquiry (Regan, Nesbitt and McIntyre, 2011; Murray and Lawrence, 2013), which utilizes autoethnographic methods to examine professional participatory contexts. In these situations, the researcher is privileged with access to agency and outcome both as insider songwriter and outsider researcher. Analytical autoethnography is a branch of autoethnography that lends rigor because it emphasizes analysis and theoretical development. For its emphasis on epiphany and reflexive insight, analytical autoethnography is argued as an appropriate and effective method with which to transform lived creative experience into theory. Affirming legitimacy and validity through third-party data from outside the project, this analytical approach to autoethnography avoids the solipsistic pitfalls of autoethnography by correlating observation with external industrial data.

#### **1.2.2.3 Chapter Four: Conceptual Framework**

Identity is a word-concept loaded with problematic, often tendentious connotations. It can simultaneously imply race, nationality, region, religion, sexuality, age, class, wealth, education, politics, taste, self, multiple selves, identity politics, fan identity, authenticity, originality and more. Given the slippage in the use of this term, I have provided a definition in the glossary of key terms (see Section 1.3 below) that will stabilize it for the purposes of this thesis. Because this study is interested in constructions of identity evident in song, the need arises for an analytical model that eschews the essentialist and/or ideological concepts mentioned above. Marilyn Brewer's optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) (1991), and its application in sociology, industrial design, consumer psychology and marketing, is explored in order to develop its utility as a principle structuring the anatomy of original songs. This theory is argued as providing a robust conceptual framework with which to analyze songs as a negotiation of the familiar and the new: a dynamic seeking both assimilation as product category, and distinctiveness as brand identity. Socio-cultural dimensions of optimal distinctiveness are also explored as defined by Brewer's social theories, as they model of the drive for optimal self-representations on levels of personal, interpersonal and collective identities. This structure is explored for its applicability in

apprehending original artist identity seeking optimality in relation to peers, gatekeepers and audiences.

#### **1.2.2.4 Chapter Five: Portfolio**

This chapter introduces the portfolio materials for analysis. It first offers a view of a large-scale project with multiple industry actors involved in the creative process. In this project I was employed as a songwriter for an iconic UK popular music figure embarking upon an experiment to transform his public identity. This perspective observes practitioner songwriting responding to two briefs. Barât's project enjoyed substantial mainstream success whilst simultaneously creating a dissonance with his core sub-culture audience. Later, a follow-up album sought to correct this identity shift. This chapter first explores an experiment that initially achieved conflicting results in which questions of identity were played out. The chapter then documents subsequent moves to reconfigure the project by deploying gestures more closely aligned to Barât's established public profile. This also provides the thesis with insight into negotiations of legacy and identity. The chapter deals with design briefs, song outcomes, and reactions from journalists and pundits, thereby illustrating the challenges facing artists who wish to transform existing public profiles.

Following chronologically, the second project offers a contrasting creative and production model to the first project. It explores a performance vehicle for which I am the sole songwriter, producer and primary instrumentalist. After a twelve-year break, this project sought to establish continuity with its own back catalogue whilst extending the project's aesthetic range. This project witnesses me writing, performing and producing songs tailored to my singer's performative voice in constructions of a synergetic band identity. This particular form of band identity represents an amalgam of both singer and songwriter/instrumentalist, and is a model familiar to music fans in the composite writer/singer identity collaborations of The Who, Oasis and others. This chapter witnesses my original project as we accommodate our established audience with familiar aesthetics whilst exploring evolutionary stylistic adaptations.

#### **1.2.2.5 Chapter Six: Analysis – dimensions of similarity**

From analytical autoethnographic observations of portfolio songwriting processes, salient concepts emerged from observations noting key inflection points in the creative processes that affect the artist's outward facing impression. Because they have a direct bearing on configurations of identity, these concepts are explored as a series of choices navigated by original artists in songwriting practice. This and the next chapter engage theoretical

support for these key concepts, from a combination of musical and literary sources. Working with these identifying variables, portfolio songs are tested against third-party critical responses, and correlations between identifying variables and third-party data are established. As journalists and critics seek to explain and contextualise the materials to their readers and subscribers, they reveal through-lines to the variables observed in the songwriting process. This chapter explores those variables within original songs judged by the researcher as communicating those elements of belonging, assimilation and category inclusion evident in song-based identity.

#### ***1.2.2.6 Chapter Seven: Analysis – dimensions of difference***

As ODT demands, in tandem with dimensions of similarity, vital aspects of difference will likely also be present. Optimal distinctiveness theory would predict that optimality is sought whereby the product will strive to counterbalance similarity by communicating unique, distinctive and attractive characteristics. Thus, dimensions of difference work in creative tension to strike equilibrium with dimensions of similarity. In this chapter, identifying variables observed inflecting distinctiveness are explored for the way they communicate unique, defining and potentially compelling facets of an artist in song.

#### ***1.2.2.7 Chapter Eight: Synthesis of ideas***

Here a conceptual model is presented in which principles emerging from practice and its reception are anatomized within the conceptual framework of optimal distinctiveness theory. In so doing, the model proposes a view of songwriting that may contribute to broader scholarship. Chapter Six and Seven's intra-song elements of the portfolio are proposed as conforming to ODT's predictions, proposing a view of co-functioning song elements seeking equilibrium. Then an ecological model witnesses a macro view of performer identity structured by an expanded socio-economic adaption of optimal distinctiveness theory. This develops a view of the performer seeking optimality on three inter-subjective levels: the personal, the interpersonal and the collective. The two models that emerged from practice are proposed as working together within a combined, holistic system. This is the contribution to the field with the potential to endure long after the portfolio's songs are forgotten.

#### ***1.2.2.8 Chapter Nine: Conclusion***

From professional opportunity to serviceable theory, this autoethnographic journey is reviewed. An argument that optimal distinctiveness structures original song and original artist identity is made with a view that successful musicians have long been instinctively aware of these principles. Copycat acts and sound-alike songs rarely establish substantial

careers in the same way that extreme fringe acts, with exception, will struggle to do commercial business. The internal song anatomy of similarity and difference, observed in practice and then structured with a view to optimality is reviewed. Then the external socio-economic dimensions of self-representation are reviewed as a reminder that like human individuals seeking optimality in social groups, similarly original artists careers are defined by the way their interactions with peers, gatekeepers and audience.

### 1.3 Glossary of terms

The following terms are used throughout the thesis, and should be understood as below:

**Identity** – The public impression of an original artist formed mostly from the performer's original songs and associated images. Accepting that identity is a broad term, this thesis is exclusively interested in the way songs constitute a public's impression of an artist. Other aspects of public identity, such as promotions, interviews and videos, are understood as closely related, though not the specific facet of identity under investigation. This is a songwriter's study into identity at play in song.

**Idiolect** – Idiolect shall be understood to be the combination of traits unique to an original artist: the sum of identifying variables that differentiates an artist from others. This concept is explored further in Chapter Two.

**Original artist** – An artist who is presented as a songwriter or co-writer to the public and whose career is defined to a significant degree by their original song outputs.

**Song** – Words and music combined for vocal performance. In popular music this primary text is performed by a singing artist and expanded upon through arrangement and production to create mastered recordings. For the purposes of this thesis, this definition does not include instrumental music.

**Track** – The mastered recording of the arrangement and performance of an original song.

**Distinctiveness** – Qualities of identity that differentiate original artists from their market competitors.

**Genre** – Defining performance, production and linguistic expectations of a sub-section of popular music, e.g. Metal, Chart, R&B, Pop Rock, Country, Hip-Hop.

**Sub-Genre** – Sub-division in genre that allow for aficionado variation (e.g. Death Metal).

**Style** – Nested within Genre and Sub-Genre, stylistic qualities defining an original artist's particular aesthetic (e.g. Screamo, Djent).

**Identifying variables** – Choices negotiated in the act of song creation and observed constructing constituent parts of artistic identity in original songs.

**Gatekeepers** – These are ‘field’ agents active within Bourdieu’s (1977) and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) models of cultural production. The gatekeeper metaphor describes the filtering and selection role performed by journalists, producers, editors, A&R<sup>2</sup> managers, individuals and organizations in selecting cultural items for inclusion within broader popular music culture.

**Belt voice** – This is the high end of the chest resonating part of the human voice. Sometimes known as ‘yell register’ it is a high-performance version of the speaking voice.

**Song character** – a character framed by the lyric such that the singer needs to act out the role of another identity within the song.

**Torch-songs** – Sad and melancholy songs of loss and unrequited love, often set to jazz-influenced harmonic constructions.

**Gestalt** – The organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts.

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<sup>2</sup> This stands for *Artists and Repertoire*, and is the name of the wing of a record company or publisher’s business that seeks out and engages performers and songwriters in the creation of intellectual property for the company.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Issues of identity are core to creative practice in popular music, and the marketing of identities remains fundamental to the processes of artist development. Whether the entity is a record company, publisher, manager, or pedagogue involved in training new generations of artists, negotiating this challenge is crucial for any artist and wider project team seeking to establish viable careers through original songs. Yet there exists little significant literature that addresses the specific target of this research. Instead as we shall now explore, there is a range of conceptual ‘concentric circles’ in the literature that surrounds, but does not directly address, the creative process itself. What follows in this chapter first demonstrates a lacuna in contemporary conversation, before exploring some ideas that prepare the ground for the specific focus of this thesis. In Chapters Five and Six, literature with a bearing on song analysis is explored, and themes and patterns observed in the portfolio songwriting processes are discussed in relation to ideas from a range of disciplines. This chapter begins with a broad focus as we explore the ideas and concepts that define and prefigure the models for which this thesis argues.

### 2.2 Songwriting

#### 2.2.1 Songwriting discourse

In comparison to the sophisticated scholarly conversations around subjects such as cinema, literature or architecture, songwriting remains a relatively under-explored aspect of academic discourse. This is an area of enquiry seemingly in its infancy. In their introduction to *The Cambridge companion to the singer songwriter* Williams and Williams (2016) describe the lacuna this research hopes to illuminate when they declare a peculiar gap exists in discourse:

...despite the four decades of chart success, documentary coverage, biographies, autobiographies, and the desirability of the idiom to music students, the academic literature on singer-songwriters has been sparse (p.1).

The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s saw journalistic texts prepare the groundwork of popular music’s intellectual discourse. Music journalism typified by *Rolling Stone* in the USA and *New Musical Express (NME)* in the UK exerted substantial influence upon popular culture

and music industry theory. Academic discourse emerged in the late 1970s (Hebdige, 1979; Fabbri, 1981; Frith, 1981) as scholars began to reflect the economic and cultural impact of original artists from this dynamic creative sector. The process of induction into the academy saw popular song scholarship diverge into two distinct branches. Discourse tends towards either the *musicological* (Middleton, 1990, 2000, 2006; Moore, 2001, 2009, 2012; Tagg, 2015) or the *sociological* (Frith, 1981, 1987, 1998, 2007; Kotarba, 1987, 2009; Kotarba *et al.*, 2013; Toynbee, 2000, 2016). Whereas musicologists theorize about established, often canonized texts, the sociologists explore reception-orientated aspects of fans, socio-economics, movements, and sub-cultures. These twin orientations provide the basis of powerful scholarly culture, and popular music now enjoys considerable respect within arts discourse and cultural theory. Yet still there exists scarce 'backstage' or creativity-based discussion of the songwriting process. Shuker (2012) articulates songwriting's lack of scholarly discourse as presenting a challenge:

At all levels the subject has usually had to struggle to be accepted as a legitimate educational study... in comparison with the writing on other roles in the music industry, the role of the songwriter has not received much sociological or musicological attention (p.12).

Nevertheless, the allure of original artists and market curiosity about their craft has seen a substantial supply of reflective interviews detailing their creative philosophies and approaches. Zollo's compendium (2003) and Rachel's (2013) interviews with songwriters are the most comprehensive of the available songwriting texts in this respect. Bennett (2011) suggests that the working songwriter's fidelity to the truth of his/her craft is invariably influenced by promotional and public-image imperatives. Subsequently the richest information and insight from songwriting's most adroit exponents are often unreliable sources of theory. There is little doubting the creativity, sincerity and openness of the artists interviewed in these compendia, but as Bennett (2014, pp.25-31) suggests, much of a songwriter's conversation is subordinate to the greater demands of reputation management. Both Zollo's and Rachel's interview compilations witness songwriters exploring their backgrounds and their material, but there has yet to emerge direct theoretical perspectives on the songwriting artist as a public impression constructed through their original songs.

The comprehensive ethnographic work of McIntyre (2007, 2008a) brings together eighty songwriters, publishers and cultural intermediaries in a study structured by Csikszentmihalyi's (1999, 2014) 'individual, field and domain systems' model of creativity.

This view proposes a non-essentialist model of songwriting whereby recognition and song success are viewed as socially and culturally as well as individually constructed; rather than the result of 'romantic' singular genius alone. McIntyre's work explores the intersubjective influences of educational training, familial song exposure, self-tuition and tacit knowledge in the development of performer creativity, songs and individual voice. In examining songwriters across a substantial sample group, McIntyre often infers the focus this thesis seeks to detail by exploring the concept of an artist as fluid, evolving identity expressed through original songs. His respondents discuss songwriting both as an expression of the individual artist, and as a manifestation of broader cultures and markets. The relationship between their ongoing public identity and their songs is discussed if not directly unpacked. In the main, McIntyre's songwriters enjoy significant public profiles and their songs carry the cultural capital of their enculturation and training. Songs then, are seen as modulated through field agents who facilitate access to wider audiences and potential cultural impact. So, whilst the direct focus is not squarely sat within considerations of identity as manifest within song, this work nevertheless prepares the ground for important elements of this study by examining cultural capital, field, industry and cultural discourse as intersubjective parts of the songwriting ecology. Also pertinent to this enquiry, McIntyre (2008b) explores songs as expressions of studio-based creativity in which he departs from other inspirational and romantic concepts of creativity. Of particular relevance to this thesis is McIntyre's reinstatement of Sawyer's (2006) idea that studio song practitioners are implicitly aware of, and influenced by, a sense of an audience of connoisseurs. This is an abstract concept of market audience as an inferred *presence* in the popular music studio; tacitly influencing, modulating and determining creative decisions and outcomes. This speaks substantially to this study's findings that artists invariably maintain a concept of their audience as they create the work they later bring to market.

### **2.2.2 Songwriting theory**

Of the extant 'backstage', creativity-based songwriting texts, Jimmy Webb's (1999) is possibly the most profound as his work offers a complex musicological view of song alongside sophisticated technical advice and process reflections. Webb's main conceptual contribution to the field is in his suggestion that songwriting might be considered as a form of architecture. In this model, architecture deploys different forms for different functions whilst working with universals in ratios, rhythms, space and harmony. Webb's architectural metaphor received advocacy from Negus and Astor (2015) who point out that the 'frozen music' concept has long been aphoristic in conversations about composition.

The concept is useful for its acknowledgement of the relationships between patterns, spaces, materials and textures in song. Negus and Astor call for the development of new metaphors and devices for discourse around songwriting and suggest that Webb's conceptual model may provide a valuable entry-point from which new paradigms may emerge. However, Webb treats the song as a separate text from the version, and frames the songwriter as a creative agent removed from singers and their public persona negotiations. In contrast, the sole focus of this thesis is on those performers who write or co-write their own material. This is concerned with the resonances that cohere between singer and his/her material, and asserts that songs carry vital, valuable impressions of the artist's identity. While it is at times instructive to consider song as a separate text for analysis, nevertheless, this tends to ignore the centrality of the songwriting artist as an organizing principle governing song attributes. This thesis will argue that intersubjectivity exists between performer identity and song texts.

Any multi-billion-dollar arts industry might reasonably expect an abundance of 'how to' manuals targeting their prosumer market. Published texts exploring the craft of songwriting examine technique and creative processes to a forensic degree. For illustration, there are thirty-six instructional songwriting titles available for purchase on Amazon.co.uk as of May 2019. Works such as these offer an instructional approach to songwriting, and have circulated since Charles K Harris' (1906) *How to write a popular song*. While lacking academic rigor, these nevertheless offer valuable practitioner insights into songwriting's craft principles. Marrington (2016, p.268) sees these kinds of publications as reliant upon anecdotes with autobiographical anecdotes designed to suggest insider industry know-how compensating for limited writing insight. Nevertheless, some publications such as Blume (2003) and Braheny (1996) offer a comprehensive range of techniques with which to develop creative processes. Blume and Braheny's books are distinctive because they integrate industrial relationships with publishers and management in their broader ecological view of song. Rooksby (2004, 2006, 2010) contributes valuable commercially orientated approaches to songwriting and each of Rooksby's books promotes valuable generative creative exercise-enriched writing approaches. Elsewhere, Davis (1985, 1987) Pattison (1991, 2009, 2012) and Stolpe (2008) are robust and efficient enablers, offering a range of technical guidance, exercises and training advice. However, each of these authors fails to explore directly the ways in which original artists represent their identity through their songs. Meanwhile, the challenge to create an effective identity with which to compete in the marketplace is the foremost issue facing songwriting students and aspiring artists.

Other limitations are common to the above titles. Broadly speaking, these share a perspective that assumes the song is somehow separate from the artist that performs it. What is rarely discussed are the way songs are expressions of a performer's unique character. In addition, the above publications are uniformly underpinned by normative evaluative assumptions about song choices that might instead be seen as potentially fertile carriers of an artist's public identity. Normative assumptions are common to these instructional titles in that they seem to be predicated on pan-commercial criteria loosely defined by mainstream USA music markets such as mainstream Pop and Country. Yet a failure to define crucial vectors within divergent chart-sectors and their broadcasters promotes instead unitary, under-variegated style criteria. Whilst these are useful perspectives on song principles and approaches, they have yet to extend to considering the performer's identity, or its relationship to culture and marketplace. This, I argue, is a crucial exclusion rendering this approach unlikely to inform the aspiring writer beyond technical basics. Perhaps the most unfocused assumption common to these titles is one that suggests global songwriting principles might apply across all genres. Sub-cultures such as Metal, Indie, Hip-Hop, Folk and mainstream Chart music each signal different discourses and markets, and each musical genre reflects specific sociological realities.

## 2.3 Songwriting and identity

### 2.3.1 Songs as sites for the formation of identity

Identity is *mobile*, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; ...our experience of music - of music making and music listening- is best understood as an experience of this: *self-in-process*. Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind (Frith, 1996, p.109).

Frith's pithy thoughts articulate what is at the heart of this thesis. Music is a medium of identity, and this works both ways: songs can be the artist's self-in-process just as powerfully as they represent the audience's self-in-process. Within the sociological school of popular music discourse, reception-based studies are widespread, particularly in relation to audience identity and audience identification in relation to artists. Where listeners encounter an original artist performing original songs, there exists a site of human experience rich in potential for the constructions of identity both personal, and social (Frith 1998; DeNora, 1999; Kotarba, 2009; Born, 2011; Kotarba *et al.*, 2013). What is

common to these studies is their sense that songs are seen to be temporal explorations of an *extended self* for the singer and for song's audience. For the duration of song, a listener may resonate with an artist's presence, values, preferences and choices to the degree whereby that listener's sense of identity may experience some measure of alterity. Often listeners will want to experience the music repeatedly, possibly sharing songs in communal activities, and eventually investing in deeper, longitudinal 'fan' loyalty (Lewis, 1992). For Frith, songs present an experience that facilitates an 'articulation of the self' (2003, p.45), or a site for vicarious extensions of identity for both singer and listener. Individuals not only experience songs, but, in the words of DeNora, 'mobilize culture for being, doing and feeling' (2006, p.147). Audience identification and reception studies are numerous, and we can assume with confidence that popular songs provide fertile sites for the incubation of both public and private explorations of identity. Frith again offers a perspective into the various private process by which this alterity might occur:

If the singer's voice makes public (makes manifest, makes available) the supposed sounds of private (personal, individual) feeling, then these public gestures are consumed privately, fitted into our own narratives, our own expressive repertoires. Similarly, if all songs are narratives, if they work as mini-musicals, then their plots are a matter of interpretation both by performers attaching them to their own star stories and by listeners putting ourselves in the picture, or rather, placing their emotions - or expressions of emotion - in our own stories, whether directly (in this situation, in this relationship now), or more commonly, indirectly, laying the performance over our memories of situations and relationships (1996, p.211)

Frith acknowledges the various formative ways in which individuals privately engage with songs and their singers. Original songs clearly offer sites for private and public extensions of identity on behalf of the listener. However, this thesis looks to the impressions of identity developed and projected through their songs by original artists. From the listener's perspective, this is the performer's identity that is met in the act of listening to a song or watching a live show. In studying identity as embedded in song, ready for this two-way articulation of self, we are dealing with those configurations of the artist: alive in the public's consciousness in a manner constructed largely by their songs. So, while audiences are known to identify and develop by engaging with popular songs, this thesis reverses this perspective to explore the identity of the performer as projected through their original songs.

### 2.3.2 Idiolect, identity and personage

Idiolect (noun) - the speech habits peculiar to a particular person (Oxford Dictionary, 2019)

The term 'idiolect' comes from the field of linguistics, where it combines the Latin parts 'idio' meaning self, and 'lect', meaning voice. The concept is used in creative writing scholarship and its pedagogy to detect and refine discernible traits of authorial voice (Newman, 2007). It is also deployed in linguistics (Kraljic, Brennan and Samuel, 2008), and in sociolinguistics and forensics (Coulthard, 2004) to examine variability in the articulatory properties of speakers. Moore and Ibrahim, (2005) deploy the concept to explore Radiohead's defining sonic, musical and lyrical characteristics. West (2016) suggests focusing idiolect is the songwriting performer's primary challenge, as they embark upon what he defines as 'the discovery and exposition of an individual voice' (p.147) through the songwriting craft. He suggests that enculturation; accent and timbre combine to form the native individuality songwriters might enhance, provided a conscious effort is made not to sound like anybody else. Moore (2004) calls for 'individuality of idiolect' to reframe or replace the concept of *originality* in the study of songwriting and songwriters:

...Individuality of idiolect, then, rather than originality is what songwriters achieve, and the particular ways that creativity is harnessed is itself a product of idiolect (p.1).

This thesis pursues this point: that original popular music artists strive to establish and consolidate distinctive characteristics within their songwriting outputs. What follows attempts to chart the elements at play in the curating of a channel between an artist's private and outward-facing public identities.

Linking artist idiolect with public image has been explored before in the study of popular music, and whilst essentialist romantic mythologies and authenticities are plentiful, it would seem that idiolect is not necessarily hard-wired to the artist's biography. Songwriting is capable also of identity-defining choices that express the curiosities, values and preferences of their creators. These traits and characteristics can themselves become parts of assemblages of influence and inspiration. Scott (2016, p. 190) develops a view of the 'strategic anti-essentialism' exemplified in Joanna Newsom's embodiment of the radical philosophers Deleuze and Guattari's (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994) ideas of 'absorbent

identity' in art. In this view, the artist creates a hybridity of cultural identity they refer to as 'becoming-other' (p. 169). Their post-modern view of artist identity views the artist as an agent connecting a networked fabric of cultural influences. These they picture as rhizomatic cultural threads, using a biological metaphor of fibrous mushroom roots to model inter-related matrices and complexes of influence and inspiration. Joanna Newsom's harp-accompanied, North West American, folk-tinged, and fairy-tale inflected songs are Scott's locus for the suggestion that 'becoming' is more than appropriation or intertextuality. Instead she proposes a view of Newsom as an adaptive identity, or an artist evolving, absorbing and adapting in a fluid response to cultures and contexts. Björk might also be seen to be an example of this type of artist: her identity in popular music witnesses her assembling 'herself' through an eclectic weave of Icelandic, Nordic sensibilities, UK art, 'punk' and club music cultures amongst others (McDonnell, 2001). David Bowie was perhaps rock history's most luminous 'becomer' as he absorbed Music Hall, mime, beat poetry, pop, Detroit Rock, Kabuki, Zen, Philadelphia Soul, the occult, modernism, Krautrock, minimalism, musical theatre, Chanson, Disco, Drum n' Bass and LGBT cultures amongst others (Trynka, 2011).

In contrast to this 'becomer' concept, Suhadolnik (2016) proposes a variant of performer identity in her examination of Adele, who she suggests is an example of an artist nurturing public perceptions of a direct through-line between private person, performer and song character. For Adele, the boundaries between voice, song character and biography become blurred. Biddle (2007) proposes that this apparent fidelity to a personal biography works as a way of 'grounding a certain kind of fantasy' (p.130). Within this fantasy the listener imagines themselves inhabiting the inner and outer worlds of song in an 'articulable relationship that extends to artist and audience' (p.130). Somewhere between assemblies of post-modern becoming and candid truthfulness we witness differing kinds of constructions of self at work in popular music. One polarity would encompass the David Bowie model: protean, responsive and intersubjective. Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) rhizomatic metaphor is useful here for its conception of exploratory, interlinking threads of influence and appropriation in art. Adele's model sits at the other polar extreme, an overt sense of biographical veracity extending from song material through performance, photographs, videos and public relations. An arboreal metaphor is perhaps more applicable here, in contrast to the rhizome model. Adele's is a singularity of location and direction with the singular reach and depth this metaphor implies. Adele appears to be resolutely herself, singing about her own personal life, contrasting with the 'becoming' model appropriate to fluid identities such as Bowie, Björk and Newsom.



Negus (2011) problematizes the notion of authorship, truthfulness and the blurred sense of the factual and the fictional in popular music. He points out that in the songs of artists such as Joni Mitchell, Tori Amos or Fiona Apple, the audience senses that they are hearing the 'real' person exposed and revealed in the narration of the song. In apprehending these artists, he proposes a seemingly transparent message with no critical distance between the real author, implied author, and persona. This he contrasts with artists such as Elvis Costello, Lady Gaga, Marilyn Manson and Bob Dylan, all of whom could arguably be viewed as identity inventions. Each of these artists also function by adopting various personas or a persona whilst singing songs about both fictional and real song characters:

[these artists] quite consciously craft a critical distance and open up spaces between categories. This may be achieved through irony, camp and artifice, satire, studied understatement, mannered indifference, or unobtrusive exaggeration when presenting characters, whether in the first, second, or third person (p.619).

This protean end of the songwriting-singer spectrum embodies what Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010) define as 'meta-authenticity', or to use Grossberg's (2014) clarification: 'authentic-inauthenticity'. Confessional artists inhabit the opposite polarity. However, at either extreme of the spectrum the artist is inescapably mediated by a set of impressions of who s/he really is. In suggesting that Joni Mitchell, Tori Amos and Fiona Apple project the 'real' person of their public's expectations, Negus somewhat credulously accepts the artists' public-facing promotional constructions at face value. Yet he acknowledges that the singer's public identity is likely distant from the biographical veracity of the performer's everyday life. This echoes Graver's (1997) concept of 'personage' as an abstracted, constructed identity. Graver's personage concept differentiates, by way of illustration, between Jack Nicholson the private, real *person*, Jack Nicholson subsumed into the *persona* of a character in a film, and Jack Nicholson the notorious celebrity *personage*. Both the film *persona* and the actor's public *personage* are constructions separate from the private person. Auslander (2006) distinguishes between the *real person*, or performer as private human being, *song characters* played out in song, and *performance persona*, or the artist as socially constructed being. Auslander proposes that, instead of self-expression, performance identity is better conceived as 'self-presentation'. Performance persona, or personage, as mediated, cultivated, managed public face echoes sociologist Irving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model that suggested individuals deploy different masked 'selves' adapted for different social situations. In this view, masking is everyday,

commonplace behavior, and it is when our masks, our idealized or 'played' selves cohere with our self-concept that identity is most coherent. Echoing Goffman's (1959) ideas of multiple masks, Williams (2016) deploys Gergen's (1991) theory to propose a post-modern condition of 'multiphrenia' in order to structure an account of Rufus Wainwright's deployment of poses and characters in song. Gergen's multiphrenia concept is used by Williams to define an original artist's multi-faceted projections of self in a fragmented, technological age. This view suggests songwriters, in shifting subject positions within and between songs, reflect contemporary identity formation as 'a new pattern of self-consciousness ... the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments' (Williams, 2016, p.74). This idea of multiphrenic sub-identities within a songwriting-singer's work suggests that variation and mutability of character within a broader artistic identity aligns, at different times, with the kind of contemporaneous zeitgeist to which artists are attuned. When artists are able to subsume multiphrenic identities into their greater personage, the perennial question of 'who is the real artist?' emerges, often wrapped up in questions of authenticity, and the subjectivities loaded into this controversial concept.

## **2.4 Mediation**

### **2.4.1 Authenticity and mediation**

It is impossible to approach issues of identity in popular music without confronting one of popular music's most cherished, yet most indefinable, qualities. Authenticity is an attribute to which music audiences seem finely attuned, and it is a notion valued highly for its ability to foster identification and brand loyalty from fans. Yet, despite its currency, the concept is problematic. As Middleton (2006) articulates, authenticity can be seen to conflate two separate judgements:

Authenticity was born in shock. It's co-joining of ethical and aesthetic imperatives - law with pleasure, a 'you should' with a 'you want' (p.232).

In proposing a two-part conflation of ethic and aesthetic evaluation, Middleton illuminates an indeterminacy that may explain why the concept of authenticity is so enduring and powerful within popular music. Authenticity is commonly assumed to be a desirable quality that, if unexamined, tends to conflate the 'what is said' with the 'how it's said'. Frith (1987) links this to identity, supporting the view that identity in rock is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. Unsurprisingly, evaluating authenticity can prove controversially subjective. Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) believe the concept should be consigned to the

'intellectual dustheap', outmoded in a culture they argue as *ruled by the simulacrum, an epistemological regime run through by anti-foundationalism, and a politics governed by pragmatism*(p.30). Moore (2012, p.269) attempts to problematize the concept by suggesting there exists tripartition of 'authenticities' in popular music. The first of these he defines as *first person authenticity*, or the authenticity of expression. This is present when an artist succeeds in conveying the impression that his/her utterances are direct, palpable expressions of inner self. This represents the sincere attempt to communicate unmediated expression of self to an audience, i.e. 'this is what it is like to be me'. The second of these Moore defines as *second person authenticity*, or the authenticity of experience. This occurs when a song succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that the listener's experience of life is being validated, with an empathetic sense of 'this is what it is like to be you'. Finally, he theorizes a *third person authenticity* or the authenticity of execution more applicable to repertoire recreations such as blues, classical music and tribute acts concerned with faithful interpretations. Ascriptions of authenticity are bestowed upon an artist by audience in the views of Born (2011), Middleton (2006), Frith (1981) and Auslander (1998), each of whom suggest that live concert performances provide an extraordinary performative space within which the artist's commitment is ritualized in a transaction involving the temporarily proximate audience. By expressing palpable personal passion, an artist's live performance is often perceived as an essential glimpse of the artist's self. This process establishes authenticity as 'not a property of, but something we ascribe to a performance' (Rubidge, 1996 p.219). In this view, authenticity is constructed in the act of listening. As Moore emphasizes, valuations of authenticity depend on who is doing the evaluating:

'Authentic'. 'Real'. 'Honest'. 'Truthful'. 'With integrity'. 'Actual'. 'Genuine'. 'Essential'. 'Sincere'. Of all the value terms employed in music discourse, these are perhaps the most loaded. They have been present, in their various ways, in fan and journalistic writing (most notably in the pages of Rolling Stone). In almost all cases, it is music to which these qualifiers can be attached that such writing, and presumably thinking, has prized (2002, p.209).

However difficult to define, authenticity has for decades remained a high-value ascription in popular music. Gilbert and Pearson (1999) remind us that the singer's fundamental duty is to represent the culture from which s/he originates. Machin (2010) suggests that popular music invariably articulates discourses of sub-culture, movements, fashions and scenes, and is freighted with meaning such that songs speak directly to specific sub-cultural discourse. Taylor (1991) remarks:

If authenticity is being true to ourselves, is recovering our own 'sentiment de l'existence,' then perhaps we can only achieve it integrally if we recognize that this sentiment connects us to a wider whole (p.91).

As Hebdige (1979) and Frith (1998) explore in their explorations of sub-cultures and meaning, for popular music's audiences, authenticity often becomes codified within the semiotics of specific subcultures. Popular song absorbs and reflects these signifiers of authenticity through multi-media, audio-visual impressions. These impressions replicate reduced, processed and refined versions of the artist. Ultimately it is a mediated fabric of impressions that serves to communicate artist context and identity to audiences and wider culture, and the song parts of this amalgam are, in part, under an artist's control.

#### **2.4.2 Multi modal mediations**

As explored above, personal and public identities are contingent, fluid and reflexive as they gather and reform within song's 'constellatory configurations' of meaning (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). The voice of the performer, her/his signature sonic textures, lyrics, images, live performances and public relations outputs comprise a fabric of mediations. This approximation of artist identity (unless at a live concert) can only ever be 'simulacra' (Baudrillard, 1994): a simulation of the real artist, deliberately idealized and stylized to create a persuasive impression. In considering artist identity we must accept we are exploring a tapestry of various impressions. Ahonen (2007) advances ideas of authorship and author image which proposes that authors and songwriters construct a 'mediated image'. This is a composite impression of texts and public relations artifacts: a composite multi-media entity separate from, though related to, the original artist. Phillip McIntyre's study of listener's perception of song suggested an ecological view of song by establishing that 64% of his sample audience perceived songs as being constituted by an aggregate of impressions constituted by the following:

...melody, lyric as well as arrangement and performance characteristics such as production values and even the projected media image found in the press and on the video screen, of the persons performing the song.  
(McIntyre, 2001, p.106).

What links these views is their sense of song as an intersubjective set of impressions at work constituting the experience of the original artist for the listener. Increasingly, contemporary popular music debates challenge the traditional definition of song in relation to various textual layers of production, arrangement and performance (Bennett, 2011; Moore, 2012). Video, photographic, biographic and public-relations outputs have

considerable bearing upon mediated identity surrounding song outputs. As Bicknell (2005) suggests, the singer's 'public persona' is the face, body, and personal history s/he presents to the audience. A public persona is distributed variously, including the following:

...factors as gender, race, age, and ethnicity, as well as quirks of personality. This information is conveyed by the singer's appearance, clothing choices, and the statements and activities reported by the media or circulated among fans (p.263).

The songwriting-singer's public persona may reflect the singer's 'true' identity to a recognizable degree, although it is likely this self-presentation will be highly mediated and socially constructed.

In a conceptual model incorporating spatial, ecological and relational dimensions, Georgina Born (2011) suggests that songs form a 'constellation of mediations'. Songs have no essential state but instead inhabit a plural and distributed materiality. In this view popular music is:

.... an extraordinarily diffuse kind of cultural object: an aggregation of sonic, social, corporeal, discursive, visual, technological and temporal mediations (p.377).

This idea of a constellation of mediations leads us to a concept of song as a mixture of messages, any of which may carry identifying properties. In an effort to describe these musical materials, Born's model suggests it might be possible to develop a way to describe elements in a fresh manner that avoids the standard grammars and paradigms associated with conventional songwriting discourse. Kress (2010) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that popular culture artefacts are often 'multi-modal' ecological construction, activating multiple layers of meaning. Songs create meaning through the activation of what Hennion (1983) defines as 'tiny reservoirs' containing social 'significations of the moment' (p.179). This present thesis follows an argument that the ongoing, longitudinal entity developed and consolidated within song is the original artist him/herself. Beyond the song, album or concert the career of the act is a 'brand' identity that might potentially continue beyond the artist's death in the manner of Bob Marley or Tupac Shakur. This is the most valuable commodity within the music entertainment industry: an original, songwriting musical brand predicated upon successful audience engagement. Increasingly these are constructed from multi-modal, multi-media outputs, although essentially public image, or the art of building myth and notoriety remains the same, as Hennion suggests:

He himself is part and parcel of the song he sings, in the form of the 'character' he impersonates. The construction and publicizing of this character are not solely a promotion job, separate from artistic creation; on the contrary, this work is central to the song, which is inconceivable outside the association between the lyrics, the music, and the singer (Hennion, 1983, p.156).

Within these projections of personage across a career, we witness artist identity as a version of the performer as activated across configurations of song texts and audio-visual mediations. If we can accept an artist's identity as a *personage* form of 'self-projection' contained within multi-modal composites, then research can begin to search for the creative decisions that determine their assembly within songs.

## 2.5 Summary

The literature surveyed in this chapter first demonstrates that a gap exists in scholarly work directly addressing the formation of identity through the craft of songwriting. Current scholarly contributions exist within reception-based musicologies or reception-based sociologies of popular music. These discussions are concerned with how existing songs and performer identities are received, critiqued and used to mobilize fan and audience identification. This literature is characterized by concern about how identity is perceived, rather than how it is constructed by songwriters. What the scholarly field lacks is research that accounts for and examines the creative side of songwriting, performance and production. Existing creator-orientated publications are limited because they are instructionally focused and programmatic in their assumptions that normative principles apply universally. These prosumer manuals stop short of addressing the key challenge every original performer faces. That challenge is to construct a market-optimized identity through the creation of songs that project the original artist's unique characteristics. This gap in discourse indicates that research literature is currently under-supported by endeavors to understand the career-defining challenge to establish identity, market visibility and consumer selection. However, what can be absorbed into this thesis are some foundational concepts that underwrite its ideas. It is hereby assumed that original artist identity is a fluid process of becoming, and that an artist creates a personage, or mediated image in the public domain. If this personage were to express the idiolect of the performance vehicle, then the conditions for the artist to engage an audience of equally fluid identities will have been created. The following discussion attempts to initiate a conversation into these aspects of the original artist's vocational challenge.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

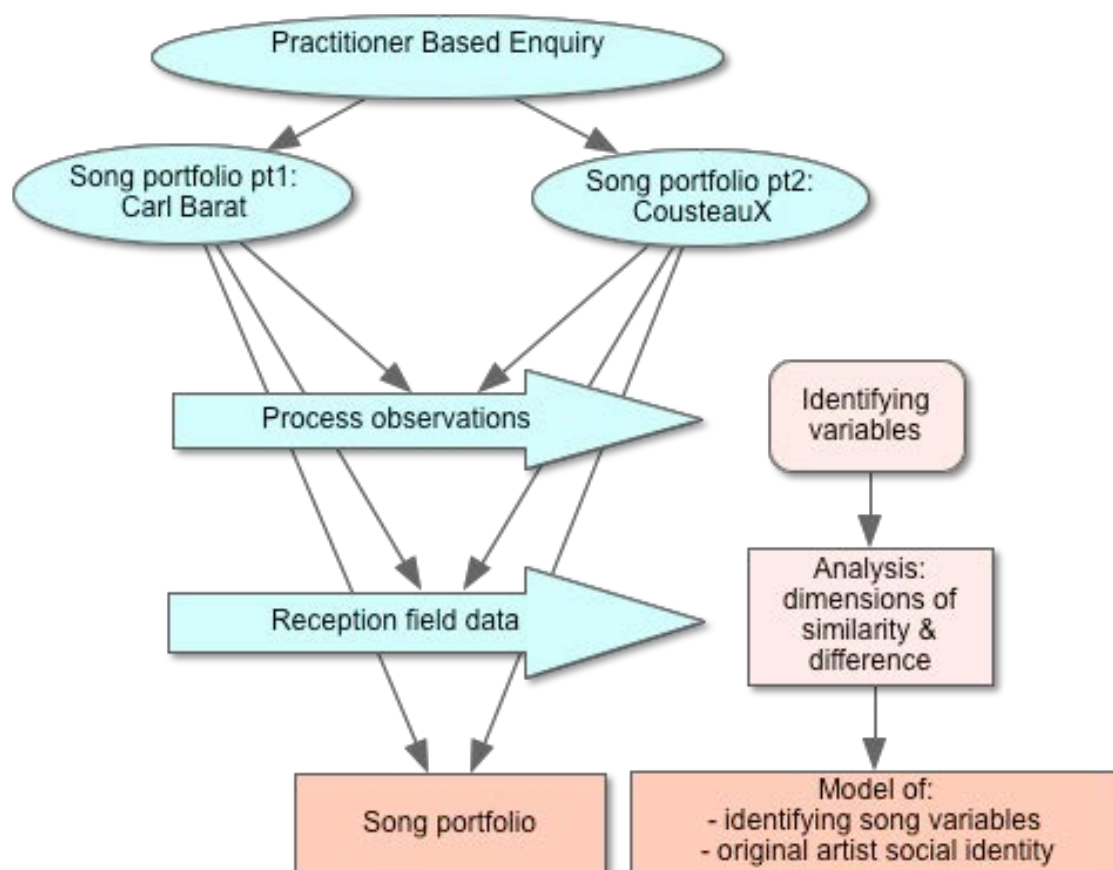


Figure 3.1 Research design

### 3.1 Introduction

This research utilizes an opportunity to explore professional practice in order to engage a systematic enquiry into songwriting. Because I am a songwriter invested in professional situations, the need arises to deploy a methodology that can acknowledge and make use of this reality. However, in so doing, the research must be conducted in such a way as to establish a level of objectivity in relation to projects in which I am also a participant. This is to ensure that conclusions carry weight, and can be tested by other scholars and generalized beyond the specific data of songs present in the thesis. If, as Negus and Astor (2015) suggest, songwriters are to become more involved in the academic discourse surrounding the practice, then songwriters must adopt methodological approaches that provide for this possibility. If a practitioner is engaged in a thesis project in which that practitioner's creative materials form a part, then it is also necessary to establish clarity

around the way in which those materials are used as data, and the purpose these serve enquiry. The opportunity explored in this research is one privileged for its access to the inner workings of commercial songwriting situations. In the accompanying portfolio and observations of creative process, there exists the potential to provide insight into hitherto opaque areas of this professional craft. The approach deployed here and illustrated above in Figure 3.1, utilizes experiential knowledge in the service of scholarly enquiry. It does so by first understanding the practice of making new knowledge, the truth claims that follow, and the culture these address.

### 3.2 Ontology and epistemology

Research must first answer the ontological question ‘what exists that we might acquire knowledge of?’ (Hay, 2002, p.61). In this thesis, original songs with substantial impact within the public domain are demonstrable phenomena, and these phenomena are the result of creative processes and choices. Ontology, or what can be said ‘to be’, and epistemology, or ‘how we come to know this’, are fundamental assumptions underpinning this or any research, as Ruddock (2000) illustrates in detail:

Ontology relates to how we understand the nature of reality... epistemology refers to a theory of knowledge. It is related to ontology in that the nature of the reality you set out to explore influences the sort of knowledge that you can have of it... methodological implications follow. Observation, measurement and interpretation depend on the understanding of the ontological and epistemological nature of the work at hand (p.27).

Because of this quantum-age sense that truth is constructed by the nature of its enquiry, Crotty (1998) purposefully conflates ontology with epistemology, and argues that the two concepts are difficult to separate and often mutually dependent: ‘to talk about the construction of meaning is to talk about the construction of a meaningful reality’ (p.10). This thesis’s approach is not the scientific and positivist discovery of *objectivist* research, nor is it pursuing a *subjectivist* account of the inner world of individual experience. Instead it adopts a *constructionist* epistemological position (Grix, 2010). To avoid confusion in nomenclature, Crotty makes the distinction between the term *constructivist* (as a way to grasp the way individuals construct reality), and the collective, social qualities of the *constructionist* viewpoint:

It would appear useful then, to reserve the term constructivism for epistemological considerations focusing on ‘the meaning-making activity of the individual mind’, and to use constructionism where the focus includes ‘the collective generation (and transmission) of meaning’. (1998, p. 58).



Constructionism therefore forms the ontological basis of this thesis. This is because constructionism views social, and therefore artistic, knowledge and meaningful reality claims, as contingent on human practices, and thereby *constructed from* interactions between people and their situations. This knowledge is then developed and transmitted within social contexts: humans constructing meaning as they engage with the world they are interpreting. It follows that a constructionist ontological/epistemological position is essentially *interpretivist* in its theoretical perspective. Interpretivism is the philosophical perspective that serves the goal of understanding complex lived experience from the interpretation of data that arises from those who live it. Central to the interpretivist approach is a concern for the emic 'lifeworld' (Schwandt, 1994) of lived reality and situation-specific meanings. Particular actors, particular places and particular times fashion meaning from events and phenomena through processes of social interaction, involving language and artefacts. Interpretivist researchers focus on the processes by which meanings are negotiated, created, sustained and modified within specific contexts of human activity. This thesis is a study into the way original artists create songs to sell their product to market. The culture it seeks to inform are scholars, educators and original artists working within popular music industries.

### **3.3 Methodology**

#### **3.3.1 Practitioner-based enquiry**

The study of professional processes and their outcomes, viewed through constructionist philosophical perspectives, is one with potential for enhancement through the application of experiential knowledge. Undoubtedly, songwriting can be appreciated and analysed by persons outside the creative processes; however, in order to best exploit an insider's perspective of the deeper workings of the craft, a methodological approach is called for that assumes fluency with the working practices of the culture. Practice based enquiry (PBE) is such a methodology (Murray and Lawrence, 2013). Emerging originally from educators and post-graduate researchers carrying out research projects in the workplace, this methodology has since been argued as one effective for the study of creative arts and design. This broad, flexible methodological approach can encompass techniques of making the object, observations of technique and processes, as well as examination of the artefact itself:

PBE as a methodology encompasses a self-reflexive and reflective examination of the practitioner's own activity through a process of participation in that activity. (McIntyre, 2006 p.4)

Murray and Lawrence (2013) argue for PBE's ability to situate researchers within work-based situations in order to 'enquire into their own practices to produce assessable reports and artefacts' (p.10). PBE is a methodology similar to and consistent with practice-led and practice-based research, yet it works in a more focused manner by deploying culture-specific skills possessed by the researcher, acknowledging as it does that practitioners are close to issues of their own practice (Regan, Nesbitt, and McIntyre, 2011, p.4). The PBE researcher is tasked with remaining self-reflective and self-reflexive. Self-reflexivity increases efficacy in a manner described by Sullivan (2004) as:

An inquiry process that is directed by personal interest and creative insight yet is informed by discipline knowledge and research expertise. This requires a transparent understanding of the field, which means that an individual can 'see through' existing data, texts, and contexts so as to open to alternative conceptions and imaginative options (pp.64-65).

Equipped with prior knowledge and expertise, the PBE researcher engages vocationally attuned autoethnographic methods to immerse the practitioner as the principle instrument of enquiry within processes. The autoethnographic method, therefore, is a suitable fit for the study of the private and public acts of songwriting, and the rigors demanded of the analytical autoethnographic method provide structure to PBE's otherwise autobiographical subjectivities.

### **3.3.2 Analytical autoethnography**

Autoethnography is ethnographic inquiry built into autobiographical experience. It is situated where the personal and the professional, or the self and the social (Reed-Danahay, 1997) interact. According to Chang (2016), autoethnography is: 'ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation' (p.2). This is different from autobiography, memoir or self-narrative. Instead, autoethnography emphasizes the interpretation of a researcher's experiences, actions and reflections. Autoethnography is deployed in this research to document these songwriting situations partly for its descriptive, illustrative potential (Duncan, 2004; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011), but mainly for its ability to deploy professional experience and materials developed outside the time span of the project. The school of analytical autoethnography (Anderson, 2006) provides an effective approach with which to explore the research questions at hand. This is because it locates the researcher in social situations tasked with the mission of generating theory from these contexts. Anderson argues for an approach in which the researcher is: (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, (3)

committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena, and (4) engaged with informants beyond the self. As a means by which to examine collaborative songwriting, analytic autoethnography positions the researcher-participant as both reflexive and reflective agent charged with a mission to seek and refine what emerges in search of theory. Anderson argues that the approach requires complete-member-researcher status. This is a 'being there' situation in which the researcher is acknowledged by all participants as being integrated with the people being studied (Adler and Adler, 1987). The Schutzian distinction in ethnography (Schutz, 1962) differentiates between the 'first order' constructs of the people being studied (concepts, languages, processes, contradictions etc) and the 'second order' abstracts of trans-contextual constructs (theoretical constructs, principles and concepts). Anderson (2006) argues the imperative to identify and capture key points that emerge in process is vital for generating theory on behalf of communities of practice. Further, autoethnography is made valid and legitimate through adopting Anderson's approach because it insists upon dialogue with informants beyond the researcher. This seeks the legitimacy of third-party sources to corroborate, interrogate and consolidate information and findings, and binds to the process its commitment to second-order constructs. While accepting post-modernism's scepticism about truth claims Anderson asserts:

The definitive feature of analytic autoethnography is this value-added quality of not only truthfully rendering the social world under investigation but also transcending that world through broader generalization (2006, p.388).

This *broader generalisation* Anderson seeks in his method is one that converts experiential data into themes, principles and concepts. Therefore, practitioner-based enquiry deploying the analytical autoethnographic method has the potential to illuminate both insider songwriter practice and wider songwriting studies. There are, however, pitfalls to autoethnography that must be avoided in order to best benefit from its power to generate new knowledge from unique situations.

### **3.3.3 Autoethnography's strengths and weaknesses**

Autoethnography has been criticized for being vulnerable to narcissism, solipsism and *researcher-saturated* data (Denzin, 1989, Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2006). The very virtues that make it powerful are also its weaknesses. Autoethnography is valuable for its ability to illuminate unique and delicate human situations, yet by their nature these situations are impossible to replicate and therefore generalizability is compromised. Autoethnography is also criticized for being either too artful or not scientific enough in its evocative form, or

too scientific and not artful enough in its analytic form: some autoethnography is powerful for its therapeutic and expressive values, though less so for its theoretical reach. However, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (ibid) believe that the positions of the artistic and scientific communities can both be satisfied, and that autoethnography can be rigorous, analytical as well as therapeutic, personal and social. They argue that autoethnography has the capacity to embrace and connect the two conditions; the key is to define goals in the research and to align the approach accordingly. The goal of this thesis is to discover what parts of original songs construct public impressions of original artist identity. Two different streams of data inform this study: observations from within creative processes, and subsequent responses from key parts of the music media industry. In combining these two dimensions, a degree of objectivity is introduced through the intervention of third-party voices responding to the songs under analysis, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of self-study. It is not the researcher who is being researched here; instead creative choices and their outcomes are explored for what they can tell us about practice.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

Denzin (2013) argues for an interpretive autoethnography for its particular sensitivity to *epiphany* emerging through observations of lived experience. This looks for meaningful moments and collates them towards theory building. Ellis and Bochner (2006) also argue that autoethnography seeks epiphanies, or moments of insight and understanding. For this project's exploration of how identity is constructed in song, key moments in the song creation process observed exerting influence on direction and character were collated. These inflection points were then analysed through a coding approach to data adopted from *grounded theory* methods (Charmaz, 2014). This method sifts through observations looking for themes and patterns, and allows for concepts to emerge from data. Charmaz insists this method of conceptual coding is available to a range of qualitative approaches, even if they differ from the unscripted, exploratory nature of foundational grounded theory. Chapter Six and Seven's analysis discusses the themes that emerged from observed practice, and deploys these to structure the analysis upon which later theoretical models are based.

#### **3.4.1 Research data**

Materials available for analysis consists of the following:

##### **a) 18 portfolio songs**

These are the core materials of this research. Song lyrics and final mastered releases provide the primary site for analysis of creative outcomes. This thesis's portfolio comprises

eight songs performed and released by Carl Barât (2010, 2015) and ten songs performed and released by CousteauX (2017). Each of these songs and processes of their production are explored as opportunities from which to draw out concepts and principles relating to original artist identity.

#### b) Artwork and album photos

Photography and album artwork have the potential to influence an audience's perception of original song. Whilst not central to the songwriting process, these paratexts (Genette, 2010) nevertheless operate as 'thresholding' images associating defining graphic dimensions with original songs. Artwork and artist promotional images are usually within an artist's direct control, and so are admitted into this data set because they will have influenced audience and field responses to the song material.

#### c) Journalist reviews and field responses

Autoethnography's access to insider-observation sees its validity and legitimacy enhanced when supported by data from external, third-party sources,. As we have seen, analytical autoethnography claims its legitimacy through the inclusion of outsider voices in its conversation. Triangulating perspectives on song materials and their creative processes, the reviews and responses of popular music field agents such as journalists and radio programmers here serve to structure an ecological socio-economic view of the portfolio's original songs.

#### d) Working notes

These are reflective practitioner observations documenting the creative choices encountered in the making of portfolio songs. Creative materials and sketches are made available for analysis in conjunction with in-process observations. Consistent with analytical autoethnography's commitment to a systematic approach to data, observations of the portfolio's songwriting processes have been collected, alongside song lyrics, audio sketches, demos and mastered album releases.

## Chapter Four: Conceptual framework

### 4.1 Introduction: optimal distinctiveness theory

When working to songwriting and compositional client briefs, I notice that people commissioning the work often describe the music they require in terms of previously existing work. Yet at the same time, they stress the work being commissioned needs to be original with novel, unique characteristics. In a similar manner, music reviews will often describe the music of new original projects in terms of established artists they resemble, whilst attempting also to describe qualities indicating artistic originality. Similarly, cultural pundits and critics tend to refer to an artist in relation to a movement, subculture or scene; yet value those who distinguish themselves from that background. This thesis develops an argument that popular music can be seen as a creative dialectic seeking a balance between familiar and distinctive qualities in performers and their materials. Too much similarity to peers and precedents runs the risk of rendering an act too predictable, reverential and referential. Yet too much difference renders an act too strange and difficult for industry gatekeepers and audiences to categorize. This thesis proposes that a theoretical model transposed from the field of social psychology may provide a framework with which to view song based operations of these opposing motivations. In what follows I propose that here is a way in which to view artist identity as constructed in song in a manner free of the distracting, essentialist ideologies often associated with conversations concerning identity.

Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991) is social identity theory that suggests there exists two opposing forces driving identity formation in individuals in social situations: motivations seeking assimilation, and motivations seeking distinctiveness. Both drives govern the relationship between identity and belonging within social groups on a range of different levels. ODT is a model of motivations, behaviours, traits and characteristics. It proposes that a dynamic equilibrium is in play, working to balance motivations that reinforce a need to assimilate and a need to differentiate. The model proposes that any social situation in which an individual is too different will activate the need for assimilation, motivating individuals to activate aspects of identity more conducive to inclusion. Conversely, situations that arouse feelings of de-individuation will activate a counteracting drive in order to heighten differentiation, resulting in the expression of increasingly distinctive qualities. These countervailing motives structure a regulatory equilibrium of self, as illustrated in Figure 4.1:

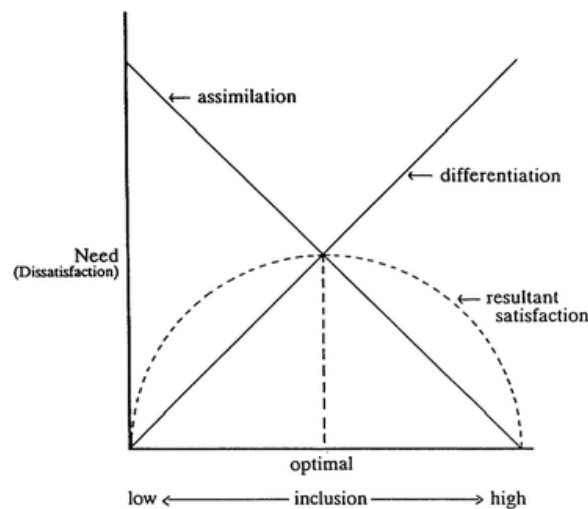


Figure 4.1 The optimal distinctiveness model (Brewer, 1991 p.477)

ODT differs from foundational identity theory's cognitive orientation (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979) as it is based instead upon motivational drives. Social psychologists, designers, marketers and sociologists have since embraced ODT's ideas as a means by which to appreciate social identity, political participation and consumption dynamics. Brewer's view was prefigured by the work of Snyder and Fromkin (1977,1980) in which they defined the 'need for uniqueness' as a positive striving for abnormality relative to other people, or a fundamental human drive to escape excessive similarity (Fromkin, 1972). Brewer's (1991) work was influenced by studies of salience within in-group and out-group dynamics explored by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Tajfel (1982). In these studies, social identity researchers examined identification and identity formation within groups, exploring the ways in which social groups self-define in relation to *out-groups* (others). *In-group* members then become defined in relation to others within the group themselves. In-group identity sees internal roles and positions begin to form. Social groups signal their difference from other groups such as bikers with their leathers; yet, within these groups, differentiation is signaled by more subtle variation, such as types of helmet, hierarchical bandanas, etc. Brewer proposed that individuals actively seek social groups that offer the best opportunity to establish *optimality* between belonging and distinctiveness. From the intimate to the social and political, ODT is proposed as operating on different levels, or contexts of social identity, each of which seeks an equilibrium permitting that individual to thrive.

Distinctiveness, in this view, depends on the frame of reference within the social groups to which individuals belong. Each of these social identities activates different levels of drive towards either distinctiveness or inclusiveness. Importantly, individuals' strongest, most committed social identities are found within those groups that provide the best optimal balance. Brewer's empirical work and the studies that followed (De Cramer and Leonardelli 2003; Abrams 2009) established that if individuals perceive minority groups to be distinctive and exclusive, then individuals are more likely to identify with and value their membership. Abrams' studies established that members of minority groups are more invested or attached to their in-groups than are members of majority social groups. From its beginnings as a social psychology theory, a range of different disciplines has adopted ODT for the purposes of understand human behaviors, from the naming of children, to politics, fraternity membership and industrial design.

## **4.2 Design and marketing**

ODT 's principles can be seen to be demonstrably manifest in behavioral and consumption choices, providing a robust theoretical utility for use as a framework by which to predict and design for competitive product identity. Berger's (2016) *Invisible influence* suggests that optimal distinctiveness exerts profound influences on human behaviors evident in consumption and wider patterns of choice and preference. Berger explores how in the 2000s TiVo television recorders were introduced in cabinets that resembled DVD players, just as the introduction of the Apple iMac repackaged computer technology into objects that resembled decorative furniture. In doing so Apple re-energized the personal computer boom of the late 1990s with features that repositioned the personal computer as a piece of domestic furniture, rendering the iMac familiar and less technological than previous computers. Berger's research established predictable behaviors seeking assimilation to university fraternities and eating clubs where motivations to acquire in-group membership were high, as were corresponding conformity patterns. Once assimilated, students expressed uniqueness within the group with stylistic variants of the in-group markers: when a group is largely wearing 'preppy' college clothes, the drive for uniqueness might lead to subtle identifying gestures such as the acquisition of a vivid variety of polo shirt.

ODT principles are central to the work of Hekkert, Snelders and Van Wieringen (2003) in which they measure 'typicality' and 'novelty' as co-predictors of consumer preference. Because a typical product is rarely new and, conversely, a novel product is rarely typical, the positive effects of both features seem incompatible. Yet this study confirmed that



consumers prefer novel designs as long as the novelty does not affect typicality. People also prefer typicality as long as this is not to the detriment of novelty: respondents preferred the products with an optimal combination of both aspects. He *et al.* (2010) demonstrated that consumers acquire and display material possessions to achieve or maintain their personal optimality. As predicted by ODT, consumers who perceived themselves as having low distinctiveness expressed an increased desire to acquire distinctive products, whereas perceptions of high personal distinctiveness reduced consumer appetite for individuating signifiers. Consumer desire for distinction-activating products is consistent across various consumer items, including the motivation to pay more for limited-edition products, and even a preference for distinctly unpopular products when distinctiveness is actively sought. Chan, Berger and Van Boven (2012) demonstrate that consumers simultaneously pursue assimilation and differentiation goals on different dimensions of a single choice; by conforming through identity-signalling attributes such as known brands, people assimilate to their group on one dimension, whilst simultaneously distinguishing themselves with uniqueness attributes (such as colour) to re-assert their individuality. Consumer choice, as a way of expressing identity, seems to correspond to the predictions of ODT; as the need for assimilation and the need to individuate seek equilibrium.

### **4.3 Politics, music and identity**

In a study that examined UK political affiliations and political party membership Abrams (1994) established that minority political parties who provide strong bases for self-identity are considered more desirable than larger, more inclusive parties. Minority parties seem to attract members because of a greater perceived capacity for them to provide equilibrium of assimilation and distinction. Abrams' later (2009) study of youth self-expression through musical preferences established that individuals preferred musical styles that were moderately popular, i.e. not too obscure and not too popular. These were stylistic choices deemed by teenagers to be optimally distinct. This explains the phenomena whereby teenagers reject previously favoured bands once that band achieves broad popularity. These fans also invest more resources and commitment into their musical identities than people who preferred mainstream or obscure musical styles. Cohrdes and Kopiez (2015) investigated adolescent sensitivity to typicality and unconventionality in relation to images of musicians and their songs and found that, for young music audiences, moderate novelty intensifies identification as ODT would predict.

The concept of optimal distinctiveness has only just begun to be applied to the study of music artists, though not to the extent proposed in this thesis or its specific application to the songwriting process. Peoples (2017) mapped the concept of optimal distinctiveness to Prince's career. In this view, Prince achieved optimality on a variety of levels, including social identities of songwriter, performer, producer, band-member, businessman, philanthropist and campaigner. Peoples' paper strains somewhat to connect Brewer's theories to Prince's protean musical identities, although her work is a useful precedent for this study as it establishes the application of ODT to the analysis of an original artist's career. In transposing ODT from its origins as identity theory in order to deploy it as a model for the analysis of original song construction, there remains a fundamental problem. This is because Brewer's ODT model is powered by a socially orientated concept of drives and motivations. Yet songs are artifacts: artistic creations aspiring to achieve market impact. Brewer's is a model of individual behaviors within groups, yet songwriters need a model by which to view creative outputs. Therefore, I argue that original songs, being the *results* of artistic behaviors, are manifest expressions of motivations, desires and drives. This provides the key for ODT's repurposing into a tool for understanding songwriting in relation to original artist identity: as a way to understand the generative potential of ODT operational within commercial products.

#### **4.4 Corporate product identity**

Because it can be argued that an original musical act is an enterprise in the business of selling a product, perhaps the variant of ODT most appropriate for understanding songs comes from the field of corporate marketing. An original music act's survival drives are similar those of corporations, in that commercial success and failure are determined by market responses. MIT academic Zuckerman (2016) challenges ODT for its ability to explain behaviors at an organizational level, particularly organizations offering products and services. Corporate motivations are made manifest in their products, and are not shaped by the social motivations of the people who run the companies. Instead, organizational optimality is driven by the external need to create products with which to compete for the favour of consumers, or 'audiences of resource-holders' (p.2). ODT's emphasis on individuals' drives is limited in this regard because a corporation is not motivated by the personal drives of their employees, but instead is driven by market imperatives. Zuckerman suggests that the best adaption of ODT is *the two-stage valuation theory* (Urban, Weinberg and Hauser, 1996; Phillips and Zuckerman, 2001) This model sees products accommodating the needs and desires of a single, exterior audience, and emphasizes that organizations compete for selection by those consumers. In this view,

conformity and assimilation satisfy the need for *categorization* within an appropriate section of the marketplace, whilst distinctiveness improves a commodity's candidature for consumer selection within that category. And, so, the same audience demands a balance between conformity and differentiation in the same product. Because organizations compete with one another for consumer choice, competition induces differentiation within category. Such competition simultaneously induces conformity because consumer selection requires marketplace inclusion within categories: a product needs to be placed within the correct section of the store. Within Zuckerman's two-stage valuation theory (Zuckerman 2016, p.3) we are presented with a model that bridges ODT's social psychology concepts into commercial understanding for situations where the marketplace exerts conditions that encourage both conformity and uniqueness within products. Zuckerman proposes that distinction between products within category is determined by *dimensions of difference*, or the defining qualities of a product that attract selection in the evolutionary struggle for market survival. Dimensions of difference, however, are those variables at play in forming candidate characteristics that are the same as, though different from, others within a given genre. There is an argument emerging here that sees two-stage valuation as a device with which to describe the way in which song markets exert genre expectations upon artists whilst simultaneously seeking innovation and novelty. In developing a view of dimensions of similarity and difference within the two-stage valuation version of ODT, we may have a model for understanding constructions of identity in popular song artistry. This has the potential to move beyond problematic music culture tropes such as originality and authenticity and instead structure a framework with which to explore constituent elements of identity configured in original artists' songs. Whilst ODT, in Zuckerman's adaption, provides the framework for grasping the internal identifying properties of song, it also provides a mechanism with which to apprehend the original artist's identity in the marketplace.

#### **4.5 ODT and social identity**

Brewer's ODT model proposes an individual's identity becomes activated, in various configurations, in response to a variety of different social situations. Brewer and Gardner (1996), and Brewer and Roccas (2001) further developed Brewer's foundational 1991 theory to suggest ODT can be understood as active on three distinct intersubjective levels of self-representation within an individual's holistic identity. This is a model that views individuals as seeking optimality concurrently within 'levels' that Brewer and Gardiner define as 'the individual self', 'the relational self' and 'the collective self' (p.83). Table 4.1

illustrates self-representation as defined by this model refined by Brewer and Roccas (2001):

*Table 4.1 Self-representation as defined by Brewer and Roccas (2001)*

Opposing drives and levels of self-representation		
Motivational pole		
<i>Levels of Self</i>	<i>Separation</i>	<i>Assimilation</i>
Individual	Uniqueness	Similarity
Relational	Autonomy	Intimacy/interdependence
Collective	Differentiation	Inclusion/belonging

In this diagnostic, the *individual self* identity is structured by drives to assimilate with, and drives to differentiate from, others in an individual's home culture. This is a level of distinctiveness operating on the level of family, siblings, colleagues, cultural background and peers. Here aspects of identity differentiate by expressing an individual's constellation of traits and characteristics (Brewer and Roccas, 2001). At this level, self-representation is informed by interpersonal comparisons and is motivated by the psychological drive to protect or enhance the individual. The *relational self* is more intimate, expressed in relation to significant others, and developed through personalized bonds of attachment. These relationships are dyadic and contain shared aspects of self-concept with significant degrees of mutuality, privacy and intimacy. Such bonds include friendships, romantic relationships and parent-child relationships, as well as specific role relationships such as teacher-student or doctor-patient. This relies upon reflected appraisal driven by the motive to protect or enhance the other by maintaining the relationship itself. The third and most public level, *the collective self* is active in relation to social groups. These are groups such as cultures, clubs, institutions, societies, gangs, guilds, associations and co-operatives. The collective self is based on impersonal bonds formed from common, often symbolic identification and does not necessitate intimate personal relationships among group members. Self-construal is activated, as ODT would predict, in a manner determined by the inclusivity or exclusivity of the group.

#### **4.6 ODT and the original artist ecology**

Brewer's later work provides popular music with a robust tool for structuring understanding of the symbiotic ecological relationships that includes the artist, their audience and the gatekeeper curators of song culture. In Chapter Eight, an artist-orientated identity model adapts ODT into a diagnostic tool with which to model original artist identity across these three socio-economic interactions. Original artist identity is proposed and argued in Chapter Eight as activated on the following three levels:

- 1) *Peers and precedents* (the individual artist)
- 2) *Audience* (the relational artist)
- 3) *Gatekeepers* (the collective artist)

It is important that this model be understood not as stratification, but more an intersubjective productive system. I propose that an elegant transposition is possible because in this model, self-representations are seen as active on three distinct areas, each crucial to an artist's effective functioning in the socio-economics of popular music, each intersubjective in their interactions with each other. Below is an argument for how Brewer's levels concept transposes into a tool for modelling activations of original artist identity.

**a) The individual level: similar to, though different from, peers and precedents**

At this level an artist establishes cultural, technical and musical competencies in equilibrium with their unique blend of enculturation, talent and flair. Competencies and genre expectations must be established, whilst unique traits and characteristics must differentiate to an optimal degree. Talent, ability, creativity, idiolect and motivation are the raw materials of distinction at this level. Artists rarely invent new genres of music, and are more likely to emerge from associations with particular sub-cultures. This is the level where Zuckerman's two-stage evaluation is most active: artists require category inclusion, but they also must differentiate within their category in order to ensure consumer selection. Assimilation is achieved through absorbing and reflecting genre competencies, skills, fashions, discourses and conventions. Distinction is achieved through an identifiable idiolect's adapting and developing aspects of all these in the synthesis of a unique voice.

**b) The relational level: similar to, though different from, audience**

We are encultured to think of popular music audiences as crowds of fans. Yet an artist/fan relationship is a one-to-one relationship, enjoyed privately (Lewis, 1992; DeNora, 2000) and multiplied. As this one-to-one relationship multiplies, individuals then constitute larger fan-bases with the potential to expand into mass proportions. Yet the original artist survives by establishing and maintaining a relationship with that audience of one. An audience needs to be reflected empathetically and accommodated by songs, to the degree that the artist's product becomes their regular consumption choice. West (2016) suggests that successful songwriting consists of two crucial connections: the generation of a link between the song and the songwriter, and the generation of a separate link between the

song and the listener. In mirroring and engaging an audience, the original artist is representative of audience because they must speak somehow to that audience's tastes, dreams and desires. This tension attempts to balance Moore's (2012) first-person and second person authenticity: equilibrium is sought between artistic expression and this shared audience mutuality. The artist needs to be sufficiently similar to their audience in their aesthetics, tastes and preferences, yet separate due to the unique peculiarities of their talents, and the unusually mobile lifestyle of the songwriter vocation. Accordingly, the original artist seeks to express extraordinary aspects of their identity whilst generating an emotional resonance in their listeners. The artist's livelihood is dependent upon their work cohering with an audience's discourse and emotional investments, and within the artist–audience dialectic, common values of ethics and aesthetics incubate vital resonances.

Considerations of audience may be cardinal when creating successful songs, however there exists a paradoxical quality to the marketing of products seeking to generate commerce. This is because producers need to be perceived to be striving only to make the best product imaginable. Zuckerman (2016) insists that an audience, market or consumer must perceive a 'moral authenticity' (p.13) in a product. An audience must never sense they are being anticipated or manipulated. Instead, consumers need to believe that manufacturers are motivated solely by the desire to make a quality product. This is a powerful principle at the relational level, despite its inherent paradox: producers of products invariably anticipate market tastes. What it supports is a view of the original artist made familiar to its audience through a degree of representativeness, yet committed to the art of making music the artist wants to make. In this view, an audience must never sense the artist is driven by pragmatic marketing imperatives. Original artists must prefigure the tastes and appetites of their market audience without allowing their work to appear cynical or contrived. This is the dynamic play between artistic expression and a music's resonance with the audience and their lives. The artist may be the same as the audience in terms of what s/he values, but they remain different if only for the ability to express this in songs and pursue an artistic lifestyle. Contemporary social media blur the boundaries between fans, friends and artists, but the principle remains: an artist will, to some degree, express a degree of representativeness in relation to their audience whilst seeking to establish a career that creates distance sufficient for the artist to be optimally separate from the lives and careers of their audience.

Established artists (such as the two acts in this portfolio), negotiate a further dimension of optimality in relation to their audience that early-career artists do not. Established artists

need to satisfy existing expectations of audiences familiar with, and invested in, an artist's previous work. The unique identity in the act's voice, aesthetic and ethical values will, to varying degrees, negotiate dynamics of expectation in any new work. This is often in creative tension with an artist's urge to express change and renewal. With rare exceptions such as Status Quo and AC/DC, original artists usually respond to their zeitgeist and express change through variance in their ongoing artistic development. At the other extreme, artists such as Neil Young, Beck, and Bjork wilfully disrupt expectation and favour radical breaks with previous work. But in a general sense, audience expectation and artistic evolution structure a productive dialectic involving fanbase and artist in a generative mutuality. The intimate relationship between an artist and listener is the communicative channel that, when multiplied on mass scales, powers the international industries of popular song.

**c) The collective level: Similar to, though different from, canonical artists**

The intersubjective relationship between artist, audience and potential audience remains an ecological relationship largely determined by performance opportunities afforded to the artist by field operatives. Csikszentmihalyi's (1999, 2014) and Bourdieu's (1977) models of cultural creativity define the roles of cultural gatekeepers as agents performing a selective, filtering function for the broader discourse and market (or domain) activity. 'Field' agents (in this thesis people working within the music, press and broadcast industries) consist of individuals who know the culture's rules and vocabulary, and use this knowledge to decide which artists gain entry by meeting discerning criteria. Those ideas, works or artists determined to be creative by the gatekeepers are introduced into culture to become a part of its cultural milieu. While 21<sup>st</sup> Century Internet-based promotion is rapidly evolving, nevertheless music industry operatives remain powerful actors evaluating and directing attention and capital towards original artists, and in doing so determining artist circulation within the cultural bloodstream. These gatekeepers include A&R officers, live agents, music publishers, managers, radio and TV producers, journalists, bloggers, critics and pundits amongst others. Each agent evaluates and determines the degrees of access and capital artists are permitted in their bid to impress upon the culture of popular music. These agents make editorial decisions, shape opinions, and in the case of broadcast and live agents, grant access to performance opportunities. Here is where cultural expectations and artist distinctiveness seek a constructive optimality. Field operatives make choices balancing established institutional appetites with their outlet's simultaneous requirements for fresh, innovative talent. In order to ensure commercial viability, field operatives evaluate similarity and difference based upon the policy

expectations of their media outlet or venue. Artist exposure to wider audiences is, with the exception of some DIY projects and YouTube phenomena, mediated by evaluations made at this level. Over time, canonicity is ascribed to artists as they impress upon and assimilate into popular culture. There comes a tipping point in the successful artist's career at which an act establishes a workable level of visibility, veneration and circulation within industrial structures. An original song artist with vivid characteristics, active within culture's awareness, will have negotiated an effective resonance with the life and times of their culture. Their balance of similarity and difference, now visible publically, competes with every other music act seeking exposure. Any genre or musical style may have carried the original artist to prominence, yet canonical artists often remain alive in culture decades after their physical death.

#### **4.7 Discussion**

This chapter has explored principles that render the generic concepts of ODT adaptable for purposes of understanding both songwriting and an original artist's socio-economic ecology. Brewer's ODT has demonstrated varied applicability beyond its origins as a social identity theory, underpinning numerous studies of identity formation both in the way individuals relate socio-culturally through assimilation and differentiation, and significantly, in the way industrial and consumer designs embody aspects of similarity and difference in their products. ODT is a framework capable of elegantly predicting social behaviours, motivations and purchasing choices. Apart from its tentative application in Peoples' (2017) study of Prince's career arc, this theory has yet to be deployed fully in the service of analysing creative musical materials. In the chapters that follow, ODT is demonstrated as a tool with which to anatomize original portfolio songs for variables expressing similarity and difference. It is later applied as a framework for understanding the original artist in terms of their individual, relational and collective social identities. This thesis argues for ODT's functionality as a conceptual tool; particularly for the way it opens out the conversation into song elements artists deploy to convey identity. ODT is uniquely useful because it permits a deeper understanding of song-based identity that avoids issues such as race, gender, class, nationality, ability and politics, each of which can distract from core songwriting concerns. ODT is a neutral framework with which to parse working elements active within original songs, and with which to view an artist's socio-economic identity. Towards that analysis, the following chapter is an overview of the two portfolio artists, their songwriting processes, outcomes and reception.



## Chapter Five: Portfolio

### 5.1 Portfolio overview

This thesis now turns its attention to the materials contained in the portfolio. Each album project is examined chronologically through a cycle separated into three stages of the process: aims, outcomes and reception. The eighteen portfolio songs are demonstrations of identity formation in action, and can be appreciated as such. But more importantly, they are also sites rich with insight into the songwriting process and its outcomes.

#### 5.1.1 Project selection rationale

In order to build a data set as a legitimate platform from which to investigate research questions, consideration has been given to the relevance of projects to the commercial field and their level of prominence. It should be noted that three other album projects (The Moon in The Man, 2015 [no reference] and Sinnober, 2014 and 2016<sup>3</sup>) were excluded from this thesis because they failed to establish sufficient public impression from which to draw reliable observations of song-based constructions of artist identity. This is what makes the two projects under examination valuable sites for study: they have both projected their identity into the public arena to a demonstrably effective degree. Also consistent is the fact that both original acts operate within a single music genre. This is a constraint imposed by professional conditions that nevertheless allows for controlled study of the variants in similarity and difference within a single genre. With their validity established publicly, both projects also share some defining qualities that provide methodological constants rendering their inclusion potent. These qualities are:

#### A)- Reception data is available for both projects

For both the Carl Barât and CousteauX projects, triangulation is made possible through substantive gatekeeper reactions. As Chang (2016) argues, affirming Anderson (2006), third-party responses to research materials are vital to substantiate autoethnography. The key data points included here are tangible evidence of the songs' and their public impressions: gatekeeper industry responses that provide both evaluative and descriptive qualitative data for the thesis. This establishes a rigorous system testing portfolio outputs on third parties, thereby guarding against autoethnography's vulnerability to researcher bias and self-evaluation.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://sinnober.bandcamp.com/music>

### **B)- Both projects have existing public profiles**

Both Carl Barât and CousteauX are witnessed in the process of satisfying existing audience expectation whilst satisfying their own artistic expression. There is equivalence between the two projects in that neither is fresh new acts seeking to become established; instead they both build upon their legacy. This consideration is demonstrated seeking an equilibrium balancing the familiar with the new in relation to the artists' legacy material. New and emerging artists are not subject to this imperative. Accommodating existing audiences is a dynamic only relevant to artists with an established fanbase, yet ODT principles are still operational in the interactions between artists and their audiences.

### **C)- Two variations of professional engagement are explored**

The two portfolio projects represent the two main professional modes most likely encountered by professional and semi-professional songwriters. One sees me writing with another artist, the other writing for my personal original project. In exploring both situations, two contrasting collaborative and professional contexts provide different contextual angles on the songwriting process and its outcomes.

## **5.2 Introduction to portfolio**

### **5.2.1 Varying roles undertaken by the researcher**

The key opportunity granted to this autoethnography study is its access to the realities of industrial songwriting practice. Across a career, a songwriter may variously engage in configurations of his/her talents encompassing variations of the following: composition, lyric authoring, arranging, programming, performing, producing, mixing, mastering, promotion and video production, amongst other tasks. The economic scale of a project invariably dictates the level of creative involvement. In Carl Barât's high-investment project, I am part of a large team supported by significant financial interests. In the other, CousteauX, I am the main player in a low-investment, low-budget production, performing the majority of roles in the album's creation. In studying these two projects I am using my own creative material as data, and also my observations of materials, such as album production and artwork, created by other contributors. In this respect I am both observer of my and other contributors' work, as well as witness to the projects' public-facing outcomes. Below is a brief outline of my various creative roles:

### 5.2.2 Carl Barât: researcher as actor amongst a range of contributors

For the Carl Barât albums, I was engaged as part of a team in a manner typical of high-profile artists. Teams of managers, publishers, record companies and agents support and promote these projects. My particular roles operated within this field of contributors in the following configurations:

#### *Carl Barât* (Barât, 2010)

- **Composer/Songwriter:** My main role was as half of a demarcated songwriting process<sup>4</sup>. Because Barât enjoys a reputation as a distinctive lyricist, my creative role was primarily to respond to the management brief in order to create musical constructions sufficient to evoke a creative response from Barât in the form of lyrics and melodies. This is a songwriting model similar to the creative relationship between Morrissey and Marr of The Smiths, or Richards and Jagger of The Rolling Stones. In both these cases, one member of the pair primarily works as composer, whilst the other contributes primarily as the lyricist. Melodies are often the bridge between the two, and this type of team usually defaults to a 50/50 writing credit in order to acknowledge cross-role contributions.
- **Arranger:** Contemporary songwriters increasingly demonstrate song ideas through the creation of fully realized 'demo' productions complete with instrumentation and sonic characteristics conveying the eventual recording aesthetic. Because stylistic experimentation was required, arrangement ideas at this demo level were required to demonstrate the eventual aesthetic qualities of the finished tracks.
- **Performer:** I contributed piano on two of the mastered songs – 'This is the song (irony of love)' and 'Run with the boys' – later playing keyboards with Barât's touring band in the UK, Ireland and Austria in 2011.

For Barât's second solo album my songwriting and arrangement roles reduced, though my role as producer expanded to include the following:

#### *Let it reign* (Barât, 2015)

- **Composer/Songwriter:** One song
- **Producer:** Two songs

For this album I was involved in writing only one song, although I was tasked with the role of producing two of the album's tracks with a newly-formed live band. Whilst my

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<sup>4</sup> This is one of Bennett's (2014) typography of common songwriting collaboration systems whereby two or more contributors work within defined roles.

involvement on this album was limited, it nevertheless grants this research access to issues of identity played out in public.

### 5.2.3 CousteauX: increased creative agency and oversight (*CousteauX*, 2017)

Another perspective is provided by this third professional situation. The smaller-scale independent release *CousteauX* (2017) saw me working as:

- **Songwriter:** All words and music
- **Arranger:** Instrumental and vocal arrangements
- **Performer:** Multi-instrumentalist
- **Art Director:** Artwork and photographic designer

In a manner customary to personal artistic projects, for this album I engaged in every level of writing, performance, production and promotion. What is similar to the Carl Barât albums is the way in which the creative process begins with the music and takes shape in a manner determined by the characteristics and traits of the singer. What is different is that I am the lone songwriter within CousteauX's album outputs as well as its producer and one of two performing members. This context is increasingly common in contemporary original song practice in which artists are active in the creation of various parts of the multi-modal processes of song production and promotion. These two different situations have the potential to triangulate questions of identity in song through contrast and cross-reference.

### 5.2.4 Song and album: different levels of career catalogue

Whilst this research focuses on the formation of identity through original songs, it is important to acknowledge that songs often function within a set constituting a generalized impression of album identity. Despite the track-selecting behaviours of streaming from mediums such as Spotify, the album still retains some primacy as an important whole document representing key stages of an artist's development. Within the culture of popular music, albums remain milestone markers within an original artist's career, often defining key career chapters within which songs are constituent parts. Most of the third-party journalistic data that triangulate this research's findings address album projects as a whole. These descriptive and evaluative responses contribute key critical data to this research.

## 5.3 Carl Barat solo album (Arcady Records, 2010)

### 5.3.1 Introduction

In 2010 Carl Barat's management approached me to collaborate on writing songs for Barat's debut solo album. I proceeded to collaborate on eight published songs, several unused songs and a movie soundtrack<sup>5</sup>. Carl Barat is a highly visible figure in UK popular music, being one of two songwriting singers in The Libertines, who were one of the UK's most influential, critically acclaimed music acts of the 2000s. Barat's band made two albums in the years 2002 and 2004, one of which achieved the #1 place the UK album chart and platinum sales status. These two albums were awarded the honour of #2 and #24 in *New Musical Express*' Top 100 Albums of the 2000s<sup>6</sup>. The Libertines are widely credited for catalyzing the British guitar-band revival in the 2000s (Thornton and Sargent, 2006), partly because they re-energized the form with their literate punk rock, but more notably because they redefined the relationship between band and audience. They were one of the first bands to pioneer 'guerilla gigs' and the distribution of free material on the Internet. This band in its short life managed Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) process of 'becoming' through their absorption of parts of English songwriting of the Kinks' observational variety; Punk Rock of the New York variety exemplified by The Strokes; British and French romantic poetry (such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud); leftist critical discourse; London vernacular; mid-century English cinema and Edwardian literature (Welsh, 2004). The Libertines had a profound impact on UK music of the 2000s, and to a generation of UK music fans they are arguably as significant as The Jam and The Smiths were to their generation. Figure 5.1 is an indication of the cultural impact of the band visible in a special edition *New Musical Express* from 2010 (p.1) which declares the band's brief history to be 'the greatest rock n' roll story of our generation'.

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<sup>5</sup> *This is my body*, directed by Paule Muret premiered at The Geneva International Film Festival in November 2015

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nme.com/list/the-top-100-greatest-albums-of-the-decade-1381>



Figure 5.1 *NME*, 2010 The Libertines special edition

A personal, confessional autobiographical style became the defining feature of the Libertines' songs, which on their second album *The Libertines* (The Libertines, 2004) detailed the enmity between its two singers. Songs like 'Can't stand me now' and 'What became of the likely lads' injected a personal reflexivity into their lyrics. The Libertines generated hit singles from the interpersonal frictions that would lead to the band's split in 2004. Their songs were characterized by London-centric cockney vernacular ('Horror show', 'Dilly boys'), idiomatic language and evocative place names ('The Delaney', 'The ha ha wall'). The band were distinctive for blending a fondness for English heritage alongside Ealing-era British cinema, and writers such as Evelyn Waugh, Saki and Siegfried Sassoon. Their best-known, most enduring songs are 'Time for heroes', which captured their brand of romantic, leftist, insurgent, melodic poetry in a song about lovers caught up in the Reclaim The Streets London riots of 2002, and 'Can't stand me now' which documented the band's internal tensions. The Libertines split in 2004 at Barât's insistence because of friction with his writing partner and co-leader, Pete Doherty. Barât formed the band Dirty Pretty Things in 2005, who signed to a major label and enjoyed mild chart success. However Dirty Pretty Things were roundly critiqued as inferior to The Libertines, whilst replicating many of the Libertines' qualities. Pundits and audiences were roundly indifferent. The very 'Indie' discourse that had nourished The Libertines consigned Dirty Pretty Things to the status of 'indie land-fill' – a term to describe the many similar guitar bands that flourished briefly in the 2000s (Reynolds, 2010). The band disbanded in 2009. In 2010 Barât embarked on a profound transformation of his public image. What follows documents a five year process of experimentation and reconstruction.

### 5.3.2 Aims

Barât's management contacted me and briefed that a career change was sought for their client. They had secured Barât's account with a pitch to mature his identity by rebooting his brand along the lines of mature 'auteur' solo artists such as Nick Cave or Leonard Cohen. Management supplied an exemplar CD containing Nick Cave, The Magnetic Fields, Cousteau, The Divine Comedy and Richard Hawley. It was hoped that new, more mature

musical dimensions might help bring Barât to a mainstream audience. His time in the underground was thought to have run its course, and management felt Barât ready to broaden his appeal to a more commercial, mainstream market. Crucially, the material also needed to accommodate and extend Carl's Libertines audience. This audience was no longer made up of students, but now comprised graduates, professionals and young parents. Barât's management briefed for a transformation from 'Indie' cult personality to mainstream popular artist. Other collaborators included in this project included Neil Hannon of The Divine Comedy<sup>7</sup> and the Academy Award-winning songwriter Andrew Wyatt<sup>8</sup>.

The artistic directions I chose at this stage were twofold. In order to connect to the music of The Libertines, I composed backing tracks that were upbeat, energized and harmonically complex in the manner of The Smiths and The Jam, each arranged with overdriven, electric guitars that avoided distortion tones. The kind of sound I imagined was mainstream in referencing 'classic' era music that encompassed Motown and '60s guitar bands. This was an attempt to re-imagine Carl's Libertines work for BBC Radio 2 airplay. My second creative strategy was to provide compositions typical of my own Cousteau catalogue. Cousteau albums from the 2000s were distinctive for their soundtrack-like, baroque and jazz-tinged qualities. There is an aspect to Barât's previous work in Libertines songs that romances ideals of a Gallic bohemia and the 'demi monde' nightlife. In preparation for writing sessions, I listened to Jacques Brel and Serge Gainsbourg, and came to our first writing session with backing tracks that suggested some new musical directions for Barât's reboot. These were presented to Barât as demos, and the intent was to inspire him to improvise a topline. In our demarcated writing relationship, the arrangement required me to focus upon supplying chords, some melodies, arrangements and demo backing tracks sufficient to catalyse lyrical and melodic responses from Barât. Below is a brief overview of the Barât portfolio tracks explored forensically in Chapters Six and Seven.

### **5.3.3 Outcomes**

#### **'Shadows fall'**

Deliberately soundtrack-like and reflective, this is a restrained, slow song in which a set of descending minor chords supports trumpets, chamber strings and celeste combining to create a European-sounding cinematic backdrop. The lyric deploys a device in which the

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<sup>7</sup> <https://thedivinecomedy.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://newsandrewwyatt.net/>

song character is a voice from beyond the grave, that asserts a layer of artifice in the lyric and a maudlin, elegiac tone. This is possibly the most universally appealing song of Barât's in this portfolio for its straightforward, sincere sentimentality.

#### 'Carve my name'

This song is possibly the best musical distillation of the initial design brief. It has a slow, swaying 6/8 feel, with a dynamic brushed-drums jazz-band ensemble, baritone guitars and an overtly romantic string section. The lyric is rueful, remorseful and cathartic as it discusses in a conflicted manner all the polyamorous damage the song character has inflicted upon friends and lovers. It is unclear as to whether this lyric is allegorically signalling Barât through a caricature of his own public image, or whether it was a fictive, song-character drama. Barât's voice explores a new lightness in the verses, and then sings theatrically and declaratively in the choruses. Overall this is intense and unsettling, though musically sophisticated in its elaborate orchestral flourishes.

#### 'This is the song'

My piano playing style accentuates the baroque plaintiveness of this compositional arrangement. Barât responded to this reflective intensity by writing a breakup confessional with gritty, confrontational lyrics. So, while there are plangent qualities to the music, the chorus lyrics are vituperative to an abrasive degree. Here Barât echoes The Plastic Ono Band here for his exploration of raw, bitter frustration. This song was one of the first new songs to feature in his live concerts and festival appearances<sup>9</sup>, and became part of the deluxe package of the album.

#### 'Run with the boys'

The proud, upbeat qualities of The Libertines are updated and made 'radio' for this song. The Motown-inspired drumbeat and bassline combine with brass and slide-guitar parts to open out the song with a saturated, tuneful burst of energy. The lead vocal talks its way through the verses before belting in high chest voice, for double-tracked chorus with a vaulting, memorable set of vocal hooks. Lyrics attempt a deliberately ironic chauvinistic polyamorous song character, resembling the protagonist of the 1960s British film *Alfie* and other 'Swinging London' films of that period. The song celebrates male bonding as the character rejects the domesticity and care of his wife/partner. There is a dissonance at the heart of this lyric that may be problematic. Here is an unsympathetic character with a

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZJfTWRCi08>



confusing resonance with the public's image of Carl Barât as a gossip-column London celebrity. And so, for all its exuberant musicality, this song leaves an impression of a heartless playboy in the English capital, and audiences might reasonably assume this was Barât expressing something about himself, his life or his values.

#### 'Death fires burn at night'

This was written at the end of the songwriting cycle for this album, and was created to counter-balance the Chamber Pop of this new direction in order to return to heavier guitar music. This song attempted a Queens of The Stone Age inspired extension to his palette. This song attempts to describe the fevered dreams, internal conversations and delusions of paranoid substance-addled celebrity. This is an unsympathetic character speaking of a grimy underworld in the style of Lou Reed or Iggy Pop at their most debauched.

The writing and demo recording of these five songs completed my creative presence on this album. What follows now documents graphic elements that, whilst beyond my control, nevertheless impacted upon this album's, and therefore Carl Barât's, public identity.

#### **5.3.3.1 Album graphics**



Figure 5.2 Album cover



Figure 5.3 Billboard

Carl Barât has defended the front cover of his debut solo album, which has been the subject of ribbing on the Internet from fans. Barât explained 'it's just because it's a self-titled confessional album and I'm just kind of naked and it just shows me how it is' (Fullerton, 2010 n.p.).

The *NME* article above witnesses how the Carl Barât album cover drew negative online critical responses from his core fans (note the defacement on the London billboard in Figure 5.3). The intent of this defining cover choice seemed to intend to signal a confessional singer-songwriter album. And yet this image is misaligned with the album's character-centred songs and Leo Abrahams' elaborate orchestral arrangements; each

qualities an album cover might predictably reflect. The style of this cover and the style of music it suggests, I would argue, are dissonant. Here is a demonstration of a disconnect between the music and its 'thresholding' paratext (Genette, 2010): the CD or LP sleeve that attempts to distil and convey the songs in an image. The image in Figure 5.2 declares an intimacy and up-close personal portraiture, yet this is in conflict with the characters and caricatures the album lyrics portray. A sense of voyeuristic entry into Barât's private world was exaggerated by the image of a pregnant woman, alongside the heavy-handed symbolism of a camera photographed through a mirror. The cover also communicated a proximity to an apparent self-regard; Barât in a vest associated with virile masculinity, situated in what appears to be his bedroom. Yet the music this artwork introduces is overtly fictive in its theatrical allegory and devices. My sense is that this mismatch renders this album cover a confusing and disorientating introduction to the songs it thresholds.

### 5.3.4 Reception

Operations of popular music identity are played out in public, and – in the reactions of strangers, critics and pundits – third-party perspectives supply this research with its triangulation. The first of this portfolio's upbeat songs, 'Run with the boys', received significant radio exposure early in the promotional process, whilst concurrently a surprising level of mainstream critical appreciation began to emerge.

#### 5.3.4.1 Gatekeepers: radio

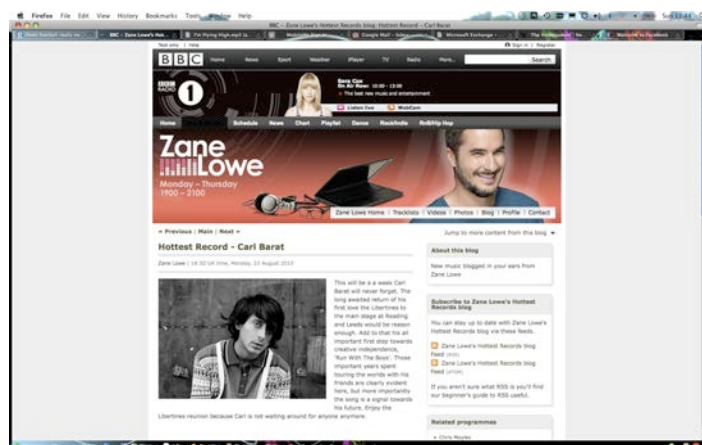


Figure 5.4 [BBC Radio 1 Zane Lowe's hottest record](https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/zanelowe/2010/08/hottest_record_-_carl_barat.html) (Lowe 2010)

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/zanelowe/2010/08/hottest\\_record\\_-\\_carl\\_barat.html](https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/zanelowe/2010/08/hottest_record_-_carl_barat.html)

A month ahead of Carl Barât's album release, BBC Radio 1 previewed 'Run with the boys' (Figure 5.4). In 2010 Zane Lowe was one of the UK's foremost tastemakers, and this his 'Hottest Record' recommendation is some indication of the level of esteem and expectation surrounding Barât's album.



Figure 5.5 BBC Radio 2 playlist, October 2010

The campaign then met more support with the addition of 'Run with the boys' to the coveted BBC Radio 2 playlist (Figure 5.5). This saw the track receive high-rotation airplay to a mainstream audience of over nine million listeners<sup>10</sup> over a period of two weeks. It was also added to the playlist of iconic alternative radio station XFM (Figure 5.6) and was awarded Album of The Day on BBC 6Music (Figure 5.7). This chain of successes seemed to indicate Barât's project was successfully bridging both Indie and mainstream cultures with this song.



Figure 5.6 XFM playlist 5-10-2010      Figure 5.7 BBC 6 Music Album of The Day 5-10-2010

A week ahead of album release, the influential *NME* magazine ran a positive preview of the album, granting the album a two-page feature spread in which Barât discussed the album's songs in detail. At this point critical response was looking decidedly favourable: it appeared as though Barât was indeed managing to bridge both mainstream and Indie cultures. The week after its playlist addition, Carl was invited to play 'Run with the boys' live on BBC Radio 2's *Steve Wright in the afternoon* (Figure 5.8) to millions of listeners.

<sup>10</sup> 2014 listening figures <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-27421380>



Figure 5.8 *Steve Wright in the afternoon*, BBC 2, October 2010

Barât's transition into the mainstream seemed to be proving effective, and all indications were that this much-anticipated project was gathering substantial momentum.

#### 5.3.4.2 Gatekeepers: press and print

The first substantial press indication that the project had the potential to appeal to a new audience came in the form of an 'Album of the week' accolade (Figure 5.9) in liberal broadsheet *The Independent*:

With this impressive solo offering, the more steady-footed of the Libertines frontmen demonstrates he has the depth to develop furthest beyond their shared original musical vision. The songcraft throughout is skillfully affected for the most part, some genuine flashes of inspiration. An unexpected delight (Gill, 2010, p.20)



Figure 5.9 'Album of the week' *The Independent* (Gill, 2010)

UK daily *Metro* awarded the album four stars in a review that appeared to value the character conceits within the songs:

His tunes are appealingly self-deprecating... He practically bounces into action here, a cross between vintage London rocker and theatrical villain... Bracing pop single Run With The Boys even recalls classic Kevin Rowland. For once Barât doesn't seem crushed by expectation or suffocated by celebrity (Halder, 2010)

*The Times* (Paphides 2010) awarded the album three stars and a feature article that noted the nocturnal character and the high, gentle singing Carl deployed on 'Carve my name': '...a purveyor of 4am confidences and aching semi-falsetto'. *Uncut* magazine awarded three stars and in doing so highlighted the two album tracks written by the researcher:

...two bruise-coloured ballads (Carve My Name and Shadows Fall) which may be the best Barât has written (Lewis, 2010 p.81)

Mainstream commendation also came from the esteemed *Mojo* magazine's four-star review:

Barât's solo debut is his best post-Libertines yet. (Stubbs, 2010)

This series of mainstream articles built a profile that substantially re-positioned Barât and broadened his reach within the mainstream of UK music media. However, the campaign was dealt a blow by the magazine most crucially representing Barât's Indie Rock cultural discourse. The *NME* critiqued Carl's album as worthy of six out of ten (6/10) in a full-page review that declared the album disappointing:

the album is entirely in thrall to a certain very undergraduate view of sophistication....Barât coats his lovelorn ballads in all kinds of sonic goo...Ultimately, the character he's offering up as 'Real Carl' - this lugubrious lovepie - just doesn't gel... More worryingly, there's a nagging sense that he's decided to dress it up in grandiose, emotive sentiments simply to camouflage a lack of real emotional investment. (Haynes, 2010 p.27)

This was a dramatic setback in a campaign that was hitherto showing signs of impact and an increased reach. Whilst 2019 sees *NME* as less powerful than it once was, in 2010 *NME* still retained its status as the primary field gatekeeper within UK Indie Rock. Most importantly, this review seemed to express the online views of Libertine fans that had previously enjoyed Barât's more biographical, personal outputs. The influential platform AllMusic.com delivered a eviscerating perspective from the USA:

When Barât returns to his rock roots, the results are downright campy: the cleaned-up riffs and big brass on Run With the Boys makes the song sound like it's from Barât! The Musical (Phares, 2010)

This sentiment was confirmed to some degree by *The Guardian's* 2/5 album review:

Unfortunately Brecht and Weill need not worry about being upstaged... This self-titled snoozer misses any of the zip that made the Libs and to an extent, erstwhile offshoot Dirty Pretty Things arresting ... this is a brooding break-up record (Dean, 2010)

Overall, reactions were polarized. Contradicting the above responses in a live concert review, the same *Guardian* publication responded positively in a live review:

The lyrics are as dramatic and poetic as ever 'I've carved my name on the livers of my lovers' he sings at one point - and he isn't short of tunes... while Run With The Boys allies a Motown beat to an unashamed defense of the rock 'n' roll lifestyle. (Simpson, 2010)

And perhaps the most influential voice in support of Carl's album was Creation Records founder and UK music grandee Alan McGee who wrote a year-in-review piece for *The Independent* in which he praised the album:

The one record I liked this year - and I'm shocked to say it as I managed them for years - is Carl Barât's album. It's a complete departure. It's like Scott Walker and Kevin Rowland - it's the best record Carl's ever made (McGee, 2010)

McGee's opinion illustrates one extreme of the various polarized views towards this album. Some committed Barât fans enjoyed the experimentation, others were unimpressed.

#### **5.3.4.3 Audience**

Despite its conflicted reception, the album went to #4 on the BBC UK Independent Charts (Figure 5.10) and #42 on the iTunes UK National charts (Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.10 UK Independent Charts 10-10-10

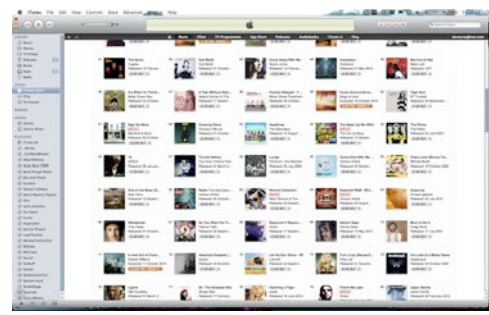


Figure 5.11 iTunes UK Charts 10-10-10

Barât's 2011 tours across the UK and Europe were well attended, yet although the mainstream gatekeepers had welcomed Barât into uncharted territories, the project was ultimately considered by artist and management as an experiment that – for all its positive reception – had disrupted Barât's connection to his core discourse. Barât and his management regrouped, changed direction and over the next period assembled an album that would restore Barât's career continuity.

## 5.4 Carl Barât and The Jackals (Cooking Vinyl, 2015)

### 5.4.1 Aims

In response to a disorientating dissonance with his core audience, 2015 saw Barât and his management abandon the stylistic experiments of his 2010 release, and resolve to assemble a young band that might bind together a sense of commonality, camaraderie and live performance dynamics. For this album I co-wrote one of the songs and produced two others at Livingstone Studios, London. One of the few of the team from the first album to be retained on this project, I was granted access to the process of re-balancing Barât's experimental solo album with a body of work that strove to revisit qualities of his Libertines songs. Barât occupies a place in popular culture where ethics and aesthetics merge in a blend with a pronounced leftist political orientation. In 2011 Barât headlined Billy Bragg's Leftfield Tent<sup>11</sup> at The Glastonbury Festival, an affirmation that Barât was considered to be sufficiently socialist and politically charged for the top-spot at a prestige global festival. Barât had, for some years, been a prominent figure, visible at protests and rallies in support of unions, nurses and students. Returning to public attention with a fresh young band, and an energetic Garage Punk musical aesthetic, Barât assembled a body of work that strove to align his public and artistic lives. The introspection and romantic reflections of the previous album were rejected in favour of a return to Barât's ideological perspectives and a preference for loud, fast guitar music. The return album, *Let it reign*,

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/areas/left-field/>



was designed to reposition Carl Barât as an Indie/Punk artist, in a deliberate effort to re-connect with the Indie discourse that nourished The Libertines. These songs were deliberately raucous, political, critical and provocative. Aligning to leftist ethics and abrasive rock aesthetics allowed Barât to express the native commitments that reprised the sense of authenticity audiences had ascribed to him in earlier career phases. I produced the first two of these songs and my brief was to align the arrangements and sonic aesthetics of the recordings so that they enhanced the songs' lyrical values.

#### 5.4.2 Outcomes

I am not instinctively inclined towards Punk Rock, however I admire the sing-along melodic qualities of The Libertines' work. Barât and I collaborated on the gentlest song on this comeback album in a manner that helped ground his work in familiar territory. We felt the most effective way to connect with this aspect of Barât's Libertines past was to create a strummed, tuneful acoustic song that echoed the lighter, melodic qualities of his Indie origins. Because it is one of the only gentle moments on a heavy guitar album, this song functions within the broader body of work by providing contrast and dynamic, and it contributes to balancing the album's overall impression.

#### ['Beginning to See'](#)

'Beginning to see' is a softer, more reflective moment within *Let it reign's* otherwise abrasive program. In its descending major-key chord sequence, strummed guitar and eventual orchestration the song's musicality has aspects of Classic Rock of the early 1970s, as Barât delivers a litany of personal viewpoints in a laconic, wry style, critical of nation states, violence and organised religion.

My task as producer on these next two songs was to capture the energy and dynamism of Barât's UK live band, in a return to a traditional Indie Rock/Punk Rock aesthetic and performance approach. In these two productions I chose to pursue a polished version of 70s and 80s punk and garage rock.

#### ['The gears'](#)

This song is a raucous invitation to riot, and its fast tempo and fast-looping chords recall mid 1970s Punk Rock. This impression is made more urgent by an exuberant live band performance and a distorted, belted delivery from Barât. Gang vocals in the choruses provide a key hook, and the lyrics reprise Mario Savio's iconic 1964 speech<sup>12</sup> calling for

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<sup>12</sup> Mario Savio, Sproul Hall University of California, Berkeley December 2, 1964



insurrection and direct action. My challenge here was to capture the dynamics of a live band playing with passion, energy and commitment.

#### 'We want more'

Less Punk Rock and more the updated Surf-Punk sound of The Pixies, for this song I attempted a taut, dry, pumping track recalling 1980s New Wave and 2000s Strokes. A crisp rhythm section supports a 'surf' baritone guitar hook, some chanted vocals and a characterful, wry, deliberately psychotic character delivery from Barât. This song has an obtuse, ironic quality critical of over consumption and contemporary culture. My job was to make these two songs, the only songs actually featuring Barât's live band The Jackals, fit the others on the record that had been recorded by US producer, Jody J. Ford<sup>13</sup>. This song's co-writer, Anthony Rossomando, later won an Oscar in 2019 for a song he wrote with Lady Gaga and Mark Ronson<sup>14</sup>.

#### **5.4.2.1 Album graphics**



Figure 5.12 Album cover



Figure 5.13 Album promo photo

*Let it reign's* album cover (Figure 5.12) is dark and confrontational in its composition and colours, signalling that themes of conflict and insurrection may be contained within the album. It is a collage of images with an explosive violence, suggesting righteous mythical battle. There is a clear coherence between the explosive album graphic and the militant, abrasive tone of the album's songs. In presenting himself and his band in leather jackets (Figure 5.13), Barât is signalling that this is music made by an Indie Rock band. Indexical semiotics signal the Punk Rock of The Ramones, The Clash and The Strokes in an association with Indie Rock subculture. Leather jackets, long hair and urban locations are all recognizable signifiers connoting guitar rock and an Anglo-American, alternative, metropolitan aesthetic. One can infer with confidence that these graphic gestures were assembled in an effort to make a clear statement rejecting Barât's earlier album's theatrics

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.discogs.com/Carl-Bar%C3%A2t-And-The-Jackals-Let-It-Reign/release/7371043>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/feb/15/its-10-years-of-relationships-boiled-down-lady-gaga-anthony-rossomando-shallow>

in order to replace them with a reinstatement of his previous, Libertines-era qualities of gritty, left-leaning poetics and insurgency.

### 5.4.3 Reception

#### 5.4.3.1 Gatekeepers: radio

*Let it reign's* most significant media support came from XFM, London's Indie radio and UK broadcast network that awarded it Album of the Week status (Figure 5.14).



Figure 5.14 [XFM February 2015](#)

This endorsement from XFM represented a public relations achievement for the Barât and his team, as XFM is a UK brand with a distinctly Indie character at the centre of key Indie discourse. This was an early hint that the stylistic reboot may have been effective.

However, the album's singles failed to achieve play listing on mainstream BBC Radio 1 or BBC Radio 2, and the exposure granted to this project would prove substantially less than the previous album. A series of spot plays on BBC 6 Music supported the release to a reasonable degree, and Carl Barât and The Jackals played a live performance broadcast on BBC 6 Music in February 2015 (Figure 5.15).



Figure 5.15, BBC 6 Music live February 2015

By early 2015 The Libertines had announced their permanent reformation. It is likely that Barât and his team aimed to re-establish his underground, counter-culture capital before returning to his established act later in the year. By the time of its release, *Let it reign* was being trailed as a bold and positive return to the qualities for which Barât is admired.

#### **5.4.3.2 Gatekeepers: press and print**

In its 2015 promotional/interview cycle *Let it reign's* campaign emphasized the new project's band ethos. Barât reiterated to the press that not only was this sound stripped-back, raw and direct, but equally importantly this was now an expression of a genuine 'gang' of newfound colleagues. This promotional spin on this album proved effective and *NME* responded positively. In light of *NME's* rejection of his previous album, this turnaround exerted significant bearing on the restoration of Barât's sub-culture capital:

His self-titled 2010 solo album indulged his baroque theatrical bent, but didn't make space for his ravenous natural bite... But look how alive he seems today. Invigorated by the Libertines' much more positive comeback and sucking the lifeblood from a bunch of fresh band-mates in The Jackals, he's part Fagin, part Iggy, part punk rock warrior leading his noble band of brothers into a battle against seemingly insurmountable odds.... It's a testament to Carl's re-invigoration and the most electric and exuberant record he's made since 'Up The Bracket'. (Beaumont, 2015)

*The Guardian's* review offered mainstream support reinforcing this view:

35 minutes of punky swagger that reignites the Libertines-esque notion of bands being blood brothers... so the album's themes are ones he's explored before, scratched into 10 brief, snarling tracks. (Sullivan, 2010)

*Rolling Stone* contributed more mainstream support when they awarded *Let it reign* four stars:

If Carl Barât's 2010 solo LP was battle weary, *Let it Reign* is a call to arms...While the gung-ho, colonial themes sound familiar, the Jackals are loose and louche without falling apart. (Valentish, 2015)

Equally mainstream the print version of *Q Magazine* noted the album's energy with its four-star review, that commented "It's uplifting stuff... Barat is on tasty form" (Perry, 2015)

### 5.4.3.3 Audience reception

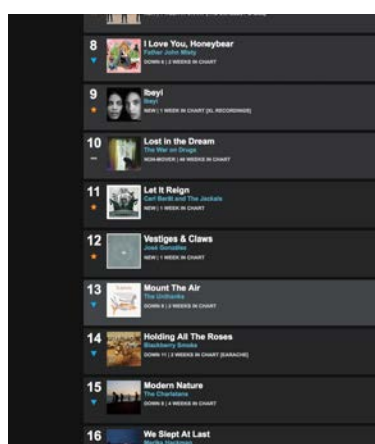


Figure 5.16 #11, UK Independent Charts 22 February 2015

*Let it reign* went to #11 on the UK Independent Charts (Figure 5.16). Carl Barât and The Jackals toured the UK and Europe in 2015, 2016 and 2017, appearing at SXSW Festival in Austin in 2016 and touring Russia and Baltic states on two different occasions. The band continues to draw large crowds and currently enjoys a loyal, energetic fanbase to which Barât returns in between Libertines activity. As of early 2019 there is a growing sense that Carl Barât and The Jackals have established a loyal following. The band is an ongoing, international brand with concerts in May 2019 in Japan, Korea and China.

## 5.5 Discussion: Carl Barât

The reception to the above work demonstrates the *Carl Barât* song collaboration project substantially achieving its initial 2010 design brief to broaden Carl Barât's audience. However, the *NME* and *The Guardian* reviews were totemic in setting the tenor of his core culture's response to the album, and the impact of these critiques went on to set the tone for the album's negative international reception on tastemaker sites such as AllMusic.com. In 2015, Barât designed a corrective identity shift with his *Let it reign* album, and this configuration of his public identity aligned more effectively with his original fanbase. This supports the impression that Barât's creative instinct to return to his core approach had been sound. He seems to operate best when addressing his Libertines-generated subculture through his songs. The attempt to attract an older, broader mainstream audience as a singer-songwriter in 2010 was successful in part, but by 2015 Barât's brand required corrective measures. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 witness how over the course of two albums a highly visible public figure such as Carl Barât can disrupt then later salvage his relationship with his audience by diverting from and then returning to a familiar blend of ethical and aesthetic values. Barât managed this particular change by returning to

energetic guitar-based Rock and discarding character songs in order to return to a more personal, socially orientated, politicized version of his public image. This is an exercise in identity formation with a two-part contrast that provides rich material for the analysis that follows in Chapters Six and Seven.

## 5.6 CousteauX (Silent X Records, 2017)

### 5.6.1 Introduction

CousteauX is a reboot of my personal original song project, Cousteau, a UK band that enjoyed significant popular and critical success from 1999 to 2005. This part of the portfolio documents 2017's campaign to re-establish the band, rebranded with the addition of the capital letter 'X'. This rebranding gesture signalled both an updated aesthetic, and the fact that CousteauX now included only two of the original five members. In 2000 Cousteau signed to Island Records founder and UK Hall of Fame inductee Chris Blackwell<sup>15</sup>; proceeding to achieve gold-album status internationally. Two albums achieved over 300,000 in physical sales as well as international cinema synchronizations, substantial radio and television airplay and critical acclaim including Album of The Week in *Time Out* (Davies 1999). *The Guardian* (Aizlewood 2000) and *The New York Times* (De Curtis 2002). My role in the band was sole songwriter, producer and multi-instrumentalist. The organizing principle for assembling the band was to reimagine the torch-song for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Cousteau was a non-ironic, sincere version of the 'lounge' band, mixed with elements of jazz and alternative rock. In its lead singer, Liam McKahey, the band possessed a powerful baritone that injected a masculine worldliness into my atmospheric, romantic ballads. His supple baritone, alternating with high tenor-range and head-voice variations, is a distinctive sound: Liam McKahey is a versatile singer with unusually broad tonal and chromatic range. Songs were mostly ballads, described by *The Sunday Times* as: 'a giddy, almost rapturous classicism darkened to perfection by a smoky late-night melancholia' (O'Connell 2002). In creating this blend, I had intuited a formula that aspired to blend Leonard Cohen's intimate lyrics with Burt Bacharach's harmonic constructions and David Bowie's balladic vocal style. Cousteau's lyrics tended to evoke a romantic, sensory melancholia. The project is almost exclusively invested in explorations of the conflicts and turmoil of love, echoing the torch-song qualities articulated by Simon Frith as:

...music that sets up a sense of sadness, or a verbal place within which a voice could tell a story, and the singer applied herself – her critical, musical

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/chris-blackwell>

faculties – to the pleasures and difficulties of interpreting feelings, atmosphere, verse. (Frith, 1996, p.200).

Frith also contends that torch songs ‘clearly belong’ to their singers, not their writers. He said that interpretation in the torch-song tradition does not mean realizing what the songwriter meant, but moreover the singer uses the music to show what *interpretation* means. Accordingly, the design principle that made Cousteau distinctive was its emphasis on its singer’s energetic, emotive delivery. As Frith points out, the torch song is essentially a narcissistic artform, and for this band it was part of a signature aesthetic, particularly when arranged in the instrumentation of Alternative Rock.

### **5.6.2 Aims**

As the Barât project demonstrated, creating a comeback album requires accommodations of the act’s previous aesthetic as well as qualities suggesting evolution or renewal. Preparing the songs for this re-union album, I sought to revisit the characteristics that made the earlier work popular whilst exploring new sonic and lyrical dimensions. However, I was minded to beware of what I perceived to be the pitfalls common to middle-aged musicians, and purposefully sought to avoid music that sounded smooth, mellow or overtly jazzy or sophisticated. Instead my intent was to update our earlier aesthetic by working darker, edgy and sinister qualities into our signature sound. Lyrics would explore more saturnine, adult themes whilst arrangements would extend to include Alternative Rock textures and Neo-Soul aesthetics, just as McKahey’s voice naturally reflected fifteen years of maturation and life experience. We aimed to make an album that might be considered ‘cool’ and relevant to alternative radio and Indie press: both band members considered it vital that we were considered underground and sub-cultural rather than mainstream. We believed it would be a valuable progression to first generate support from alternative music gatekeepers after which we might thereafter establish a credible base from which to develop our profile. Accommodations of our previous aesthetic are most evident, as ODT would predict, in the first half of the song program as detailed below. These are the tracks with signature Cousteau, torch-song qualities and sincere, romantic themes arranged with piano, flugelhorn and baritone-range electric guitars.

### **5.6.3 Outcomes**

#### **[‘BURMA’](#)**

A slow waltz constructed from simple chords, this is a ballad that imagines a story built around the BURMA acronym (Be Upstairs Ready My Angel) which is a World War Two

military letter correspondence phenomenon<sup>16</sup>. Liam McKahey performs this with a sound that emphasizes sweet high-chest and low-head tones in his vocal delivery. The plaintive vocal qualities for which CousteauX aims are evident in the text's relationship to McKahey's voice, particularly in the song's choruses. The vocal performance in this song has some of the tonality of traditional Irish folk music, and is likely connected to McKahey's exposure to Irish folk and Country songs in his native Cork. The arrangements here suggest a deliberately antique, early 20<sup>th</sup> Century parlour quality for their piano, chamber string and fluglehorn parts.

#### [‘Seasons of you’](#)

This purposefully references 2000s Cousteau with a Chamber Pop track with a Country Rock, swung rhythmic feel. The song is constructed around a slow tempo, two bar chord pattern, with thematic figures expressed on flugelhorn and baritone guitars. Lyrics are pithy and succinct, and McKahey delivers these with a comforting Nashville-like baritone. Female backing vocals thicken the choruses as the song explores the idea of seasonality as a metaphor for a love's cycles of comfort and conflict. The band and its publishers had hoped this track's brevity, pithy title concept, and arrangement flourishes might make this attractive to radio and synchronization.

#### [‘This might be love’](#)

The upbeat tempo of this song and its fingerpicking acoustic guitars drive a looping, hypnotic figure over a pulsing bass and light jazzy drums. Singer McKahey sounds intimate, present and tactile in these verses before swelling his delivery into a mid-intensity, high baritone in the choruses. Lyrics are impressions describing the small hours of morning in the first moments of romantic love. This song features a coda, which loops the end section over which McKahey sings sweet, melismatic improvised parts. Still clearly CousteauX, the acoustic guitars and fast tempo of this track provide contrast and texture to the album's down-tempo programming.

#### [‘Maybe you’](#)

Aspiring to the quality both of late-night torch-songs and European cinema soundtracks, this mainly-piano arrangement opens out into a complex arpeggiated long-form chord sequence. A song about forbidden love, the lyrics are wistful and delivered with considerable delicacy by McKahey. There is a stripped back, almost baroque classicism to

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<sup>16</sup> Various 'postal acronyms' were deployed by soldiers in WWII as codes for cryptic, comic affectionate and sexual references. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_War\\_II\\_postal\\_acronyms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_postal_acronyms)

this arrangement and the melismatic, non-lyric B-section features a high head-voice vocal with a soaring, euphoric quality. This song's harmonic structure compositionally communicates a substantial sense of melancholia within its brooding nocturnal atmosphere. The topline threads through the chords using variations in interval and direction. There is a melodic quality to this that is identifiably CousteauX, an effect intensified by lyrics that articulate, with very few words, a furtively ambiguous story of love, loss and regret.

#### ['Portobello serenade'](#)

This purposefully references 2000s Cousteau for its jazz/blues, live band qualities. Complicated harmonic structures in both verse and chorus sections deploy numerous diminished chords over a slow, swung 6/8 feel. These are the backdrop for a wistful internal reflection on loneliness in a bustling metropolis. Mute trumpet and overdriven electric guitar take centre stage in between sung lyric in a manner associated with jazz ballad soloists, such as Chet Baker. The lead vocal ranges through its gentler crooning tones in the verses to a Blues/Rock belt in the choruses. In the making of this song, the band was aware it was creating a track with a degree of homage by deploying stylistic references signalling jazz and blues.

#### ['The innermost light'](#)

An identity shift was explored here that lyrically moved away from the good-natured romance of the previous batch of tracks. This vocal explores a more sinister, energised delivery with emphatic, Hard-Rock distortion. The concept of CousteauX as the kind of lounge bar-band Quentin Tarantino might create for a supernatural thriller was one I attempted to capture. The song's slow-tempo, weighty waltz and primary minor key blues construction is arranged with zither, overdriven electric guitars and brass stabs. The lyrics are a departure for CousteauX for their first-person perspective. The words play with the idea of light as a metaphor for soul, and by extension, soul mate; this is both a confessional and a love song in the shape of a mythical, brooding meditation on desire, destiny and time.

#### ['Thin red lines'](#)

Musically this is an experiment that shifted the band's sound into an overdriven Glam Rock/Classic Rock aesthetic with a slow shuffle beat, complex, long chord sequences and dirty guitar parts. Vocals explore a deeper, darker Rock vocal delivery recalling Mark Lanegan and late Leonard Cohen. Lyrics detail an adulterous affair for all its secrecy and



abandon. An intense version of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person present lyric is deployed here for its vicarious 'you are there' device in which the listener is directed to visualise themselves within the drama of the lyric.

### ['Shelter'](#)

First impressions here are of pulsating backing vocals, synthetic drums and phased Fender Rhodes, combining to create an ensemble that sounds intimate, present and tactile. Lyrics are 2<sup>nd</sup> person, proximate and present tense, suggesting old lovers re-uniting after a sustained separation. The lead vocal steps through its intensities as the chordal composition, in its 'B' section as it builds harmonic tension and release. Flugelhorn parts, backing vocal arrangements and a lively guitar solo at the song's fade attempt to describe a sense of deep comfort and a euphoric familiarity.

### ['Memory is a weapon'](#)

Initially a phrase I heard on spoken-word radio, I imagined an AAA song-form with this title as the terminating phrase at the music's peak (in a manner also explored in 'The innermost light'). Lyrics explore the title for the way it implies that memory might be weaponised. Suggestions of guilt, remorse and unfinished business haunt the lyric, and band arrangements are brooding and murky. The song character here is unreliable – we can hear his sense of guilt and shame as he illustrates the fears that obsess him. This is unusual for CousteauX for its conflicted, complicated, flawed song character. The arrangements here are spacious with intent to create a cinematic sound with rock instrumentation.

### ['F\\*\\*king in joy and sorrow'](#)

The reason for this title was in part a desire to reclaim this forbidden word for its positive meaning. The song was selected for the album because of the gesture it signals declaring CousteauX as subversive, dark and 'adult'. It's a breakup-sex song documenting an era in its last moments, with sexuality as a private sacrament of affection. This overtly sexualized song is an important aspect of this album that evidenced CousteauX extending their range. Grown-up themes, heavy guitars, conflicted characters and transgressive acts were new to the band's palette, and were purposefully placed into the mix to intensify our new identity.

### 5.6.3.1 Album artwork and photos



Figure 5.17 *CousteauX* album cover (CousteauX 2017)

The photojournalist's crime photo from Chicago in the 1940s (Figure 5.17) signals the band's darker intentions through this choice of a dramatic, nefarious scene rendered in black and white. In choosing this photo we sought to make a statement eschewing the glamorous imagery common to mainstream album covers. This cover also plays with audience association between the image and the two members of the band. Presenting a re-union album with an image depicting public shame is the band's way of signalling a reconciliation of its previous breakup. The picture, at face value, has powerful realistic qualities in the way that photojournalism is imbued with a sense of witness (Barthes, 1977)<sup>17</sup>. There is little doubt this is a real scene. The graphic serves as an allegorical device linking to the band's private 'breakup' biography whilst also suggests that the band is both self-effacing and repentant. This image suggests a dark humour, and prefigures the moody experience of the music it introduces.



Figure 5.18 *CousteauX* promotional photo

Figure 5.18 communicates a certain degree of confrontation, and in doing attempts to associate with cinematic staples of espionage, mob and gangster images. A style-magazine

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<sup>17</sup> '...not a consciousness of the being-there of the thing... but an awareness of its *having-been-there*. What we have is a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction of the here-now and the there-then' (Barthes, 1977, p.44)

urbanity is connoted from the band's suits and ties, and the subject gestures are deliberately provocative. The singer's tie straightening and the duo's facial expression convey mild hostility. There is hardness to this image that aims to offset the plaintive romance of much of the album's music. The CousteauX act presents itself here in a confrontational, dramatic manner, and this photograph helps form a coherent alignment with the album's music and the be-suited aesthetic of the band's live presentation.

#### **5.6.4 Reception**

The nature of independent album releases is that there are limited resources to apply to distribution and marketing. However it is some testimony to the strength of CousteauX's identity that after a dispiriting reception at BBC and XFM radio in the UK, press, print and webzine journalists responded emphatically, with inclusion in some prestigious 'Albums of 2017' lists. However, first stage in the promotion process was the speculative networking politics necessary to attract national radio play in the UK and this part of the CousteauX's progress proved ineffective.

##### **5.6.4.1 Gatekeepers: radio**

In July 2017 Silent X/Edel commissioned London radio promoters All About Promotions to work as radio promotion 'pluggers' to service our first single. They were tasked with brokering the introduction of a 'single' to BBC Radio 2, BBC 6 Music and X Music. These were the London radio stations that had played Cousteau regularly in the years 1999-2005, and represent the only networks open to UK independent releases. We led with a single edit of 'The innermost light'. All About Promotions supplied promotional copies of the song to program producers, and reported two months of activity with the following information (below). Consistent with music-industry communication protocols, what follows is patchy and fragmentary. However, the reaction of radio programmers to 'The innermost light' was non-committal:

**From: [redacted] Promotions**

**re: 'The Innermost Light'**

**E-mail Update: 25<sup>th</sup> August 2017**

BBC 6MUSIC

(Music Programmer) – "I don't remember them from before, so I'm not sure what the history of support is like on here. I can definitely hear Nick Cave influence in there... maybe Jarvis (Cocker) might be into it".

(Gideon Coe show Producer) – Texted Amanda directly and requested to hear the new material. Have sent through and will chase up next week.

Steve Lamacq show producer – "I can't remember them from their earlier material. Was it

much different to this? I'm sure Steve will remember them because of their success and I'm sure he'll listen to this. It's a good track".

Music Team representative 2- Has streamed the track on our Soundcloud so will follow up for feedback

BBC RADIO 2

(Head of Music) – "It's very muso, a bit too heavy for Radio 2. Maybe it would be something 6 would pick up on but can't see it working on 2".

(Freelance Producer) – "Really like this - nice and gritty"

(Zoe Ball Show Producer) – Have appointment with Simon next week so shall play it then.

(Jo Whiley Show Producer) – Have informed me they will listen as soon as they can. Main producer is on holidays at the moment and assistant was busy prepping for Jo's festival coverage.

RADIO X

(Head of Music) – Awaiting to secure an appointment with Mike and the lead programmer.

(XFM Music Producer) – New music show on X. Not entirely suitable for CousteauX's music but have sent through for consideration anyway.

(John Kennedy Show Producer) – John is the main man for new music on Radio X however he has been on holiday for the last 3 weeks. Will need to be patient on this one as I know that he gets sent a lot of music and he goes through every e-mail and listens, so will check later next week or the week after.

**re: 'The Innermost Light'**  
**Email Update: 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017**

BBC 6MUSIC

Music Programmer 2 – Has streamed the track on our Soundcloud so will follow up for feedback

Cerys Matthews – "Thanks Robbie, I'll check them out, but can't come to the launch - but send my well wishes".

(Cerys Matthews, Iggy Pop, Jarvis Cocker Producer) – "I'm thinking Cerys likes this, let me speak with her and get back to you".

BBC RADIO 2

(Music Programmer) - "I remember when we last play-listed Cousteau... No sorry, not for us. Only 6Music. His voice sounds like Leonard Cohen"

Across all three of these vital UK stations, 'The innermost light' received only one radio play on BBC 6 Music on August 28th, 2017 (Figure 5.19).

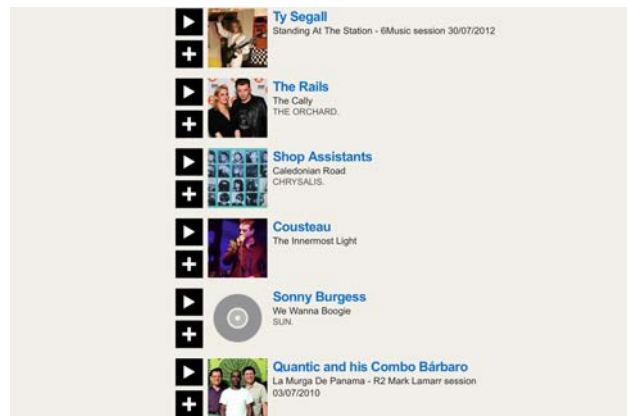


Figure 5.19 Gideon Coe Show, 6Music 28-8-2017

BBC and the X Network remain UK's most likely channel for alternative and independent music. If CousteauX were to have achieved airplay on BBC Radio 2, XFM or more substantial airtime on BBC 6 Music, then a public appetite for their album may have been stimulated, which can generate an international appeal. The fact that radio was indifferent to the single limited the project's chances of being exposed to a broader audience. The CousteauX project, by September 2017, conceded that the available UK broadcast radio had rejected 'The innermost light'. BBC Radio 2's Head of Music's response is the main style indicator here with the response: 'It's very muso, a bit too heavy for Radio 2' One might infer he is referring to the heaviness of the distorted guitars, or perhaps the lounge-band jazz-blues aesthetic of the recording. It is true this song is a very different to the chart-orientated, major-label acts BBC Radio 2 usually supports. There was momentary cause for optimism in the freelance producer's comment 'Really like this - nice and gritty', but this thread went no further, yet is some indication that the track was capable of engaging some staff at Radio 2. Radio X produced no qualitative data in their response. 'The innermost light' may have been the wrong choice for a single, as there was little radio support for this album in the UK in 2017.

In the USA Silent X/Blue Mountain Music commissioned the Truetone Media Group to service the album to radio. From the period September-November 2017 there were around 100 radio plays across the various AAA and subscription radio services, yet the impact of this exposure was negligible. A positive event amidst the overall lack of radio support was Los Angeles' influential KCRW radio stations selecting 'Memory is a weapon' as 'Today's Top Tune' (Figure 5.20) which saw the song enjoy medium-rotation for a day on one of the USA's premiere alternative music stations on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017. This may be some indication that the band chose the wrong song to promote to radio.

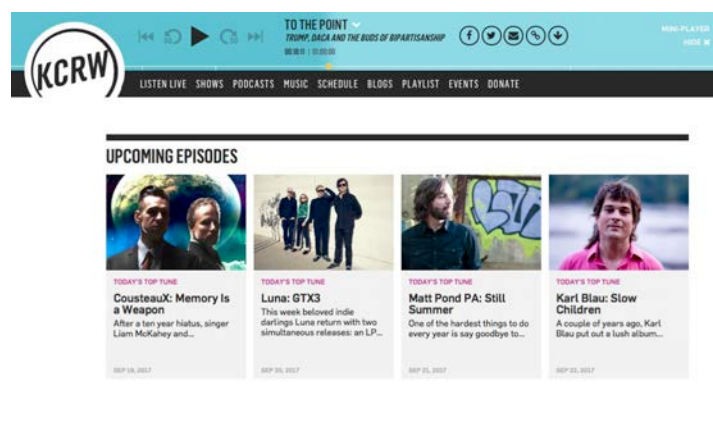


Figure 5.20 - Today's top tune KXRW Los Angeles, 19-9-2017

Italian radio was serviced by an independent promotion agent and airplay proved sporadic and limited to independent stations such as Radio Popolare in Milan<sup>18</sup>. Over a year later, December 15<sup>th</sup> 2018 saw Absolute Radio, the UK's most popular Internet radio station, include 'Thin red lines' on Frank Skinner's Saturday morning show<sup>19</sup>. Published by Chris Blackwell's Blue Mountain Music, the self-titled album *CousteauX* was released by Silent X Records through Orchard International and Edel, Italy and the USA in the fourth quarter of 2017. Promotion concentrated on Cousteau's four most successful territories: UK, USA, Portugal and Italy, and was handled by Hush PR in the UK, Jala Media Activities in Italy and Prime Mover Media in the USA.

#### 5.6.4.2 Gatekeepers: press, print and online

Whilst radio producers were lukewarm, over the ensuing weeks, the press, print and webzine/blogger responses to *CousteauX* were enthusiastic and often exceptional. The year concluded with the album included in several international Best of 2017 selections in print and webzine publications. This was some indication that the band had successfully re-invented itself in a manner that resonated with music journalists, editors and pundits. It may be the case that *CousteauX* is not a 'radio' album but instead something likely to be valued by aficionados and music fans. Below is a set of articles critically evaluating the *CousteauX* album, each awarding their highest level of esteem. Notable are Music Republic UK (Figures 5.21 and 5.26), Eyezine (Figure 5.25), Blowup (Figures 5.22 and 5.23), and

<sup>18</sup> Radio Popolare is a subscription broadcast service with a left-field, magazine format that mixes politics and music.  
<https://www.radiopopolare.it/>

<sup>19</sup> Frank Skinner is a UK comedian and DJ for the UK's most popular internet radio station.  
<https://absoluteradio.co.uk/schedule/the-frank-skinner-show-11/episodes/>

AllMusic.com (Figure 5.28) each of which bestowed CousteauX's album with maximum plaudits. The following are a collection of significant reactions that considered CousteauX to be one of 2017's best albums:

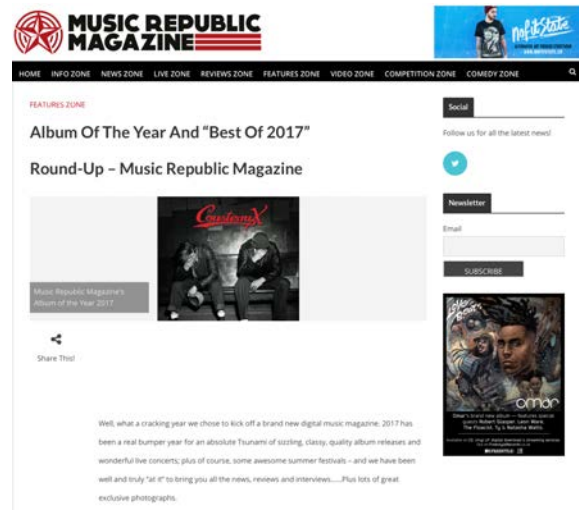


Figure 5.21 (Redley, 2017) [Album of the Year 2017, Music Republic Magazine](#)



Figure 5.22 (Babando, 2017) ['Album of the month', Blow Up Magazine, Italy](#)



Figure 5.23 ['Playlist of 2017' Blow Up Magazine, Italy](#)

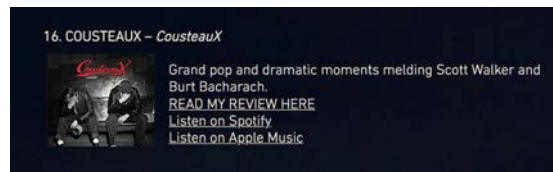


Figure 5.24 (Zuel, 2017) [#16, Best Albums of 2017](#)

The following webzines awarded CousteauX their maximum rating:



Figure 5.25 (Accio, 2017) [10/10, Eyezine.it Italy](#)



Figure 5.26 (Redley, 2017) [5/5, Music Republic Magazine](#)



Figure 5.27 (Sargeant, 2017) [5/5 Just Listen To This](#)



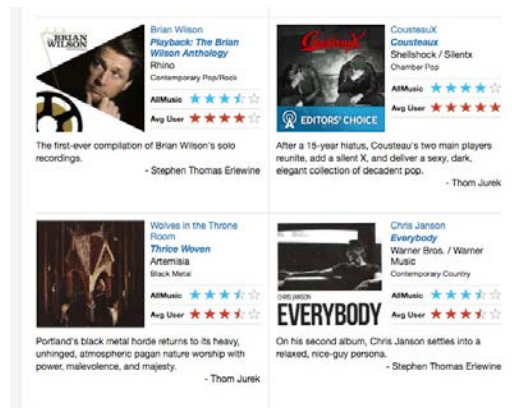


Figure 5.28 [allmusic.com](http://allmusic.com) editor's choice (Jurek, 2017)

A four-star endorsement from *Mojo* (Figure 5.29) and 8/10 from Record Collector are strong measures of mainstream, mature music fan esteem in the UK: *Mojo* and Record Collector are perhaps the most influential and long-standing of the UK's 'Classic Rock' and 'Alternative-Rock' print publications.



Figure 5.29 (Harrison, 2017) Four Stars, *Mojo* Music Magazine



Figure 5.30 (Butcher 2017) 8/10 Record Collector, *Mojo* Music Magazine, September 2017

The Huffington Post in the USA also awarded the band the coveted 'exclusive preview' endorsement (Figure 5.31), and Culture Sonar in the USA included the album in its “Fall Albums to be thankful for”.



Figure 5.31 [Huffington Post Editor's Choice](#)



Figure 5.32 (Allen, 2017) [9 Fall Albums to be thankful for - Culture Sonar](#)

Journalists, editors and bloggers were roundly appreciative if radio programmers were resistant. These commendations combine to affirm an unusual degree of gatekeeper esteem, suggesting that CousteauX’s song and graphic choices combined to communicate our identity to an effective degree in the field area of print and online music publications. Evaluations such as the following indicate that this identity was considered valuable:

- ‘Not only one of the year's most promising debuts, but a timeless offering that a decade on will sound as vital and provocative as it does now’ – (Jurek, 2017) [AllMusic.com](#)
- ‘One of the best albums in a decade. Fact... This is one of those rare times when one can be completely blown away by what we hear, and need to take a break after a few tracks to get our breath back’ - (Redley, 2017) [Music Republic Magazine](#)

- ‘... pulls on the heartstrings with an aching poignancy. This long-running cinematic pop/rock noir alternative band has triumphantly returned’ – (*Viva Le Rock* 2017)
- ‘Brit troubadours return with stunning new album’ - (Studarto, 2017)  
[blackbooks.com](http://blackbooks.com)
- ‘They have lost none or their magic. A beautiful, unique album’ - (Butcher, 2017)  
*Classic Rock Magazine*

The different responses between radio and press would seem to indicate that different gatekeepers deploy differing evaluative criteria. Music journalists and radio programmers respond and select subject to different editorial and market needs, and the same product can induce contrasting responses. CousteauX's music is slow-paced, dark and reflective and it can be assumed that mainstream radio tends to prefer up-tempo music: too many ballads discourage listeners. Because CousteauX's music requires dedicated listening, journalists might possibly be more prepared to commit time to appreciate slow, melancholy music. Yet music journalists are in the business of recommending powerful listening experiences to their readers, and need to be confident of the acuity of their appraisal. Therefore, their attention may be deeper and more appreciative; more likely to convey the character and depth of the journalists themselves. It may also be the case that the readers of music reviews, blogs, webzines and music magazines are likely to be music fans and collectors who actively seek niche, fringe, and specialist forms of music. Overall, *CousteauX* enjoyed notable success with critics in its three major territories, although the launch failed to engage significant radio support. This, I argue, indicates that the product possessed an identity considered valuable to a range of journalists, editors and pundits. It also underlines the reality that support at broadcast radio is governed by an outlet's content policy. In a crowded, competitive bid for airtime, criteria can be harsh, and the opportunity to expand a fanbase through radio play was one CousteauX was unable to generate.

#### **5.6.4.3 Audience reception**

2017's *CousteauX* album was released in CD and vinyl through Silent X Records and sold initially through Pledge Music in the UK and Edel Records in Italy. Sales were sufficient to cover production costs, and international orders are consistent two years later.

Nevertheless, the band played sold-out shows in 300-350 seat venues in Milan, London and Porto (see Chapter Eight), and our core fanbase responded enthusiastically. My sense is the band's promotional resources were too limited, and its ability to tour too restricted, so that therefore our promotional momentum could only be short lived. The album is available for global streaming and numbers are in the tens of thousands. However, this was not a

profitable commercial enterprise, and must be acknowledged for being a well appreciated, self-funding, critically feted, though relatively obscure release.

## **5.7 Discussion: CousteauX**

CousteauX 2017's reboot aimed to re-invigorate its established public profile whilst maintaining a reliable resemblance to the band's established identity. It sought to avoid maturity tropes and popular music's tendency for senior practitioners to produce mellow, smooth and comfortable music. Accordingly, CousteauX expressed darker, more dramatic adult subjects. In doing so the band managed to project an identity through their music that impressed music journalists and bloggers to the degree that the project was awarded an unusual degree of kudos. Yet largely because radio support was disappointing, and promotional budgets limited, the album failed to reach beyond its core audience. Evidently journalists and bloggers respond to CousteauX's music to a greater degree than do radio programmers, for whom selection for airplay is much more restrictive and competitive than journalistic reviews. The nature of the DIY self-funded album reveals its limitations in the lack of deep investment afforded to this album. Some record companies can regroup after setbacks at radio, and might also invest also in contemporary promotional strategies such as investing in inclusion on Spotify playlists and online promotions. The album, whilst no means a commercial success, nevertheless sold sufficient copies to cover its production costs and fund a follow-up album. For the purposes of this research, what is valuable is the acknowledgment that a compelling, convincing identity was created through CousteauX's songs. From here the research can confidently begin to analyse portfolio songs to reveal the means by which CousteauX's and Carl Barât's identity became activated through song.

## Chapter Six: Similarity variables

### 6.1 Overview of analytical approach

Zuckerman's (2016) adaption of Brewer's (1991) ODT suggests that for a product to effectively communicate identity to market, it will contain both dimensions of familiarity and dimensions of novelty. In this chapter and the next, the process of song creation undergoes forensic examination for the constituent song parts expressing these qualities. The process contributing to the making of portfolio songs will now be interrogated for the creative choices that emerged in the creative process that were relevant to identity as it was being formed. However, it must be emphasised that in the manner befitting professional practice, the professional situations described above were engaged with in a naturalistic, immersive fashion. This was to ensure that any issues affecting identity might emerge in a manner guided by intuition and practitioner knowledge, rather than be coerced in a manner that steered towards the research questions. The process deployed here was to write, produce and promote the songs in an intuitive manner, and then to step back from the process to train an analytical lens upon its outcomes (Figure 6.1).

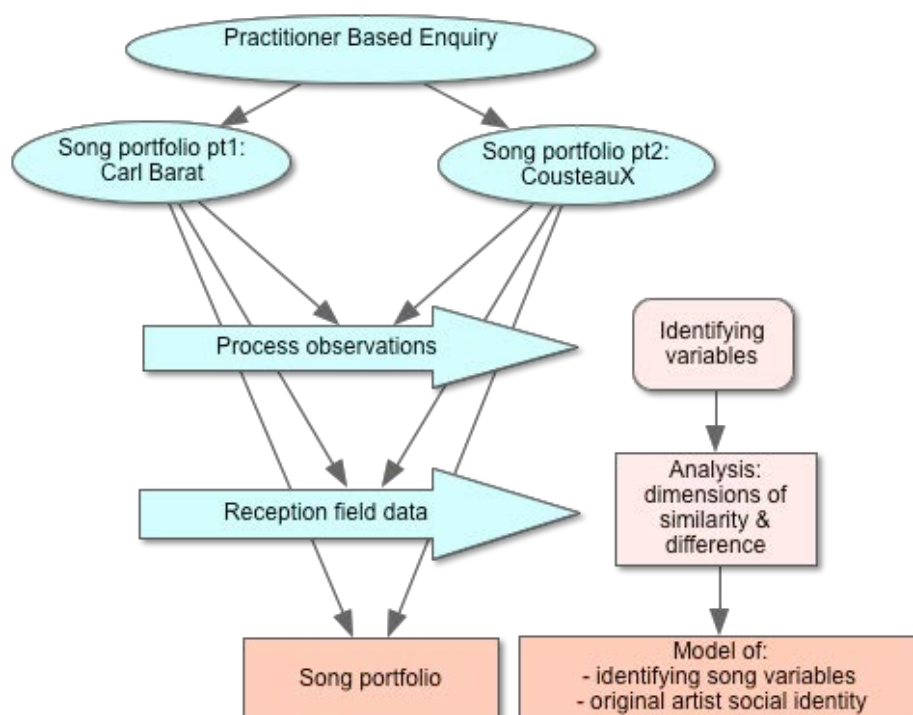


Figure 6.1 Process observations informing identifying variables for analysis

Through observation, reflection and process notes, creative processes with direct bearing upon issues of identity were initially documented, and from these a set of data points emerged. Some recurring variables were seen to be consistent across both projects' song and production processes. Creative choices, epiphany and inflection points emerged from this autoethnographic situations suggesting themes that, working together, suggest identifying variables mobilized by songwriters in original songs. Observations of practice grouped thematically into the following identifying variables, and these are demonstrated in the following chapters as operational within the portfolio songs in a manner that constructs artist identity:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demography</li> <li>• Genre and style</li> <li>• Texture</li> <li>• Tempo</li> <li>• Harmonic contour</li> <li>• Vocal Costume</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrangement features</li> <li>• Modality</li> <li>• Modes of address</li> <li>• Values</li> <li>• Value orientation</li> <li>• Songfulness</li> <li>• The idiolectic voice</li> </ul>
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When we talk about genre and location within popular music, we identify musical factors that express similarity to genre from within a tight set of musical variables. What makes songs signal a genre is worthy of exploring for those constituent parts under an artist's control. What I propose to demonstrate is that there exists a specific set of variables within an original artist's songs that serve to locate the songs within genre, or perhaps make people *feel* a song belongs to genre. ODT would predict that some song elements will help original songs assimilate into their section of the marketplace, just as other elements will pronounce an artist's uniqueness and difference. For this reason, it is instructive first to explore those variables that most determine belonging and assimilation in relation to genre and style. If genres can be described as shared musical features, then we may be able to define these in a more focused manner. At this point in the research I must deploy some practitioner habitus, or 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1996 p. 81). Mobilizing my own habitus to assist analysis allows me to broadly classify those variables that signal toward culture (genre, sub-genre, style or movement) and those others that can be signal toward the artist as a unique variant of that genre's types. It is important also to acknowledge that each of these variables interacts with the others in a song's system of meaning; dividing into two types is not the goal here. Instead a model is sought of a group of choices that songwriters deploy that can be demonstrated as combining the familiar with the unique.

Retrospectively the above variables have been divided into two sets of elements activating what I consider to be variables mostly confirming assimilation, and variables mostly gesturing distinctiveness. The first of these chapters explores those variables that arguably tend to conform to genre similarity, and Chapter Seven explores variables expressing distinction in detail. In what follows, ideas from various disciplines and sources are adapted to construct a theoretical basis for concepts observed in practice. The first of these is that most primary of consideration for any artist or product: the age, gender and location of their audience. This frames a sense of an audience's characteristics, predilections and tastes in a manner that is vital to the design of any product, and remains the most fundamental consideration attenuating an artist's public identity constructed through song.

## **6.2 Demography**

It is axiomatic that the survival of a popular music act is defined by the commerciality of its audience appeal. Differing popular musics sell to a range of gender, age groups, races, socio-economic situations, geographical situations, ethnicities, sexuality and religions. Both Carl Barât and CousteauX were aware, at all times, of their intended audience's characteristics. Invariably this was the most fundamental parameter governing the construction of the songs. Considerations of age, sex, ethnicity and income can indicate corresponding values, aesthetics, priorities and political orientation. To generate a career in popular music, an original artist needs to identify and then supply their particular audience with music that they enjoy and may come to cherish. Establishing a sense of core market characteristics, whilst an imprecise science, nevertheless represents a primary set of considerations influencing the creative choices that follow.

### **6.2.1 Carl Barât**

This research has no direct access to confidential demographic information about Carl Barât's audience. However, we can infer with some confidence the geographical reach of his music, and the age of his core audience from his live performance schedules. Countries visited in support of the two portfolio albums in the period 2010 to 2019 are the UK, France, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Austria, Russia, Latvia, China, Argentina and Brazil. The age of Barât's audiences we can estimate as likely to be those who were people aged 18-24 in 2004, the year of *The Libertines'* #1 Album and high-rotation BBC Radio 1 airplay. This audience would've been 24-30 on the release of his first solo album in 2010, and 29-35 on the release of 2015's *Let it reign*. And so, from the available information it can confidently be deduced that Carl Barât's audiences, whilst distributed internationally, are likely to be

mostly from Europe and the UK, and aged between 24 and 35 during the time-frame of the portfolio albums. Observations of Barât's audiences, from my perspective as touring keyboard player, were that his live audience were a equal mix of genders, and that these people were generally metropolitan and a broad mix of urban professionals and graduates. Whilst these are broad brushstrokes, Barât's team nevertheless knew we were not making music for the 18-24 age range of Chart Pop, nor the 45+ age range that, for example, makes up much of CousteauX's audience. Instead Carl Barât's eponymous solo album and *Let it reign* aimed to speak to people of both genders in the 25-35 age range. These were, by the second album, people in the workforce with complicated lives; different to those they lived nine years earlier when they were Libertines fans.

### 6.2.2 CousteauX

Whilst again limited, CousteauX's Facebook account provides demographic insight into the composition of the band's online audience. Notable is the broad range of nationalities represented by the band's followers. The 2,912 people who follow CousteauX are from the following countries, and is a list that suggests a global distribution of fans:

Italy, United Kingdom, USA, Australia, Portugal, Ireland, Mexico, France, Greece, Germany, Serbia, Netherlands, Brazil, Argentina, Croatia, Belgium, Canada, India, Austria, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden, Chile, Norway, Luxembourg, Philippines, Switzerland, Denmark, Japan, Singapore, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Israel, Peru, Turkey, China, Egypt, Pakistan, Romania, Ukraine, Taiwan  
(CousteauX, 2019).

The three territories with the most CousteauX followers are the U.S.A. the U.K. and Italy and accordingly, these were the main territories in which the band released its 2017 album physically. Also revealing is the age demographic transcribed from Facebook's CousteauX page (Table 6.1):

*Table 6.1 Age and gender demographics (CousteauX, 2019)*

Age	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	64+
WOMEN	1%	5%	12%	12%	6%	3%
MEN	3%	7%	17%	19%	9%	4%

This Facebook data suggests that CousteauX is a band with an international fanbase comprised mostly of people aged 35 and over, with a 60/40 mix of genders. 82% of CousteauX's audience are aged 35+, and the largest representation is males aged 45-54.



Unsurprisingly, both these figures broadly represent the demographic of the band's management, friends and social groups. In CousteauX's case, it can be confidently inferred that the music appeals to an audience that broadly reflects the musicians and their peers; metropolitan, educated, 35-55 year old professionals and music aficionados.

### **6.3 Genre and style**

Popular music has long been divided into genres for marketing, consumption and scholarly purposes. Popular musical identity is invariably determined by categorization into genre and style. Fabbri (1981) defines genre as 'a set of musical events...whose course is governed by a definite set of socially acceptable rules' (p.1), and Meyer defines style as 'a replication of patterning that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints' (1989, p.3). Moore (2001) attempts to reconcile these two terms within a structure appropriate to popular music. He notes that the concept 'genre' is commonly used in cinema and cultural studies whereas within traditional musicology the concept 'style' is more readily deployed in classical music when referring to a composer's work. Fiske (1987) sees genre performing the function of creating *expectation* within an audience by activating memories of similar texts. This is what Kallberg (1988) describes as a generic contract in which musicians agree to conventions, patterns and gestures that, in response, a listener consents to interpret in a way conditioned by genre. Moore (2001) proposes that 'style' refers to the finer manner of *articulation* of musical gestures. Genre then defines the broader context of these gestures. Moore argues that style is a concept nested within that of genre: style is a sub-set of genre. At the point of sale, music consumers choose first from a list of genres, just as they do film or literature choices. From there they select their style choices. In the present portfolio, there are two acts working as discernably different stylists within the Pop Rock genre. And so, in this thesis, focus centers upon the formation of *style* differences within this single genre. Moore and Fabbri point out that the meaning of the two terms, 'genre' and 'style', are often interchanged and are to some degree indeterminate. However, for the purposes of this study, Moore's nested differentiation (i.e. genre superordinate, style subordinate) is congruent with that deployed by AllMusic.com and other online vendors. Artists typically sit within a specific section of music's array of genres, yet every artist strives to establish stylistic distinction in order to attract genre audiences to their particular variation.

#### **6.3.1 Taxonomy and categorization: AllMusic.com**

In order to structure the discussion that follows, a taxonomical reference point needs establishing in order to define parameters of genre and style. AllMusic.com are the international supplier of popular music taxonomies, and are instrumental in formalizing

category descriptors. The platform is currently the world's key contributor to the tag-based categorization systems utilized by international online music services. AllMusic also describes, on behalf of their subscribers, the relational links between various acts. Their taxonomic databases standardize streaming and delivery over the Internet, and help build search filters and recommendation algorithms for consumers. Streaming sites and Internet stores invariably manage their materials through this tag-based system of genres and styles, and streaming platforms and online stores such as Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer, Amazon, Tidal and Rhapsody sort, categorize and recommend to customers based on AllMusic.com tags. The platform has become a new form of retail reference point, with the added value of its influential source of reviews, biographies and commentary. Each of these discourse functions is subsequently syndicated alongside their databases to other Internet services, such as Apple and Amazon. For nominal purposes, AllMusic.com provides a broadly adopted, industrial resource of taxonomic and descriptive information. For purposes of meaningful analysis, AllMusic.com also provides valuable, descriptive qualitative information.

### **6.3.2 Pop Rock: Carl Barât**

Now let us explore the variables of genre category determining 'Pop Rock' inclusion in a manner structured by AllMusic.com. This will lead the discussion into considerations of how other identifying variables interact with defining qualities of genre and style. Pop Rock is perhaps the largest section of any record store, physical or virtual, and includes both Carl Barât and CousteauX.

**Pop Rock**...defined by its energy, rebellion and catchy hooks... with equal emphasis on craftsmanship and pushing the boundaries of the music. Everything from Chuck Berry's pounding, three-chord rockers and the sweet harmonies of the Beatles to the jarring, atonal white noise of Sonic Youth has been categorized as 'rock.' For most of its life, rock has been fragmented, spinning off new styles and variations every few years, from Brill Building Pop and heavy metal to dance-pop and grunge. (AllMusic.com, 2019a)

Within this genre category, AllMusic.com's Carl Barât's page defines his stylistic variations on genre as: Indie Rock, Britpop, Alternative Pop/Rock and Alternative/Indie Rock. This is somewhat confusing, yet nested within Alternative/Indie Rock AllMusic.com publish a set of stylistic variations, where definitions become more precise (Figure 6.2).

Other Styles in Alternative/Indie Rock			
Adult Alternative Pop/Rock	Electro-Industrial	Lo-Fi	Punk-Pop
Alternative Country-Rock	Emo	Madchester	Queercore
Alternative Dance	Emo-Pop	Math Rock	Retro Swing
Alternative Pop/Rock	Free Folk	Neo-Glam	Riot Grrrl
Ambient Pop	Funk Metal	Neo-Psychedelia	Sadcore
American Underground	Garage Punk	New Wave/Post-Punk Revival	Screamo
British Trad Rock	Goth Rock	New Zealand Rock	Shibuya-Kei
Britpop	Grunge	Noise Pop	Shoegaze
C-86	Indie Electronic	Paisley Underground	Ska-Punk
Chamber Pop	Indie Folk	Post-Grunge	Skatepunk
Cocktail	Indie Pop	Post-Hardcore	Slowcore
Cold Wave	Indie Rock	Post-Rock	Space Rock
College Rock	Industrial	Psychobilly	Third Wave Ska Revival
Cowpunk	Industrial Dance	Punk Blues	Twee Pop
Darkwave	Jangle Pop	Punk Revival	Visual Kei
Dream Pop			

Figure 6.2 Screenshot showing styles within Alternative Indie Rock's sub-genre (AllMusic.com, 2019b)

The nomenclature sub-genre and style seem to be interchangeable in AllMusic.com's typography, but nevertheless we can clarify the relationship between the genre>sub>genre and style hierarchy by using Figure 6.2's style descriptors to determine three distinct stylistic variations evident within the *Carl Barât* and *Let it reign* album releases, thus:

Table 6.2 stylistic variations evident within Carl Barât and Let it Reign (AllMusic.com, 2019c)

Genre: Pop Rock		
Sub-Genre: Alternative Pop Rock		
Style: Alternative/Indie Rock		
Alt Indie Rock Variation: Chamber Pop	Alt Indie Rock Variation: Britpop	Alt Indie Rock Variation: Garage Punk

AllMusic.com defines these stylistic variations as:

**Chamber Pop:** inspired in part by the lounge-music revival but with a complete absence of irony or kitsch, chamber pop placed a renewed

emphasis on melody and production, as artists layered their baroque, ornate songs with richly textured orchestral strings and horns, all the while virtually denying the very existence of grunge, electronica, and other concurrent musical movements. (AllMusic.com, 2019d)

**Britpop:** ...in the British tradition of tuneful, guitar-driven pop bands... big, shiny, catchy hooks... Britpop celebrated and commented on (British youth) lives, their culture, and musical heritage... Musically, Britpop draws from the Beatles...but also from the pastoral sound of late-'60s Kinks, the mod movement (the Who, the Small Faces), '70s glam (David Bowie, T. Rex, Roxy Music), punk and new wave (the Jam, the Buzzcocks, Wire, Madness, XTC, Squeeze, Elvis Costello) (AllMusic.com, 2019e)

**Garage Punk:** ... garage rock revivalists also appropriated the original music's sense of style, self-consciously playing up their personal favourite qualities- toughness, sleaziness, brashness, manic energy, rebellion and a party-hearty spirit (AllMusic.com, 2019f)

### 6.3.3 CousteauX: Pop Rock > Alternative Pop/Rock > Adult Alternative Pop/Rock



Figure 6.3 CousteauX racked within 'Rock and Pop', HMV London, 2017

Figure 6.3 demonstrates the degree to which nomenclature can slip: in this store CousteauX are racked within the *Rock and Pop* category. Typically defined as Alternative Rock, CousteauX's music is mellow, melancholic, emotional, and mature. Accordingly, AllMusic.com offers a sub-genre by which to fine-tune CousteauX's niche within Alternative/Indie Rock genre typography. *Adult Alternative Pop/Rock*, as defined by AllMusic.com, reflects the AAA radio format<sup>20</sup> in the USA, in defining a variation of Alt/Indie Rock attuned to older, more mature audiences. It is a style category that represents a sector of the marketplace with established media channels; many of them mainstream, thus:

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<sup>20</sup> Short for 'adult album alternative'. This is an FM format created to be a different listening option for Boomers and Generation X listeners tired of commercial radio. According to Wikipedia, 'music selection tends to be on the fringe of mainstream pop and rock as well as many other genres such as indie rock, pop rock, alternative rock, alternative country, jazz, folk, world music, jam band and blues' [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adult\\_album\\_alternative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adult_album_alternative)

**Adult Alternative Pop/Rock** is a smooth, melodic, radio-friendly style that packaged alternative's mellower side for wider consumption.... with a sense of maturity: it's essentially mainstream, pop/rock-based music that appeals to a more refined, mellowed-out adult sensibility, intentionally or otherwise (AllMusic.com, 2019g)

AllMusic.com's style typography identifies three stylistic tendencies operational within CousteauX's Adult Alternative Pop/Rock sub-genre. These are Chamber Pop, Alternative Indie Rock and Sadcore:

*Table 6.3 Stylistic variations evident within CousteauX (AllMusic.com, 2019h)*

Genre: Pop/Rock		
Sub-Genre 1: Alternative/Indie Rock		
Sub-Genre 2: Adult Alternative Rock		
Style: Chamber Pop	Style: Alternative Indie Rock	Style: Sadcore

The band's aesthetic has evolved from its 2000s incarnation so that by 2017 the style descriptor 'Sophisti-Pop' that once described Cousteau has now been replaced, at AllMusic.com by a new descriptor in 'Sadcore':

**Sadcore** Primarily an extension of alternative/independent rock, Sadcore is slow, fragile and gut-wrenching music made by and for the depressed. Themes of heartbreak, loss, and misery dominate the lyrics, and the music itself is resolutely downbeat -- the acoustic guitars that once defined '70s-era singer/songwriters certainly resurface here, but much of the music is far more dissonant and intense, conjuring much darker atmospheres and textures. Sadcore bands like American Music Club and Red House Painters channel their pain and suffering into music that is hauntingly beautiful - the perfect soundtrack for solitary late-night listening. (AllMusic.com, 2019i)

Having consolidated genre category compliance, stylistic variations shall now be explored at an intra-song level as this argument begins to explore the ingredients that combine to constitute these stylistic characteristics. Whilst AllMusic's style descriptors are broad, they nevertheless provide nuance sufficient to structure this chapter's study of similarity. Aligning with AllMusic.com's tag-based system of reference, analysis can proceed to explore those identifying elements negotiated in song creation that contributed to category inclusion at AllMusic.com.

## 6.4 Texture

The outward identity of choices audible in sound, reflects a pattern of belief, desire, and inhibition that constitutes an 'inner self' – what it is to be 'me' (Cumming, 2000, p.11).

Texture announces identity in an instant as it rapidly conveys signals indicating genre and style through aural cultural signifiers. The phrase 'sonic self' is Cumming's term describing music's fabric of audible impressions for the way they pronounce tangible sensory impressions of music cultures. The human auditory system evolved in a way that rendered it sensitive to shades of pitch, direction, tone, spatiality and dynamics. These responses are vestiges of a time in which our species required early-warning alerts about things or events it could not see locally nor smell at a distance (Levitin, 2008). Humans are sensitized to a combination of volume, spatial location, reverberation and timbre. Our neural 'wiring' forms at an early age and we become encultured to the harmonic, tonal, rhythmic and lexical dimensions specific to our cultures. The leading edge of song's meaning will be the immediate sonic impression of the song's sound. Tagg (2015) refers to this sonic dimension as the 'synchritic' or vertical structure of music, which gets carried along by the 'diachronic', horizontal time-based structures of rhythm, melody and harmony. Different diachronic textural qualities are evident in Grime, Jazz, Blues, Soft Rock, Heavy Metal, Death Metal, Folk, R&B, EDM, Indie, Hip-Hop, Country, Dub-step, Alt-Country, Reggae, Funk and Disco amongst others. Levitin (2008) established that within 100 milliseconds a listener can recognize a track's sonic fingerprint, and any of the above textural and timbral qualities of a track will function as early indications of each genre. These sonics themselves carry style expectations that signal sociological discourses (Machin, 2010) as well as cultural, political dimensions of demography, education, enculturation and taste. Texture is expressed early in a song's duration by the palette of instruments and voices that constitute a song's arrangement. These then become incorporated within the complex sonics of mastered recordings. Bands are known for their signature sound, and popular music artists – bands in particular - often strive for distinctive sonic identifiers. Camilleri (2010) speaks of the spectral dimension in which mix engineers and producers work with dynamics of 'saturation'. This describes the harmonic effect of soft/loud dynamics evident in 'Smells like teen spirit' by Nirvana in which choruses introduce complex overtones of distorted guitars which saturate the upper partials of the sound-spectrum in a manner conveying intensity and force. Saturation is useful shorthand for describing in simple terms the difference between tones common to Soft Rock, Chamber Pop and Easy Listening and those found in Hard Rock, Alternative Rock

and Garage Rock. Each of popular music's style conventions is built upon shared sonic characteristics, often determined by saturation, and each signalling towards genre, discourse, culture and a host of socio-economic markers.

#### 6.4.1 Texture: Carl Barât

The textural qualities defining Chamber Pop, Britpop and Garage Rock, can broadly be described as the difference between low-saturation orchestral instrumentation and high-saturation Rock arrangements. Electric guitars emerge as the key defining difference, both by the extent they are used in the arrangements and also by their level of distorted textures. 'This is the Song (irony of love)' and 'Shadows fall' use no electric guitars at all, and 'Carve my name' deploys clean baritone guitars to a subtle degree. In contrast, 'The gears' and 'Death fires burn at night' and 'are built around pronounced distorted guitars. In the centre of this spectrum are Britpop's overdriven, less aggressive and more mainstream textures evident in 'Run with the boys', 'Beginning to see' and 'We want more'.

*Table 6.4 Carl Barât and Let it reign textures within AllMusic.com style descriptors*

Genre: Pop Rock		
Sub-Genre 1: Alternative Pop Rock		
Sub-Genre 2: Alternative Indie Rock		
Alt Indie Rock Variation: <b>Chamber Pop</b>	Alt Indie Rock Variation: <b>Britpop</b>	Alt Indie Rock Variation: <b>Garage Punk</b>
'Carve my name' 'Shadows fall' 'This is the song (irony of love)'	'Run with the boys' 'Beginning to see' 'We want more'	'Death fires burn at night' 'The gears'
low saturation, brushed, close-mic'd drums, upright bass, pianos, strings, solo cello, trumpets, clean electric guitars, gentle, softer vocal tones naturalistic and open production textures	medium saturation, processed live drums, plectrum bass, clean electric guitars, brass, slide guitars, belted though not distorted vocals, strummed acoustic guitars	high saturation, raw live drums, plectrum bass, distorted guitars, abrasive lead vocals, heavy, live band performances

The sonic character of the portfolio's Barât songs can be seen (in Table 6.4) to conform to stylistic characteristics. While the Chamber Pop components are soft and reflective, their Britpop companions are overdriven, guitar-led, forceful and bold. Predictably, Garage Punk's textures are abrasive, bold and confrontational. This set of textures contrasts with Table 6.5's CousteauX textures, indicating that already, at the textural level, the identities of these two acts are become distinct from each other.

#### 6.4.2 Texture: CousteauX

Table 6.5 demonstrates the *CousteauX* album divided into three stylistic textural characteristics. The intent to establish similarity with the band's previous material witnesses fifty per cent of the album clustered within the torch-song textures of Chamber Pop. Extending this formula to include the Indie Rock textures blending Blues, Americana and Glam Rock, the album explores Alternative Rock means of arranging the band's core aesthetic. Experiments in Sadcore also build upon the torch-song aesthetic to add Soul and Chillout dimensions to the band's sonic range. Within the textural dimensions alone, aspects of similarity become established by the album's sonic impressions.

*Table 6.5 CousteauX textures grouped into AllMusic.com's style descriptors*

Genre: Pop/Rock		
Sub-Genre: Alternative/Indie Rock		
Sub-Genre: Adult Alternative Rock		
<b>Style: Chamber Pop</b> 'Maybe you' 'BURMA' 'Seasons of you' 'Memory is a weapon' 'Portobello serenade'	<b>Style: Indie Rock</b> 'The innermost light' 'Thin red lines' 'This might be love'	<b>Style: Sadcore</b> 'Shelter' 'F**king in joy and sorrow'
low saturation, brushed light drums, upright bass, acoustic piano, flugelhorn, trumpet, clean guitars, baritone guitar, tremolo electric guitars	medium saturation, treated rock drums, overdriven guitars, overdriven electric bass, compressed pianos, baritone guitar	low saturation, electric piano, clean electric bass, Hammond organ, voice pads, clean electric guitars

A pared-down, baroque approach to arrangements is explored in 'Maybe you' and 'BURMA', and both are arranged in a manner that is skeletal, stark and solemn. This Chamber Pop formula is elaborated in the orchestrated, soundtrack-like qualities in the strings, muted brass and soft-rock stylings of 'Seasons of you'. 'Memory is a weapon' extends that formula in a manner reminiscent of spy and noir-ish soundtracks, and possesses some of the intensity of a Rock band whilst eschewing electric guitars. The jazzier elements of 'Portobello serenade' attempt a late-night, Jazz club version of Chamber Pop. Alternative/Indie Rock textures are expressed through edgier, more distorted Blues-Rock band ensemble approaches with an emphasis on the electric guitar. From the harder, minor-blues of 'Thin red lines' and 'The innermost light', this rock-band approach accommodates our desire to produce darker moods in a vein inspired by Nick Cave. This consolidates the fantasy lounge band design principle that defined the band's inception. The two Sadcore tracks attempt to establish the intimacy of Neo-Soul and Chill-out music by arranging with sensual, gentle and hypnotic textures. 'F\*\*king in joy and sorrow'



explores a baroque, soft-rock variant of the Sadcore aesthetic, with its muted drums and swirling Hammond organ creating an atmosphere of hypnotic intimacy. The way in which this album moves between these three textural styles with a continuity of purpose seems to have contributed to perceptions of depth and variation reflected in the album’s reviews.

### 6.5 Tempo

Recent studies have advanced the understanding of musical tempo as a musical vector activating predictable emotional responses in listeners. These studies tend to approach the subject from the psychophysiology, neurophysiology and psychology disciplines, such as Carpentier and Potter (2007) who showed that fast paced music elicits a greater skin conductance level than slower music. Trochidis and Bigand (2013) used EEG to map tempo variations to the activation of different lobes in the brain, and tempo was seen to modulate the arousal extent of emotional response. Faster tempos were associated with stronger feelings of happiness and anger, and an increased frontal activation in the left hemisphere. In contrast, slow tempo induced less frontal activation in the left hemisphere. Dobroca and Ercegovic (2015) found that openness to experience and introversion were predictors of preferences for slower tempos and minor keys. Hussein, Thompson and Schellenberg (2002) established that whilst tempo affected feelings of arousal in listeners, harmonic modal variations affected feelings of mood, each of which affected each other. Each of these scientific experiments support my experiential intuition that faster bpm tempi (beats per minute) drive greater feelings of excitement and activity, whereas slower bpm rates underpin reflective, melancholic qualities in songs. Qualitative data to describe these differences were supplied by the work of Hevner (1937), who experimented for vectors of meaning in both pitch and tempo. His study confirmed broad subjectivities of musical meaning determined by tempo alone, and Hevner divided these broad tempo responses into the following qualitative descriptions:

Table 6.6 characteristics of tempo from Hevner (1937)

Slow	Fast
dignified, solemn	graceful, sparkling
sad, heavy	happy, bright
dreamy, sentimental	exciting, elated
serene, gentle	vigorous, majestic

Hevner illustrates the broader feelings associated with tempo in a manner sufficient to affirm that tempo is likely fundamental to impressions of artist identity in song. Levitin (2008) understands tempo as the *gait*, or the rate at which the music *walks by*. He

established that across a vast range of cultures, songs with fast tempos tend to be understood as happy, and slow songs are regarded as sad. Ball (2011) conducted similar international studies and found that these emotional responses cross every cultural divide: happy or joyous music is always faster, and slower tempos universally convey sadness, reflection or calm. In the portfolio work with Carl Barât and CousteauX, creative choices in tempo determined the mood and atmosphere the song would go on to develop. After writing the slow waltzing ‘Carve my name’, and the melancholy ‘This is the song’, Barât wanted something more energized, and so ‘Run with the boys’ began by building upon an up-tempo Motown drum loop. What can be assumed is that the choice between fast or slow tempos profoundly influences the character of the song they frame. Tempo is a fundamental factor in conveying the emotionality of songs and music, and it was invariably the first affective creative choice activated at the genesis of each of the songs in this portfolio.

### 6.5.1 Tempo: Carl Barât

Chamber Pop of the kind associated with my music is typically built upon slower tempos underpinning the music’s emotional, soundtrack-like approaches. Table 6.7 confirms the consistency of slow tempos deployed by the writers to underpin typical Chamber Pop dimensions of the *Carl Barât* album. Later, Barât’s *Let it reign* album sought to counterbalance these experiments with more urgent, aggressive music, and Table 6.7 indicates Garage Punk is a style broadly determined musically by faster 100 bpm+ tempos. ‘The gears’ and ‘We want more’ are deliberately assertive and aggressive in this regard. In the centre-ground of Britpop ‘Run with the boys’ is mid-tempo, mainstream light Rock. ‘Beginning to see’ aspires to reflective Classic-Rock in the vein of John Lennon: its slow, relaxed quality steadies the album’s frenetic Punk Rock with a passage of mellow reflection. The analysis in Table 6.7 also confirms that slow tempos consistent across these three songs actively establish characteristics typical of Chamber Pop.

*Table 6.7 Carl Barât and Let it reign tempi and time signatures within AllMusic.com style descriptors*

Chamber Pop	Britpop	Garage Punk
‘Carve my name’ - <b>67 bpm</b>	‘Run with the boys’ - <b>96 bpm</b>	‘The gears’ - <b>125 bpm</b>
‘Shadows fall’ - <b>70 bpm</b>	‘Beginning to see’ - <b>62 bpm</b>	‘Death fires’ - <b>106 bpm</b>
‘This is the song (irony of love)’ - <b>58 bpm</b>		‘We want more’ - <b>148 bpm</b>

Evident here is a sense that tempo communicates fundamental identifying stylistic qualities. As might be predicted, the melancholy reflection of Chamber Pop and the splenetic extremes of Garage Rock are underpinned by contrasting tempi, with Britpop a more relaxed, mid-tempo somewhere between these two poles. Tempo emerges from these observations as a primary variable determining, to a predictable degree, stylistic variation defined by energy and arousal levels in the music.

### 6.5.2 Tempo: CousteauX

*Table 6.8: CousteauX tempi grouped into AllMusic's style descriptors*

<b>Chamber Pop</b>	<b>Alternative/Indie Rock</b>	<b>Sadcore</b>
'Memory is a weapon' - <b>80 bpm</b>	'Thin red lines' - <b>74 bpm</b>	'Shelter' - <b>60 bpm</b>
'Maybe you' - <b>55 bpm</b>	'The innermost light' - <b>97 bpm</b>	'F**king in joy and sorrow' - <b>81 bpm</b>
'Seasons of you' - <b>66 bpm</b>	'Portobello serenade' - <b>110 bpm</b>	
'BURMA' - <b>57 bpm</b>	'This might be love' - <b>134 bpm</b>	

Slower sub-100 bpm tempos are evidenced here as dominant throughout CousteauX's album, with an outlier in 'Portobello serenade's' jazz-band performance paced at 110 bpm. But overall, the album possesses an overarching slow-tempo characteristic that underpins the band's cinematic qualities. Arrangement and production qualities such as the bassline on 'Memory is a weapon', or the overdriven shuffle of the 'Thin red lines' inject a more aggressive quality into the track selection, and these contribute some energy and dynamism. For its slow tempi, the album nevertheless deceptively conveys a intensity, which works to counter-balance the collection of slow songs. This counteracts the risk of the album becoming too soporific and morbid. This analysis confirms that CousteauX is an album of slow songs, and this band's identity is one based significantly on music of sub 100-BPM tempos.

## 6.6 Harmonic contour

One of the most fundamental decisions taken at the inception of the portfolio songs concerns the harmonic constructions forming the musical shape of the songs. These are often the earliest indications of what a song is going to eventually convey; chords and harmonic patterns emerge from processes of musical improvisation and experimentation. It occurred to me during the writing that the complexity, or the simplicity of chord progressions had a direct bearing on meaning at a musical level. Moore (2012) developed Middleton's (1990) categorization of harmonic construction types to suggest there exist two fundamental types of harmonic constructions within popular music. He distinguishes

between 'open ended' and 'period' structures. Moore suggests songs based on short, looped harmonic sequences can be deemed to be 'open ended' harmonic constructions. These open-ended harmonic periods, in Moore's model, describe songs such as 'Price tag' by Jessie J, 'Smells like teen spirit' by Nirvana, and 'All along the watchtower' by Jimi Hendrix, for example. These are rapidly cycling, small sentences in harmonic language. When open ended harmonic structures underpin the song, the affective emotive communication does not reside as much within the harmonic dimension. Instead the composition tends to foreground rhythm, groove, melody, performance and arrangements. Whilst generalization is impossible, open ended harmonic structures are prevalent in R&B, Funk, Soul and EDM. In contrast, Moore proposes an opposite polarity exists in what he defines as 'period structure' harmonic constructions. 'Period' harmonic construction describes longer chord sequences in songs such as 'Yesterday' by The Beatles, 'Hallelujah' by Leonard Cohen or 'Wichita lineman' by Glen Campbell. Period harmonic constructions see harmony exert a stronger affective presence in songs and accordingly, longer, more complex melodic shapes often develop in correspondence with these extended structures. Whilst there are no absolute principles defining these differences, I argue that period harmonic structures tend to underpin more contemplative, complicated, wistful and/or romantic songs where harmony is constructed in such a way that it independently communicates a discernible emotionality. Open-ended progressions, in contrast, deploy fast-impact urgencies of 'grooves' where harmony is less freighted with communicating a song's emotionality. Instead, for these shorter harmonic sentences, the affective communication is emphasized by rhythm, top-line, performance and arrangement elements. Moore (2012) utilizes the metaphor of geographical contours to describe the way in which melody forms over harmonic structures, and we can deploy this visual metaphor to simplify the nomenclature of harmonic constructions. If we use the term 'high contour' to describe Moore and Middleton's 'open ended' chord loops, this ably describes the multiple repeats of a short chord loops. Low contour, on the other hand be used to describe 'period' structured harmonic sections in a manner that might be represented by longer compositional sections with extended rises and falls, such as an ordinance survey map might deploy to depict rolling hills and planes across a landscape. Let us now explore the ways in which the extent of the AllMusic.com style typography conform and cohere with the portfolio's harmonic contours. For clarity, shorter bar periods are considered 'high contour' in that they are fast-repeating sections of music with fewer chords. This contrasts with longer bar periods, that suggest more developed, complex and slow-repeating 'low contour' harmonic constructions that often deploy multiple chord changes.

### 6.6.1 Harmonic contour: Carl Barât

Table 6.9 Carl Barât *eponymous* and *Let it reign* harmonic contour

Chamber Pop	Britpop	Garage Punk
<u>'Carve my name'</u> 8 bar A section, 6 changes 8 bar B section, 10 changes	<u>'Run with the boys'</u> 4 bar A section, 3 changes 7 bar pre-chorus, 5 changes 12 bar B Section, 9 changes	<u>'The gears'</u> 4 bar A section, 12 changes 2 bar B Section, 2 changes
<u>'Shadows fall'</u> 9 bar A section, 7 changes 8 bar B Section, 6 changes	<u>'Beginning to see'</u> 8 bar A section, 7 changes 12 bar A Section, 11 changes	<u>'Death fires'</u> 2 bar A section, 2 changes 2 bar pre chorus, 1 change 4 bar B Section, 3 changes
<u>'This is the song (irony of love)'</u> 4 bar A section, 3 changes 8 bar B Section, 6 changes	<u>'We want more'</u> 2 bar A section, 1 change 2 bar B section, 1 change	

The most contrast evident in Table 6.9 is in the differences between Chamber Pop and Garage Punk: Chamber Pop tends to be built upon longer harmonic cycles. In contrast, Garage Punk songs are constructed from shorter harmonic sequences. High contour songs such as these Garage Punk songs would seem to telegraph the songs' urgent, alert energy. Chamber Pop's low-contour harmonic shapes, in contrast, are more sophisticated constructions suggesting complex, ambivalent and/or conflicted emotional states. Barât's Britpop selection strikes an intermediate position as the songs mix high with low contours between verses and choruses (with the exception of the high-contour 'We want more'). This analysis would seem to suggest that harmonic contour is a key vector underpinning meaning in relation to what aspects of a track's form is conveying the song's emotional communication.

### 6.6.2 Harmonic contour: CousteauX

Analysis in Table 6.10 indicates that *CousteauX* is constructed mostly from longer, low-contour harmonic constructions. This is particularly noticeable in 'Maybe you' and 'Memory is a weapon', where long 12-bar chord periods take the listener through a long set of chords working tension and release through their syntactical combinations. An instrumental version of these low-contour songs would likely convey the same pre-verbal sense of mood and meaning, and that is perhaps the key difference between high and low contour constructions.

Table 6.10: CousteauX harmonic contours within AllMusic.com's style descriptors

Chamber Pop	Alternative/Indie Rock	Sadcore
<u>‘Maybe you’</u> 12 bar A section, 11 changes 4 bar B section, 2 changes	<u>‘Thin red lines’</u> 10 bar A section, 8 changes 8 bar B section, 8 changes	<u>‘Shelter’</u> 8 bar A section, 7 changes 7 bar B section, 6 changes
<u>‘Portobello serenade’</u> 8 bar A section, 6 changes 16 bar B section, 12 changes	<u>‘The innermost light’</u> 17 bar A section, 6 changes	<u>‘F**king in joy and sorrow’</u> 9 bar A section, 7 changes 8 bar B section, 7 changes
<u>‘Memory is a weapon’</u> 12 Bar A Section, 10 changes 6 bar B Section, 7 changes	<u>‘This might be love’</u> 8 bar A Section, 9 changes 18 bar B Section, 7 changes	
<u>Atypical Chamber Pop</u>		
<u>‘BURMA’</u> 4 bar A Section, 1 change 4 bar B Section, 3 changes		
<u>‘Seasons of you’</u> 2 bar A and B Section, 1 change 2 bar pre-chorus, 1 change		

This analysis would suggest a significant part of the affective identity of CousteauX's project is activated through its harmonic structures. Created mostly at the piano, these songs reveal that instrument's tendency to elicit long-period harmonic complexity; in part guided by the instrument's ergonomics. The harmony of 'Maybe you' and 'Memory is a weapon' are baroque, torch-ballad constructions coupling with the lyric's conflicted internal thoughts. 'F\*\*king in joy and sorrow' and 'Thin red lines' are also constructed from complex harmonic structures. 'BURMA' and 'Seasons of you' are outliers here. In these songs I was purposefully attempting to write something appropriate for radio programming, and these songs possess high-contour qualities of immediacy intended to impart contemporary-sounding qualities. Written with the express purpose of creating radio-valenced, commercial versions of our romantic torch-song formula, and this would explain the adoption of groove-centred, shorter harmonic structures deployed in these two songs. However, the harmony in these high contour songs is not the primary affective layer. In both 'BURMA' and 'Seasons of you' the lyric and the vocal performance are the songs' foregrounded, affective focus whilst the high contour harmonic constructions provide the backing to these features.

## 6.7 Vocal costume

To describe normative vocal expectations within various genres, Tagg (2015) introduces the concept of 'vocal costume'. In doing so he contributes a variable with considerable utility to help assist our sense of the primary, genre-identifying signals conveyed by the sound of a singer's voice. He writes:

Whether it be a cantatour, a chansonnier, a fadista, a payador, an opera diva, or female Bollywood singing star; or, in the Anglophone world of popular song, a singer-songwriter, a death metal growler, a female gospel artist, a dramatic ballad star, a blues shouter, a crooner, a rapper, a mainstream jazz vocalist, a riot grrl or a folk revival songster, one thing is certain: every one of those different types of vocalist will be wearing some sort of vocal costume identifying him/her with the genre and style in question (p.375).

This suggests that the physiological expression of singing signals specific music cultures, each conforming to particular aesthetics and socio-cultural implications. Tagg illustrates that a Death Metal ‘growler’ would be incompatible within the Jazz genre, just as crooner might sound disruptive within a Gangsta Rap track. A vocalist will likely signal through her/his tone and intensity whether s/he is a Soul singer, Rapper, Metal screamer, Rock belter, Soul diva, Jazzy beatnik, Blues artist, Folk singer, Rock balladeer, or musical theatre actor. Whilst not an exhaustive list, each of these voice characteristics can confidently be argued as providing another gateway marker signalling genre and style. The idea of a costume accepts also that some singers might adopt different costumes for different song approaches, as does Paul McCartney on ‘Helter skelter’ and ‘Blackbird’ on The Beatles’ *White album*. This may also occur at different parts of a singer’s career. The Hard-Rock version of Rod Stewart and the American-songbook Rod Stewart, or Proto-Metal Led Zeppelin-era Robert Plant and his later Bluegrass vocals are illustrations of the same singer ‘wearing’ different vocal costumes. As Stewart and Plant’s cases would suggest, these costumes can be adopted (or ‘worn’ by) a singer in order to conform to expectations of genre. Now we shall explore the various vocal costumes worn by Carl Barât and CousteauX.

### 6.7.1 Vocal costume: Carl Barât

*Table 6.11 Carl Barât and Let it reign vocal costumes*

Chamber Pop	Britpop	Garage Punk
crooning, poised, technical, smooth, urbane, dramatic, dynamic, theatrical	bright, energetic, clean, Brit. accented, medium intensity	‘belt’ voice, emphatic, energetic, distorted, hard, abrasive

Libertines’ audiences would have been familiar with two of the three main vocal costumes sung by Barât across these two albums: The Libertines were Indie Punk Rock exponents and Barât sang many of their Punk Rock songs. However, Chamber Pop’s vocal costume is one with elements of crooning and torch-song interpretation, and in this mode Barât was not so well trained. This costume requires delicacy and technique, and at times Barât strains to remain faithful to expectations of this style. Partly successful in this regard are the high tenor parts at the top of ‘Carve my name’ and the low baritone crooning of

'Shadows fall'. Back in his Indie Rock and Garage Rock mode, Barât returns to a more familiar and convincing, high-energy Rock costume. These Rock costumes exert the energy and sense of visceral commitment Barât struggled to convey through his Chamber Pop vocal experiments. He possesses a talent for a raw, energized 'belted' vocal delivery reminiscent of singers such as Joe Strummer of The Clash, as well as the conversational Cockney delivery of Madness and Billy Bragg. It may be the case that Barât's unsteadiness with the Chamber Pop vocal costume contributed to journalists' sense of his own discomfort within the genre witnessed in Chapter Five. The Chamber Pop I natively tend towards assumes vocalists with powerful technique and range, and I was attempting to coax this kind of delivery from Barât. The vocal instrument available to CousteauX is unusually finessed, whereas Carl Barât's voice is a character voice, associated for many with his legacy and public personage. CousteauX, in contrast, places much more emphasis on the technique of lead singer and the shades of vocal costuming available to him.

### 6.7.2 Vocal costume: CousteauX

The torch-song tradition this band seeks to update foregrounds the emotionality of its vocal delivery: this style of song has a different kind of emphasis. The CousteauX project has, in Liam McKahey, a singer capable of an unusually wide range of vocal textures and tones. This is key to the identity of CousteauX: his is an instrument that ranges through various octaves at various intensities. Arguably, this is not the case for peers such as Richard Hawley or Nick Cave. McKahey's is a baritone that can reach into high Soul registers, recalling qualities of singers such as Marvin Gaye and Donny Hathaway. On this album he displays a substantial degree of control and technique, from the Celtic Folk tones of 'BURMA' to the clear, clean supper-club tones of 'Maybe you', through to the aggressive Rock growl on 'Thin red lines' and 'The innermost light'. These combine to project nuance and shading to the dramas within each of the songs.

*Table 6.12 CousteauX vocal costumes within AllMusic.com's style descriptors*

Chamber Pop	Alternative Rock	Sadcore
crooning, poised, technical, smooth, urbane, dramatic, dynamic, theatrical	hard, forceful, grainy, passionate, intense, dark, heavy, distorted	intimate, gentle, textured, soft, delicate

The ability of this singer to move between vocal costumes whilst retaining a characteristic sound contributes to the album's sense of variety, which may contribute to an experience of contrast and change. Noteworthy within all these costumes is the consistency of McKahey's singing accent. His Cork City origins give his pronunciation a mid-Atlantic



quality, and his accent expresses these words in an internationalized style unencumbered by any tendency towards the regional vowel choices common to either US or UK singers. It is the shading in his vocal costume's variety of tones and intensity that communicates CousteauX project as one with an identity centred on the pleasure of the vocal performance. This contrasts with Carl Barat, who enjoys an identity not as profoundly invested in sheer vocal ability. Instead Barat's poetic politics and iconic status requires only that he perform within a set of singing styles that defined him when he became a prominent Indie Rock artist in the UK, and are unique for being tuneful and forceful as well as characterful.

## **6.8 Summary**

From genre inclusion into stylistic texture types, through tempo's pulse to harmonic constructions and genre-signalling vocal costume, fundamental choices are enacted in these dimensions with a primary bearing on audible impressions original artist identity. What has been demonstrated through analysis is that whilst these portfolio songs were naturalistically created, they were made in a manner that nevertheless coheres with a strong degree of conformity to the expectations of style within genre and sub-genre. These, I argue are those hallmarks of similarity and assimilation necessary for communicating competencies and compliance sufficient to ensure public understanding and vendor category inclusion. What becomes clearer under analysis is that similarity to genre and style is mostly communicated by the music, whilst words, as explored in Chapter Seven, can be seen to connect the audience to the act's intrinsic, unique attractors. Throughout popular music history, the song's singer has been the primary vehicle of artist identity, and song is where singer, melody and words combine. What follows in Chapter Seven deals with the differentiating, distinctive qualities original artists exert, as ODT demands, in order to convey characteristics extending beyond category inclusion. Where the locus of Chapter Six has been largely instrumental, this next set of factors is located in the foreground of popular song, and situated for the most part where vocal meets lyric.

## Chapter Seven: Difference variables

Co-functioning with similarity variables, ODT predicts that the original artist simultaneously activates into variables that communicate impressions of the act's uniqueness. This chapter now examines a set of song variables observed in practice as working to distinguish the original artist from others within genre/style. These variables function in an intersubjective relationship with similarity variables, yet are the aspects of identity through which an artist's most distinctive characteristics are imprinted. They are mostly vocal and linguistic, because the most potent identifying elements observed in practice were those activated by the portfolio's vocalists. Before this analysis fully engages lyric and voice, first it must deal with that part of the music that becomes prominent when the voice is not singing. In the arrangement features of original tracks there exists a set of gestures that work within texture, tempo and harmonic contours to step forward and pronounce an act's instrumental identity, alternating in tandem with those identity variables activated by voice.

### 7.1 Arrangement features

Before a listener is introduced to the popular song's vocal, often the recording's arranger or producer will have introduced a standout instrumental part, texture or sonic feature. Front-stage and characterful, arrangement features communicate from popular song in a manner that resembles vocal delivery in that they deliver tuneful and memorable musical passages, taking the track's lead 'singing' role. In the opening bars of 'This charming man' by The Smiths, for example, the unique compositional flourishes of Johnny Marr's guitar work are the song's most salient feature for the duration of the introduction. What steps forward from the Alt/Indie Rock textures of the music is Marr's lively, tuneful, composed performance. This possesses significant identifying power, especially when executed by a member of the act. In accounting for constituent parts of the impression of song artists, the role instrumental arrangements play must be included in this inventory of identifying variables, before this side of the equation focuses on lyrics and singing. This is a layer of creativity that works to embellish, decorate and enhance the meaning of the song. For acts such as Muse, Dire Straits, The Rolling Stones or Led Zeppelin, lead guitar performances as song arrangements have become vital aspects of the bands' public identity. As Menon and Levitin (2005) remind us, the musical component of song aids lyric processing because it signals *and induces* attention, arousal and emotion. Within traditional Rock acts, instrumentalists such as Jimmy Page or Brian May are been considered equal to the lead

vocalist in terms of their bands' composite identity. Standout instrumental passages such as the guitar line in 'Satisfaction' by The Rolling Stones, or the saxophone line in 'Carless whisper' by Wham! contribute alternative hooks and textures that augment and frame the vocal presence with standout instrumental passages. From Stevie Wonder's harmonica solos to Nile Rodgers' rhythm guitar, arrangement features construct powerful identifying musical presences within the songs they animate and enliven. They also convey the holistic character, musicality and flair of the original artist.

#### **7.1.1 Arrangement features: Carl Barât**

This inventory of moments is a list of the instrumental hooks and auxiliary melodies that appear, when there are gaps in the lyric, to 'sing' momentarily while the Carl Barât's voice absents the song's focus.

- 'Run with the boys' – Bassline (00:00), slide and brass phrases (00:03)
- 'Carve my name' – Baritone electric guitar (00:06), orchestral passage (02:47)
- 'Shadows fall' – Trumpet melody (00:02), chamber string orchestrations (02:47)
- 'Death fires come at night' – Industrial rock guitar motif (00:00)
- 'This is the song' – Baroque piano arpeggios (00:00)
- 'Beginning to see' – Guitar solo over orchestration (01:57)
- 'We want more' – Baritone 'surf' guitar intro (00:12), gang-vocal chorus part (01:18)
- 'The gears' – Gang-vocal parts (00:22)

The bold character of the slide and brass hook in 'Run with the boys' is likely, I believe, to have contributed in part to the song achieving mainstream broadcast airtime. Elsewhere the dramatic string flourishes in 'Carve my name' exert a romantic, stormy presence in their instrumental bridge. 'Shadows falls' has a plaintive trumpet that preludes the song melody in an elegiac manner, and 'Beginning to see' is decorated with 1960s-influenced slide guitar playing and psychedelic string arrangements. The baritone surf guitar in 'We want more' plays a secondary hook with strong, Pixies-like, energy whist 'The gears' is the simplest of all these with a tuneful 'gang' vocal parts that recall Punk Rock of the 1970s. Only 'Run with the boys' and 'We want more' possess secondary hooks performing a vocal-like function in voicing an alternative melody. On reflection, there are noticeably fewer secondary hooks in Barât's portfolio songs than exist in CousteauX's. This may be because of the production emphasis I personally place on arrangement features. The degree of secondary hooks present in an act's music may be a strong factor constituting impressions

of original artist identity, and the CousteauX project seems to direct attention to its backing vocals and flugelhorn in order to emphasize its instrumental identity.

### 7.1.2 Arrangement features: CousteauX

CousteauX's arrangement features are constructed with an emphasis on the instruments that were central to the band's legacy identity. On this album, each song features a lead instrument holding the foreground, providing texture and contrast to the lead vocal sound.

Arrangement features on CousteauX occur in the following instances:

- 'Memory is a weapon' – Bass guitar funk figure (00:12), flugelhorn (01:18), backing vocal solo (02:39)
- 'This might be love' – Baritone electric guitar (01:05) (02:35) (03:11), moog synth (01:37) (03:10), backing vocal arrangement (02:16)
- 'BURMA' – Flugelhorn intro (00:00) and flugelhorn solo (01:56)
- 'The innermost light' – Spy-movie brass (00:37), baritone guitar (02:17) tremolo guitar solo (02:37)
- 'Maybe you' - Bridge backing vocal part (01:58)
- 'Portobello serenade' – Blues guitar intro (00:01) and solo (04:21) mute trumpet solo (02:11) trumpet solo (04:46)
- 'Thin red lines' – Piano intro (00:00), piano break (00:39), slide guitar bridge (01:49) and outro (03:02)
- 'Shelter' – Pulsing backing vocals (00:00). flugelhorn intro (00:16), break (01:33) and outro (02:48), blues guitar solo in outro (03:12)
- 'Seasons of you' – Baritone guitar intro (00:00), break vocal part (01:40)
- 'F\*\*king in joy and sorrow' - Flugelhorn intro (00:00), break (02:04) and outro (04:50, piano solo (02:04)

Unlike the variety of instrumental voices on Barât albums, CousteauX's arrangement features are built from a defined set of instrumental textures: piano, flugelhorn and baritone guitar. The combination of the flugelhorn's warm trumpet tones set to Jazz-tinged Rock arrangements works to consolidate a signature sound. Arrangement features would seem to be an important part of this inventory of identifying factors because it is where an act can express musical distinctiveness in a manner that affirms unique brand character.

## 7.2 Modality

At this point the inventory of variables begins to include the linguistic aspects communicating facets of original artist identity. The concept of 'modality' is one transposed from the field of critical discourse analysis and draws on the work of Machin (2010),

Machin and Mayr (2012), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), Fairclough (2003, 2010) and Han (2015). It structures perspective into the way veracity and actuality is represented in media and human communications. It is the analysis of the extent to which language or image commits to truthful, real, honest, factual and realistic representation. Political critical discourse analysis deploys modality as a concept by which to evaluate commitment, in particular politicians' personal investment in political and public statements. It examines these for indications of hedging, or its opposite, certainty, and looks for non-committal inflections or emphatic statements. This variable allows us to avoid subjective terms such as 'authenticity', 'honesty', 'verisimilitude' and 'realism', and instead replace them with a two-pole evaluation that is applicable to the veracity of any bit of communication. Kress and van Leeuwen's work (1996) provides a way to categorize visual images as existing on a spectrum ranging from the high modality of photojournalism, paparazzi photos or police mug-shots, to the low modality of hyper-real Photoshop photos or perfected hyper-real images commonly found in fashion magazines. Modality therefore problematizes interventions of media in representations of reality. Fairclough (2003) argues that modality plays a key role in the texturizing of identities in public life (p.166). What people commit to, and what they indicate a cautious stance toward are each signified in language and image, each of which express measures of modality. This concept links to the discussion of Adele in Chapter Two, who might be typified as projecting a high level of modality from her seemingly biographical stories of personal heartbreak. Adele, in this regard, contrasts with David Bowie, who instead developed performance characters that were compelling despite, and possibly because of, their low modality artifice. The concept of modality offers a neutral evaluative measure by which to discuss key meaning-making dimensions that communicate impressions of who the artist is in their personal lives. Singer-songwriters in the 1970s such as James Taylor were assumed to be singing inherently biographical songs expressing a high level of modality. Similarly, Eminem can be said to have emerged with songs demonstrating high modality in his early outputs where he candidly discussed his personal family life. In contrast, in the 1970s Steely Dan wrote low modality, third-person character stories, just as Death Metal lyrics imagine low modality situations in which song characters are involved in epic contests with apocalyptic forces. Popular songwriting discourse has long been fascinated with accounts of the inner 'real' life of the artist, and is keen to find correspondences evident in artists' songs. Leonard Cohen illustrated the gap between the artist's reality and his popular song when he complained: 'My reputation as a ladies' man was a joke. It caused me to laugh bitterly through the ten thousand nights I spent alone.' (quoted in Simmons, 2013, p.437). What this highlights is that an audience's desire for new original songs soon outstrips an artist's

ability to live their songs' content. Yet modality remains perennially fascinating for scholars, journalists, fans and pundits as they seek for clues of a private, personal inner-world that may have become refracted through the artist's material. Modality can be demonstrated as adopting various shades within the portfolio's songs.

### 7.2.1 Modality: Carl Barat

In a departure from the high-modality biographical candour that distinguished Libertines' songs, Chapter Five witnessed Barat first adopting characters as devices through which to present much of his first solo album. Not only were many of these character songs, but they were also portraits, seemingly of Barat, conveying caricature, allegory and irony and elliptical correspondences with Barat. This shift in his songs' modality is possibly the key to understanding *NME*'s objections to this first solo album. Yet an intermediate modality also exists in the song characters in 'Shadows fall' and 'The gears'. In these songs, Barat inhabits character portraits: idealized, fictive versions of his own public personage set into imaginary situations. And so, what might be described as an intermediate modality is formed as Barat's identity activates itself in song dramas within which he places himself in an actorly role, playing a version of his public image. 'Shadows fall' attempts an idealized character with a genuine Libertines-era sentimentality and 'The gears' lionizes the political insurgency with which Barat's personage is associated. Both these song characters are idealized versions of their singer: the romantic lover from beyond the grave, and the rabble-rousing rioter. In a manner contrary to the album's character and story songs, 'This is the song (irony of love)' sees this balance tipping in the other direction in a harrowing and seemingly candid personal piece. Barat here attempts, for the first time, to communicate an angry breakup song, and in doing so presents a set of conversations so candid and specific that a modality seems to be deliberately inferred in the writing. A more familiar modality returned to Barat's work in *Let it reign*'s 'Beginning to see'. This is a first-person reflection expressing what seems to be a high degree of modality as it celebrates humanist and egalitarian political perspectives, each of which is a likely position for him to take. These are broad ethical stances visible in Barat's Libertine public personage, and arguably these are key components of *Let it reign*'s reconstructive project. It is noteworthy that Barat was invited to be the headlining act at Billy Bragg's Leftfield stage for the 2011 Glastonbury Festival<sup>21</sup>, a stage that features politically charged, ethically invested artists. Across the two Barat albums, Table 7.1's analysis would indicate that low and intermediate modality lyrics permitted Barat to explore fictive character versions of himself: some idealized and some caricatured.

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<sup>21</sup> Billy Bragg's Glastonbury stage self defines as: 'where pop meets politics'  
<https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/areas/left-field/>

*Table 7.1 Lyric modality in Carl Barat's Let it reign*

Biographical (high modality)	Idealized self (intermediate modality)	Character (low modality)
'This is the song (irony of love)'	'The gears'	'Run with the boys'
'Beginning to see'	'Shadows fall'	'Carve my name'
		'Death fires'
		'We Want More'

We can infer from Table 7.1 that across these songs Carl Barat's albums mostly express fictive devices that are unlike the revelatory, high modality of his Libertines songs. This departure may have been a deliberate reaction to the tabloid intrusion Carl experienced as a consequence of his celebrity lifestyle in the 2000s. It may also be the case that low modality characters were Barat's creative routes into the singer-songwriter experiment, enacted quite possibly from an impulse to avoid cliché. In this regard, modality, as well as tempo, texture and vocal costume seem to have been the key experimental dimensions in the first Carl Barat project. Modality in song lyrics was consistently a prominent feature of Barat's Libertines work. The low-modality qualities of Barat's first solo album seem to have been in conflict with his audience's expectation of autobiographical revelations into his private world. This was confirmed by the NME review that asked "who is the real Carl?" The follow-up work sought to counter-balance this tendency with high modality expositions of Barat's worldview and intermediately modal, idealised versions of his public image.

### 7.2.2 Modality: CousteauX

...there is soul in this record and the momentum of fantasy (Eyezine, 2019)

When considering the modality of CousteauX's songs, it is noteworthy that reviewing journalists never mentioned a hint of biography, personal life or issues of realistic portrayals within CousteauX's repertoire. This contrasts with the Carl Barat project in which questions of truthfulness were critiqued on a many occasions. The comprehensive absence of discussion of biography is a strong indication that modality was not a significant part of journalists' grasp of the identity of CousteauX. It may be the case that the 'momentum of fantasy' the webzine quoted above believe the songs possess, suggests that a certain 'suspension of disbelief' may function for this act. Perhaps these songs are indeed considered by their audience, just as torch-songs are, as small works of fiction where the

emphasis is on the telling and the way the singer relays the songs' emotional content. For most of the CousteauX album there are no songs conveying, or suggesting, high modality. Instead, an intermediate, median modality is inferred through six of the songs, many of which have use lyrical devices suggesting a present tense, 2<sup>nd</sup> person intimacy. These median modality songs are less anguished than the character songs, and instead foreground the 'intimacy, warmth and grace' described by AllMusic.com in its *Editor's Choice* review (Jurek, 2017). These moments in CousteauX's lyrics reveal an interpersonal set of values, mostly situated within intimate, romantic contexts. During their writing, I intended these lyrics to imply 'this is what it would be like to be in a relationship with this singer (and this voice)' and perhaps this is where the *invitation to fantasy* is located. This is a lyrical approach that merges the singer's presence into a vicarious second-person experience for the listener, in what Ong (1975) spoke of when he suggested that Hemmingway's second-person devices were a form of writing that fictionalizes the reader. Similarly, 'Thin red lines' positions the listener as present within a sexual affair. Similarly, 'F\*\*king in joy and sorrow' and 'This might be love' generate their intimacy from second-person situations in which the listener is inferred as present.

Table 7.2: Lyric modality in CousteauX

Biographical (high modality)	Idealized self (intermediate modality)	Character (low modality)
	'Thin red lines'	'BURMA'
	'F**king in joy and sorrow'	'Maybe you'
	'Seasons of you'	'Memory is a weapon'
	'This might be love'	'The innermost light'
	'Shelter'	
	'Portobello serenade'	

Analysis reveals that four of this album's songs are character songs in which McKahey acts out a fictive role. We can distinguish between these devices and the idealized biographical characterizations, because the songs that group together as character songs describe scenarios about which CousteauX's members are unlikely to have had any direct experience. 'BURMA' is a soldier's song from the frontline, and 'Maybe you' explores the furtive desires and guarded gestures of forbidden love. 'Memory is a weapon' is a hunted, haunted and guilty man's rumination, and 'The innermost light' portrays a liminal, mythical character. These are all fictive devices with low levels of modality. Across CousteauX's album, modality would appear to be deliberately low and inferred only in relation to the voice's capacity to inhabit the character and sing with an actorly conviction.



This conviction would seem to suggest, therefore, some sense of the singer's familiarity with the emotional terrain of the song, and perhaps this is where CousteauX's audience's search for a sense of modality finds it veracity and truthfulness. Perhaps also there is something significant at play in questions of modality here appropriate to similar bands such as Oasis or The Who. There exists in the songs of these collaborations an amalgamated identity where that of the songwriter and singer combine in a composite impression of band identity. It may also be the case that modality is not assumed for torch-song specialists to the degree it might be assumed for singer-songwriters. This is a question future research might explore. What is important here is that something fundamental is declared when a singer is communicating, 'this is what my life it is like', contrasting with songs in which the singer is communicating 'listen to me act out a drama'. Modality is a lyrical orientation that signals key facets of performer identity, and is one nuanced by modes of address.

### 7.3 Modes of address

The variable 'mode of address' is one that structures the way in which the audience's presence is implied in song lyrics or poems. Modes are activated by key linguistic choices within text that suggest an audience's presence in relation to song character. In his study of Joni Mitchell, Whitesell (2008) transposes the concept from poetry theory. Subtle variations in pronouns, perspective and tense convey messages about the implied position of the receiver of the song's communication. Whether in the private first person, the relational second person or the information-rich third person, modes of address are a design principle with bearing on meaning in lyrics. Modes of address frame both the kind of song the artist performs (i.e. private reflection, love song or story song), and also the communicative channel assumed between singer and the listener. The singer may be inhabiting a fictive song character or playing themselves, but nevertheless a singer's presence is always a given in popular song because singing is a performative vocal act. This is a situation unique to song, and is unlike the voices embedded into literature or written poetry. The situation of the listener, and the time frames of events are implied in a mode's perspective and implicit timeframe. According to Whitesell, modes of address in popular song commonly occur in four types:

- First-person perspectives of the *lyric mode* (often but not always time neutral)
- Second-person perspectives of the *dramatic mode* (often but not always present tense)
- Third-person perspectives of the *narrative mode* (often but not always past tense)

- Second-person plural perspectives of the *political mode* (often but not always present tense)

In the lyric mode song words have a time-neutral quality that combines reflection with a revelatory, sometimes confessional directness, as in 'Yesterday' by The Beatles or 'Boulevard of broken dreams' by Green Day. In contrast to both narrative and dramatic modes, the lyric mode implies and infers no audience whatsoever. This mode is similar to theatre's soliloquy; it is a set of private thoughts expressed vocally, and the audience is not addressed through the text. The lyric mode is the mode of reflection, revealing insights into the writer's worldview, often with a confessional quality. Whilst singer songwriters commonly explore the lyric mode, it is not always gentle: 'Smells like teen spirit' by Nirvana and 'Anarchy in the UK' by the Sex Pistols are in the lyric mode, although it is most typically found in the introspective reflections of work such as 'Northern Sky' by Nick Drake.

In the dramatic mode of address, the audience is implied in the text as either participant or witness. The listener's proximity is inferred in the present tense, as a conversation with dramatic qualities is acted out. Often a lover/friend is addressed directly by the text as if they were present. This occurs in 'You've lost that loving feeling' by The Righteous Brothers, 'Your song' by Elton John or 'Stone cold' by Demi Lovato. Hennion (1983) suggests that the dramatic mode takes the form of a fantasy or daydream. He sees this mode as discreetly natural, acting as though it presents a situation the listener may witness like a play, or inhabit imaginatively as either the singer or the love-interest recipient of the song's message. The second variation of dramatic mode is one that positions the listener as a witness to somebody else's conversation, as in 'Brown eyed girl' by Van Morrison, or 'Hey there, Delilah' by Plain White T's. This is the mode typical of the balladeer.

The third-person orientation of the narrative mode emphasizes information, story and description. Narrative mode songs are stories about other people places and times, often in the past tense. This is the storyteller's stance in which the listener is positioned as a passive, uninvolved audience. The narrative mode most often implies no proximity to the story for either the singer or the listener. Songs such as 'The wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald' by Gordon Lightfoot, or 'Red right hand' by Nick Cave are typical of the narrative mode. These songs subtly declares 'let me tell you a story' to a passive audience. Often this is a song about something that happened to somebody else in the past. Narrative mode sometimes includes the singer as song character within the text, sometimes recalling

an anecdotal account such as 'Lola' by The Kinks, or entering the account from time to time like 'The House of The Rising Sun' by The Animals. Sometimes it provides an alternative flavour to love-song's predictable dramatic mode. 'She's always a woman' by Billy Joel and 'The Thoughts of Mary Jane' by Nick Drake are portraits framed in the narrative mode, rendered all the more effective for being love songs with distance constructed by the storyteller's stance.

Finally, the political mode of address is a relatively uncommon mode in popular music. Its plural 'we' pronoun addresses an expanded second-person present-tense context to include broad communities of commonality. The political mode of address is deployed in songs such as 'Give peace a chance' by John Lennon, 'We are the world' by Band Aid USA and 'We are the champions' by Queen. In songs such as these, the song's audience *is the singer* combined with the collective 'we' addressed in the lyric. The political mode is a mode to be sung by groups and crowds. It speaks from the plural second person where the 'you' becomes 'we', positioned within a present-tense context that addresses a shared, affirmative, participatory communality. These are often songs of protest for marches, rallies, pageants and events, and remain relatively rare in popular music in comparison to the three other main modes.

Sophisticated songwriters such as Joni Mitchell, and Lennon and McCartney occasionally mix modes of address. In songs such as Mitchell's 'Amelia', the lyric mode is reflective and ruminative before pivoting at the end of each of its strophic sections to address the absent female aviator Amelia Earhart in the dramatic mode. Songs such as 'She's leaving home' by The Beatles swap between modes of address (narrative in the verses, lyric in the choruses) as does 'Waterloo sunset' by The Kinks (narrative in the verses, lyric in the choruses). Moving between modes of address performs the task of shifting between the objective and the subjective, and sometimes implies other presences inhabiting the text such as the parents in the case of 'She's leaving home'. However, it is relatively uncommon for popular songs to switch modes of address; more often one mode remains constant throughout the song. Fundamental qualities defining artist identity are activated through modes of address. The narrative mode defines Steely Dan's and later Tom Waits' character storytelling, whereas the dramatic mode is typical of the ballad form characteristic in artists such as Elton John. The lyric mode, for its internalized perspective was favoured in the reflections of Elliot Smith and Nick Drake. This is a subtle plane of meaning contributing to a powerful facet of artist identity. Tables 7.3 and 7.4 demonstrate the way in which modes of address play out across the portfolio.

### 7.3.1 Modes of Address: Carl Barât

Table 7.3 Carl Barât and *Let it reign* modes of address

Lyric mode	Dramatic mode	Narrative mode	Political mode
'Beginning to see'	'Shadows fall'		'The gears'
'Death fires burn at night'	'This is the song (irony of love)'		'We want more'
'Run with the boys'			
'Carve my name'			

Table 7.3 sees Barât's portfolio lyrics active across three of these four modes of address. 'Beginning to see' is a first person, reflective world-view declaring his iconoclastic humanist philosophy: the title's epiphany relates to the empowering nature of scepticism. Also, in the first-person mode, this time as caricature, are the narcotic, tabloid-gossip anxieties of the disturbed character central to 'Death fires burn at night'. 'Run with the boys' is also a first-person inner-thoughts piece, even as it venerates the sociality of male bonding cultures. As we have witnessed, amatory subject matter initially represented a novel approach for Barât, and one that he responded to by deploying oblique allegory. In his dramatic-mode love songs, Barât developed a conceptual stance enabled by a dramatic device that could explore lyrics about romantic love, as in 'Shadows fall' and 'This is the song (irony of love)'. In contrast, 'The gears' is an overtly political song, with Punk Rock sensibilities exhorting insurrection, rioting and anarchy. 'We want more' is a rallying-cry for a jaded crowd: deliberately ironic as it expresses vanity, greed and avarice in a sardonically political slogan. The political mode was absent on Barât's first solo album, though emphasized on Barât's Garage Punk album; this is likely a key to the identity transformation witnessed in Chapter Five. Notable in this analysis is the absence of the narrative mode across both albums. This evidences that the Barât songs in this portfolio do not explore the storytelling postures and fictional content that songwriters like Ray Davies routinely adopt. Instead, Barât's two albums' materials mostly deploy the lyric mode, and in doing so trains the audience's focus on the inner thoughts of the song characters. This complex modal approach attempted to communicate singer-songwriter lyric-mode candour expressed by low modality characters.

### 7.3.2 Modes of address: CousteauX

As explored above, CousteauX's identity is formed largely by the band's overt investment in its torch-song emphasis. Table 7.4 reveals that 70% of this album's subject matter is in the dramatic mode. This is because during the writing process these harmonic constructions emerge with properties that are inherently romantic and melancholic. And

so, the lyrical challenge in writing these texts is to generate a form of words that resonates with what the music seems to communicate harmonically. Amatory lyrics seem to knit effectively with this music and, accordingly, the dramatic mode of address emerges as the prominent orientation of this album's songs. Yet the lyric mode adds texture to the collection. 'Memory is a weapon' is a confessional reflecting guilt, remorse and memory, while only suggesting a narrative of sexual intrigue. 'The innermost light' and 'Portobello serenade' explore different dimensions of inner thoughts. 'The innermost light' is communicated in a mythical song character whereas 'Portobello serenade' is a wistful snapshot from a lonesome, solitary perspective. Noteworthy here is the absence of the narrative or political modes and the dominance of the dramatic mode of address.

*Table 7.4 CousteauX modes of address*

<b>Lyric mode</b>	<b>Dramatic mode</b>	<b>Narrative mode</b>	<b>Political mode</b>
'Memory is a weapon'	'BURMA'		
'The innermost light'	'Thin red lines'		
'Portobello serenade'	'This might be love'		
	'Maybe you'		
	'Seasons of you'		
	'Shelter'		
	'F**king in joy and sorrow'		

What emerges from this analysis seems to make the case that the naturalistic way in which this album was made allowed a consistency to form; these are all love songs, and most of them are in the dramatic mode of address. This might be linked to my express aim to frame McKahey's instrument in a way that encouraged listeners into a vicarious sense of intimacy with the presence suggested by his performance. This is a finding that seems to be indicating that, at least for CousteauX, a certain kind of song gets repeated and remade. The kind of song a band is invested in communicates much about the kind of artist the band is, and modes would seem to be a powerful element within the identifying gestalt of song.

## **7.4 Value orientation**

In the social psychology research of Brewer and Gardner (1996) and Brewer and Roccas (2001) it was established that individuals tend to express a coherent alignment to core values consistent across various social situations. Their empirical studies established that

*trans-situational values* are defining aspects of identity, coherent across what they identified as three levels of identity activation: the individual, the relational and the collective. Values held by an individual will likely be consistent at a relational level with intimates and the collective level of sociality and group membership. Brewer and Gardner's work established that individuals seek and select friends, intimate companions and social groups with a consistency defined by their value orientations. This presents this thesis with a structure by which to understand the contexts within which values are situated in song lyric. A concept variable exists here with the power to finesse a perspective on lyric choices that reveals the realm of human experience in which the artist is invested. If we consider the Punk Rock and New Wave genres of the late 1970s, we can argue that these were broadly defined by oppositional, anarchic genre values of hedonism, stimulation and self-determination. Yet while The Clash were political with their post-colonial, collectivist insurgency, Joy Division and The Cure expressed reflective introspection, and yet The Buzzcocks sang love songs about interpersonal relationships. Song by song, value orientations may change, but nevertheless they remain lyric choices defining the area of human interaction within which a lyric functions. Simplification into the three levels of activation presented by Brewer and Roccas' (2001) model (the personal, the interpersonal and the collective) permits a framework with which to categorize the concerns explored in a lyric. Value orientations often mirror modes of address, although this is not always the case, as evident below. Lyrics will generally work on either the level of self-reflection (personal), interpersonal relationships (relational) or at the socio-political level (collective). The proposition pursued here is that these orientations communicate dimensions of difference that locate the artistic commitment and ethical investments.

#### **7.4.1 Value orientation: *Carl Barat, Let it reign***

Across the two Barat albums we witness first experiments with amatory ballads, before Barat abandoned songs about intimate relationships to return to the politicized ethics of Punk Rock. Barat's earlier stylistic experiment was one that saw him write intimate, relational songs that explored themes of romantic love. Table 7.5 demonstrates shifts in value orientation aligning consistently with the shifts in song subject across Barat materials.

Table 7.5 Value orientations in Carl Barât and Let it reign

Personal	Relational	Collective
'Run with the boys'	'Shadows fall'	'The gears'
'Carve my name'	'This is the song (irony of love)'	'We want more'
'Death fires burn at night'		
'Beginning to see'		

This illustrates that Barât's identity experiments were constituted in part by the level of social interaction addressed in the lyrics: the first album explored the personal and the relational for the most part, and the second album favoured collective orientations (this is confirmed by the orientation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> album's non-portfolio tracks). In this regard, outliers are the personal orientations of 'Death fires' and 'Run with the boys'. 'Beginning to see' was an appropriate return to the kind of pithy self-reflection familiar to Libertines fans. Barât, in this portfolio, defaulted to first-person on 50% of the material: each of these in lyric mode songs exploring personal reflection.

#### 7.4.2 Value orientation: *CousteauX*

This band's overt emphasis on amatory material locates its concerns mainly within the intimate, interpersonal relationships. Figure 7.6 demonstrates that 70% of the album describes situations of intimacy and devotion in its relational, interpersonal songs. The remaining 30% are personal reflections that, whilst not addressing amatory subjects directly, nevertheless describe emotional terrain describing amatory dimensions of guilt, loneliness and desire. There is an indication here that CousteauX's musical identity, as expressed through its lyrics, is 70% relational in value orientation.

Table 7.6 Value orientations in *CousteauX*

Personal	Relational	Collective
'Memory is a weapon'	'Maybe you'	
'The innermost light'	'This might be love'	
'Portobello serenade'	'F**king in joy and sorrow'	
	'BURMA'	
	'Seasons of you'	
	'Shelter'	
	'Thin red lines'	

Analysis reveals that the majority of this album is both relational and in the dramatic mode of address. However not all artist's songs align with this level of predictability. While relational songs are often in the dramatic mode, there are instances of relational songs written in the first-person lyric mode, such 'Yesterday' by The Beatles. There are also instances of personal song in the narrative mode in songs such as 'The night they drove old Dixie down' by The Band. A collective value orientation in the lyrical mode is what made 'Strange fruit' by Billie Holiday or 'A change is gonna come' by Sam Cooke so compelling. Mixing modes of address and value orientations can effect powerful variation. Whilst value orientation determine the whereabouts of a song's dramas, values themselves provide powerful clues about the identity of the artist.

## 7.5 Values

Popular songs express commonly held values and speak for the millions who treasure them (Chase cited in Tawa, 1990, p.87).

Hitlin (2003) suggests that identity is revealed through an individual's value commitments. These he defines as 'conceptions of the desirable' (p.121), or ideals to which individuals commit and strive to manifest. Values are cognitive representations of goals that serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Rokeach, 1979; Schwartz, 1992, 2012). Social psychologists (Rokeach, 1979; Joas, 2000; Rohan, 2000) see values as 'enduring personal constructs', which, according to Bilsky and Schwartz (1994) are critical motivators of behaviours and attitudes. Values are distinct from related concepts of attitudes, norms and traits, all of which Schwartz (2012) argues as deriving from, and subordinate to, core values. Schwartz organized his research on international human values into a typography that I propose can provide a structure with which to analyse song lyrics (see below). Schwartz established through his empirical work that values are universal, encapsulating 'desirable trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity' (Schwartz 1992, p.21). Original song artists supply significant cultural materials to their audiences (DeNora 2000; Kotarba *et al.*, 2013), by expressing impassioned, emphatic commitments through their songs, often expressing ideals of intimacy, love, hope, fears, power and desire. Allowing for intentional artful deviation, songs can be argued as indications, or analogues of an artists' personal *preferences*: ethical, personal and/or aesthetic. Original song artists deliberately freight their songs with signals indicating the things the artist values, and I would argue that these have a powerful identifying quality. In observations of practice, I noticed that choices concerning overarching values were acknowledged by both writers as they developed the



songs' lyrics. Process discussions were often about what it is that songs should explore, celebrate, emphasize or venerate.

And so Schwartz's system can be deployed for the purposes of exploring songs for the way they communicate values. His studies (1992, 2012) observed a repertoire of ten basic human values consistent across world civilizations and cultures. He established that humans the world over shape their value systems by blending aspects of the following:

- Self-direction: independent thought and action, choosing, creating, exploring
- Stimulation: excitement, novelty, challenge
- Hedonism: pleasure or sensuous gratification
- Power: social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
- Achievement: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
- Security: safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self
- Tradition: respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas culture or religion provide
- Conformity: restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
- Benevolence: preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact
- Universalism: understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature. (Schwartz 2012, pp.5-6)

In this view, an individual's values are constituted by the relative importance they attribute to combinations of the above ideals. Figure 7.1 illustrates Schwartz's typography in a manner governed by two sets of cardinal value polarities structuring *conservation/openness to change* across one polarity and *self-enhancement/self-transcendence*, across the other.

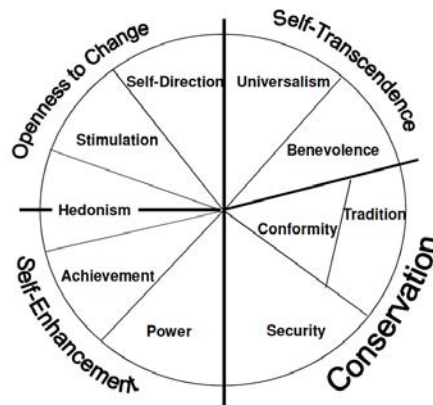


Figure 7.1 Relations among ten motivational types of value (Schwartz, 2012, p.9)

In this model, values with adjacent proximity are typically congruent, and those diametrically opposite are typically in conflict: in Schwarz's model any particular position implies opposition to values 180 degrees diametrically opposite. This provides a workable system with which to analyze values evident in song lyrics. For illustration, the song 'Imagine' by John Lennon values universalism, benevolence and self-direction in opposition to power, security and tradition. 'Shake it off' by Taylor Swift values self-direction, power and stimulation but not tradition, security or conformity. Arguably, the conservation pole of values is not frequently expressed within popular music, possibly because of pop's counter-cultural contexts and generally permissive liberal values. These might predictably venerate revolution, agitation, sexuality and celebration. On the other hand in Country music, the more sanitized material of artists such as Garth Brookes can be argued as expressing broad values of tradition, conformity and security in opposition to self-direction, stimulation and universalism. Gangsta Hip Hop could be argued as expressing values of power, achievement and hedonism in opposition to tradition, universalism and benevolence. Ascribing broad assumptions of values to popular song is a crude metric, but nevertheless we can assume with confidence that preferences, ethics, aesthetics, morals, customs and codes configure within original artist outputs. Making values salient is another way in which artists express their identity, blending ethical and aesthetic investments in the words and music of song.

Using Schwartz's value system as reference, portfolio songs can be demonstrated as conforming to these categories in a manner that combines various values from Schwarz's inventory (Tables 7.7 -7.9).

*Table 7.7 Carl Barat's Carl Barat in reference to Schwartz's values system*

<p>‘Run with the boys’: self direction, stimulation, hedonism Polyamorous sexuality, autonomy, independence and male bonding culture are celebrated.</p>
<p>‘Death fires burn at night’: power, self-direction, stimulation Lyrics seeks absolution from psychological torments and intrusion; issues of self-empowerment.</p>
<p>‘Carve my name’: self direction, hedonism, benevolence A rueful song character reflects upon polyamorous sexuality and private indiscretions.</p>
<p>‘Shadows fall’: benevolence, universalism, security Romantic love as a supernatural force surviving death.</p>
<p>‘This is the song (irony of love)’: Power, self-direction, security Independence and liberation from an unhealthy relationship.</p>

*Table 7.8 Carl Barat and The Jackals Let it reign in reference to Schwartz's values system*

<p>‘Beginning to see’: universality, benevolence, self-determination A humanist, atheist, egalitarian and socialist set of views.</p>
<p>‘The gears’: stimulation, power, self-determination Exhortations to militant, direct action.</p>
<p>‘We want more’: hedonism, self-determination, power Post-modern, ironic chant parodying materialism.</p>

*Table 7.9 CousteauX album in reference to Schwartz's value system*

<p>‘Memory is a weapon’: power, security, self-direction Memory, guilt and retribution threaten the song character</p>
<p>‘This might be love’: benevolence, hedonism and security Anticipation and the early moments of romantic love</p>
<p>‘BURMA’: benevolence, universalism, security A soldier’s song to his sweetheart from the turmoil of combat and imminent danger.</p>
<p>‘The innermost light’: hedonism, self-direction, universalism Ancient human desire to find a soul-mate is reified and anthropomorphized in the song character.</p>
<p>‘Maybe you’: benevolence, conformity, self-direction Forbidden love depicted with a sense of resignation and regret.</p>
<p>‘Portobello serenade’: benevolence, self-direction, security Lonely in a busy romantic city, this song is a portrait of wistful solitude.</p>

<p>‘Thin red lines’: hedonism, stimulation, self-direction</p> <p>An adulterer’s anthem, this song rejects conformity, delayed gratification and tradition.</p>
<p>‘Shelter’: benevolence, security, hedonism</p> <p>Old lovers find shelter and protection</p>
<p>‘Seasons of you’: benevolence, security, universalism</p> <p>About the cyclical nature of the human temperament and intimate partnership</p>
<p>‘F**king in joy and sorrow’: benevolence, hedonism, stimulation</p> <p>Asserting the beauty of private sacrament of affection</p>

It may be the case that Schwartz’s system does not supply sufficient nuance and variation to encompass popular music’s myriad values. However by using Schwartz’s research as an entry point, we can illustrate variance between songs and albums and open out a conversation about ideals embedded in song lyrics. Because singers deliver an impassioned reading of a song’s lyrics, they convey commitment and investment in something. I would argue that this is a powerful area of signification working within songs. These are clues about what the original artist thinks is valuable, important and worth pursuing with passion. Therefore, these are powerful indicators of identity working with the other meaningful identifying parts in this anatomy of song elements.

## 7.6 Songfulness and the idiolectic voice

It is through the voice that star personalities are constructed ... the tone of the voice is more important in this context than the actual articulation of particular lyrics. (Frith, 1987, p.143)

The sound of the singer in song is self-evidently the salient quality communicating original artist identity from their songs. When writing for both Carl Barât and CousteauX, the unique tones of the singers’ voices were qualities I sought to enhance as I explored the music’s melodic and emotional possibilities for words and melodies that would marry with its mood. When sung, words and melody combine to create an experience wrapped into a proximity to what Barthes described as the ‘grain’ of the voice (Barthes, 1977). Barthes believed that timbre, tone and perceived proximity to the voice bring the listener into a palpable, almost erotic relationship with the singer. Within the reproduction of the recorded moment, popular music production captures a direct experience of a singular point in space-time communicating which, when replayed, communicates an intimate relationship to the physicality of that performer. This point is taken up by Frith as a

'celebration of the materiality of the body' (Frith, 1998, p.191) present within what he calls 'the voluptuous pleasure of the song's signifier-sounds'. In this view, there is a corporeal primacy revealed by physical experiences of extreme feelings beyond the singer's conscious control. These are intimations of pain, lust, ecstasy, fear, anger, etc. Frith describes this as popular music's 'inarticulate articulacy': vocal sounds that seem expressive of their deepest feelings that we hear as 'escaping from a body that the mind - language - can no longer control' (p.192). Mumford (1957, pp.32-33) suggests that a song's lyrics possess no intrinsic importance, but function as indicators with little inherent significance; that instead they are to be followed like signposts. Mumford suggests this signpost's role is to signal the song's most important component: the sound and atmosphere the vocal performance creates. Lyrics, in this view, act as catchwords to catalyze an unconscious train of feelings and associations, reinforced by the song's compositional elements.

Kramer (2002) speaks of the fusion of voice, word and melody when describing the way in which songwriters design words and melodies in a manner that deliberately heightens pleasurable, valenced sounds produced by singing. He defines this quality as 'songfulness' and proposes that songs aspire to generate a synergetic relationship between lyric, voice and melody thus:

...as a corporeal medium, voice addresses itself in its sensuous and vibratory fullness to the body of the listener, thereby offering both material pleasure and an incitement to fantasy. These effects all depend on the ability of the singing voice to envelope or suffuse both melody and text so that their independent existence is obscured (p. 54).

Record producers have historically strived for combinations of phonetics and melody that permit the voice to reveal its most attractive and appealing qualities. What Kramer identifies as songfulness might predictably be heard in the melody at a song's emotional peak, where a well selected set of vowels sit within a sonorous, pleasant set of formants within the singer's vocal range. Through the agency of singing, words and music become transformed into a synergetic, meaningful experience that neither component can provide independently. Songfulness is where a singing voice is afforded the opportunity to achieve this unusually alluring phenomenon. At this point, lyric occupies melody's arc, and both wrap together inside the physical presence of the vocalist's delivery. As the listener hears the *body in the voice* (Barthes, 1977), s/he is affected by a sense of the primal pleasure of singing itself. The singer, like an athlete, is working muscles and ligaments in order to

combine mind, muscle, bone and breath in a manner that conveys emotion. For many singers the lyric-in-melody is valued for its physiological dimensions, or for what the song permits the physicality of voice to perform and convey. Frith (1998) argues that the singer is primarily committed to the physical logic of the sound of the words more than by the semantic meaning of the text. Audiences enjoy perceiving spontaneity in performance, where the singing feels spontaneous within the drama of the song. In the moment of performance, a singer is responding, like the listener, to the expressive event of which they are part, or as Frith expresses it being 'possessed by the music rather than possessing it' (1998, p.193). Middleton (2000) supports this sense that in Rock singing, word, voice and melody combining to create meaning:

Indeed there is research to suggest that some listeners to rock pay little attention to verbal meaning. A more typical situation, perhaps, is where a vocal 'hook' works by bundling together the meaning, resonances and sound-shapes of the words together with the melodic, rhythmic, timbral and articulatory dimensions of their sung performance, encapsulating that particular semantic-affective field which will come to be associated with the song. (p. 29)

The seductive, captivating, Orphic qualities of a singer's voice are well loved and mythologized in music's history (Young, 2010). Kramer's 'songfulness' concept appreciates the role melody and lyric in combination play in allowing a singer's voice to display its competencies and its uniqueness. Songfulness might be argued to be the ideal of the performed song to which songwriters aspire.

These pleasures of interpretation lead the listener into an experience of that most valuable of popular music commodities: the idiolectic voice. Middleton (ibid) suggests that for Rock singers, *individuality* of voice is a premium, and that, for its un-schooled peculiarities: 'the resulting directness of utterance is often taken to be a mark of expressive truth' (p. 28). 'The idiolectic voice' is a term I deploy aware of its an inherent redundancy: every singer's voice is idiolectic. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is the heterogenic, identifying qualities of an idiolectic voice that is argued as being the most valuable identifying resource available to singers, songwriters and producers. To have a voice that sounds like nobody else is a powerful advantage in the popular music marketplace, and canonical artists are invariably singers with unique, irreplaceable vocal sounds. Exceptions exist and thrive in popular music: facsimile cultures of television talent show and boy-band chart-pop cohere with a kind of homogeneity typical of opera and lieder. Some idiolectic voices are more pleasurable than others, and a vocal tone with an attractive, appealing and

persuasive, valenced sonic impact is, I would argue, popular song's foremost attractor, as well as its foremost identifying element. Songfulness in songwriting combined with the beauty of interpretation brings the listener into a relationship with the palpable, if vicarious, presence of the singer, as Frith writes:

Pop singers don't just express emotion, but also play it – pop songs are in this respect more like plays than poems. S/he is also the site of desire - as a body and as a person. In performance, then, in the playing of their various song parts, instead of 'forgetting who they are' singers are continuously registering their presence (Frith, 1998, p.210).

The sound of a gifted singer expressing words sculpted effectively into a song's melody is a powerful identifying phenomenon, and one original artists seek to enhance with every available tool. If Pop Rock singers are both competent and characterful, then both costuming and distinctiveness are communicated and unique identity becomes vividly apparent within the song's performance. The idiolectic voice is a term that exists to describe a blend of technique and distinctiveness that is the opposite of a homogeneous tone. It may be the case also that the Pop Rock genre is unusually broad in the range of vocal tones it admits. In the vocal tones of Carl Barat and Liam McKahey this study has two prime examples of idiolectic voice. My view is that the idiosyncratic voices of these two performers are the most salient element in this model's inventory of identifying factors. These two singers sound like nobody else, and nobody else will likely replicate their sound.

#### **7.6.1 Songfulness and the idiolectic voice: Carl Barat**

Carl Barat's is a voice possessing a powerful idiolect unique if only for its raw energy and self-taught Rock technique. This gifts him with the ability to sound like nobody else, and his nasal, cloudy tone is instantly recognizable, especially to those in the UK familiar with his hit Libertines songs. One of my early creative strategies was to suggest melodies to Carl that explored parts of his vocal range that were hitherto under-explored. The following nodes of songfulness are the points in this portfolio where Barat achieves that mixture of melody, tone and lyric that form attractive moments. These moments are particular manifestations of the songfulness effect in the Barat portfolio:

- 'Love is a graveyard of nostalgia and trouble'(00:30) and 'Forgive me love' (00:46) in *Carve my name*. These are the opening and closing line of every verse and they are pitched high in a lyric tenor range brings out a sweet lyric quality to Barat's otherwise baritone voice.

- ‘Better let her go’ (01:11) in *Run with the boys*. Pitched high at the upper end of Barât’s baritone, this is delivered in an energized, bright and excited tone. ‘Running with the Boys out night after night’ (00:52) is double tracked and projects an appealing, crisp Britpop sense of boisterous energy.
- ‘And you know I’ve loved you so, and I will to the end of days’ (01:26) in *Shadows fall* projects a vulnerability where Barât’s Gallic, nasal quality achieves a rueful quality in a manner reminiscent of French singer Serge Gainsbourg. ‘Shadows fall from the fire, loneliness was desire’ (02:17) hears Barât moving up an octave into his reliable high chest voice, negotiated here with a lightness that sounds authentically emotional.
- ‘Death fires come at night...’ for the titular chorus (00:56) in which Barât sings in a full-throated energized Rock style, this vocal is double tracked in a manner that enhances the bright, metallic qualities of this upper part of his chest-voice range.
- ‘With dirty hands, though our hearts are clean, with all our best-laid plans scuppered out at sea’ (02:44) From *Let it reign’s Beginning to see*, in which Barât performs at the high end of his chest voice and flips into his head voice with a clear sweet tone. ‘You and me, I’m beginning to see’ in the song’s coda (03:00) captures Barât in his most powerful singing mode, belting at the upper range of his chest voice, double tracked for sonic force.
- ‘The gears’ ‘So sing along like it’s the last time’ (00:19) blends punk delivery with characterful Cockney tones.
- ‘Oh and when she goes, yeah she really goes, She goes yeah yeah yeah’ (00:52) in *We want more* initially for its rounder, weary tone leading into a screamed, hard rock intensity. There is songfulness present here in the compelling sound Barât delivers in performance.

Songfulness is a subjective and indeterminate concept, yet we can assume with confidence that the sound of a singer’s voice will determine whether people like the act or not. We can also assume that songwriters will likely strive to bring out the best parts of a singer’s voice so that their songs sound attractive at as many points as possible.

#### **7.6.2 Songfulness and the idiolectic voice: CousteauX**

In his study of torch-song singers, Moore (1989) suggests that in this tradition, the singer is perceived by their audience to be an emotional expert. Not an expert on emotions themselves, but instead an expert in the act of *expression* of those emotions. Although the torch-singers of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century presented particular feelings in their portrayals of



romantic illusions, disillusion and conflicts, the listener's pleasure in the torch-song lies in the way the singer explores nuances of feeling. Torch-song lyrics are, in facilitating this kind of performance, texts signalling feeling. Identifying the most attractive tones in McKahey's singing voice and then writing for his instrument was always one of CousteauX's key design principles. In Liam McKahey this project possesses a powerful voice capable of a range of tones across an unusually broad range of dynamics. The following points across the album are key nodes of songfulness that focus songfulness in relation to McKahey's voice within the portfolio. As Kramer (2002) would see it, the following moments bind together lyric and melody in a manner that creates a sonic fingerprint unique to this act. Key points of songfulness evident in CousteauX's album are:

- 'Be upstairs ready my angel' (01:36) in *BURMA* in which the voice, pitched high in a lyric tenor range, negotiates large intervals with an easy, gliding, clear tone.
- 'There's a change coming down the line, all of the reasons remain looking for rhyme' (00:29) in *Seasons of you*, in which McKahey's accent and tone sound deep, and reassuringly warm with deep, with trans-Atlantic, Country-inflected, crooner qualities.
- 'Get away while you still thrill to the touch' (00:49), and 'an awakened ache safe in a blush' (00:56) in *Maybe you's* second A section. These have a desperate, anguished quality that brings out an appealing yearning aspect to McKahey's instrument. 'Maybe this lingers on our lips' (02:49) at the end of the song becomes more of a baritone belt as the melody improvises around a melisma that emphasizes the song's core emotion.
- 'And the music is love looking for words' (01:20) in *Portobello serenade* possesses a whimsical quality contrasting with following the bluesy force of 'and then when it comes it's something like I ain't ever heard' (01:35) in the choruses.
- '*This might be love*' (03:16) in the coda parts of this song in which extended melismatic phrasing brings out McKahey's impassioned, clean mid-intensity tones. The third verse's lines 'what brings us home who sets us free' (02:23) engages an appealing formant shift in the voice as it flips between McKahey's vocal registers.
- 'Daybreak ain't nothing without the sun' (00:46) and 'hard light that flickers on the blade of a knife' (01:31) in *The innermost light* for their gritty, sinister qualities; 'for the Innermost Light' (01:26) in every end-phrase for its power and passionate delivery.
- 'Nothing drags me down so low and nothing ever ever takes me higher' (00:32) 'There's something fine in what we've done, there's thin red lines between what's

right and wrong' (02:22) in *Thin red lines* for its declaratory authority and compelling decent into the bass octave of McKahey's range.

- 'Where did it all go, where did it all go, where did it all go right' (01:07) as McKahey builds up anaphoric emphasis toward the melismatic release in the last phrase in *Shelter's* choruses.
- '*Memory is a weapon*' (01:11) in the final cresting parts of this song's titular chorus, McKahey delivers this titular phrase with commitment and power, and in doing so brings out a quality in his voice that recall Tom Jones and/or David Bowie.
- '... another escaping another unknown, feeling lucky like there's no tomorrow' (01:27) in the choruses of *F\*\*king in joy and sorrow* in which a sense of anguish is clear in the cry in McKahey's voice.

Experiences of songfulness are possibly knowable only through phenomenology and hermeneutic research. However, the design principle in the CousteauX project is one that strives to manufacture these moments. This could be because of the productive tension within the songwriter/singer demarcation at the heart of the band's creativity: perhaps each of the two members attempts to emphasize the aspects of the other's creative contributions. While difficult to define, songfulness and its relationship with the idiosyncratic voice is the lifeblood of popular music: audiences love the sound of their favourite artists' voices and enjoy them all the more when they perform in a manner energized by the song's passions and dramas and the melodies that carry these sounds.

## 7.7 Discussion: similarity and difference

Zuckerman's (2016) ODT insist that elements indicating similarity and difference will be co-present in brand identity with a commercial optimality. Table 7.10 demonstrates the qualitative variants of identifying variables observed in practice, grouped into anatomies structured by ODT principles and informed by practitioner habitus and observation.

*Table 7.10 Portfolio albums: Similarity and difference*

<b>Carl Barât (2010)</b>	
Characterful nasal, untrained crooning interspersed with Hard Rock belting	
Dimensions of similarity	Dimensions of difference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainstream UK audience</li> <li>• Chamber pop, Britpop and Indie Rock textures</li> <li>• Medium to slow tempi</li> <li>• Low contour harmonic structure</li> <li>• Soft Rock and crooning vocal costume</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slide guitar, brass parts, orchestrations</li> <li>• Low to intermediate modality</li> <li>• Dramatic and lyric mode of address</li> <li>• Personal &amp; interpersonal value orientations</li> <li>• Hedonism, stimulation, benevolence</li> </ul>

<i>Let it reign (2015)</i>	
Hard Rock belting and nasal, Soft Rock mid tones	
Dimensions of similarity	Dimensions of difference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indie Rock UK audience</li> <li>• Garage and Punk-Rock textures</li> <li>• Fast tempi</li> <li>• High contour harmonic structure</li> <li>• Hard Rock and Classic Rock vocal costumes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twangy ‘surf’ guitars, lo-fi guitar solos gang vocals,</li> <li>• Intermediate to high modality</li> <li>• Political and lyric mode of address</li> <li>• Collective value orientations</li> <li>• Self-direction, power, security</li> </ul>

<i>CousteauX (2017)</i>	
Technical crooning baritone with high lyrical qualities and Hard Rock distorted tones	
Dimensions of similarity	Dimensions of difference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mature, international Alt Rock audience</li> <li>• Chamber Pop, cinematic, Jazz textures</li> <li>• Slow tempi</li> <li>• Low contour harmonic structure</li> <li>• Crooning, Folk and Alt Rock vocal costumes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flugelhorn and trumpet figures, baritone guitar parts and vocal arrangements</li> <li>• Low modality</li> <li>• Dramatic and lyric mode of address</li> <li>• Interpersonal value orientation</li> <li>• Benevolence, hedonism, stimulation</li> </ul>

This anatomy will now form the basis of Chapter Eight’s ‘Optimal Distinctiveness and Original Song’ model. This proposes that *the idiolectic voice* and the *songfulness* exert a superordinate relationship over all other song variables constituting identity, for their power to convey unique, corporeal aspects of an artist’s physicality. The sound of the voice in song, being the immediate, salient impression of an act, carries the gestalt, synergetic experience of song to the listener. What is salient in popular song is the intimate impression of the singer performing in a manner defined by songwriting aspiring to generate songfulness. The experience of assembling the Carl Barât and CousteauX albums lead me to conclude that the idiolectic voice, once wrapped into affective words-and-music, becomes the prime identifying property of song. This palpable connection to the physicality of voice animated in song and doing something extraordinary, is the experience audiences cherish, and songfulness is the craft that powers these moments. There is an argument that arrangement features such as Jimi Hendrix’s, or Andy Summers’ guitar parts in The Police are as powerful as the idiolectic vocal and its songfulness in projecting distinctiveness. Perhaps the commonality between instrumental and vocal distinctiveness in original tracks is that they both occupy the foreground of the songs, and share the leading edge of an original song act’s identity with the voice.

## Chapter Eight: Dimensions of optimality

The above chapters anatomized identifying variables that constitute identity with song. Now this chapter changes perspective to look outside song in order to develop a holistic model of the socio-cultural interactions original song artists engage in order to generate cultural and commercial capital. This view sees original songs as self-representations of the artist functioning within three socio-economic levels in a model transposed from Brewer and Gardner (1996) and Brewer and Roccas (2001), and explored above in Chapter Four's Conceptual Framework.

### 8.1 *Dimension 1*: ODT and the original artist

We need now make the working assumption that original songs sit at the core of an original artist 's identity, and upon release, they do their work externally through interactions with industry and audience. Then the conceptual framework proposed by this thesis can work at addressing the second of its research questions which asks:

*How might we understand the way in which original artist identity interacts with the market ecology of popular music?*

Brewer's later work (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Brewer and Roccas, 2001) expands the ODT principle to structure an ecological model of the activation of social identity, or 'self representations' in social situations. Self-representation is seen, in this view, to be activated on three discernible levels, each understood to be intersubjectively relating to the other two ecologically. This view of optimality provides a framework for apprehending the socio-economic dimensions of similarity and difference mobilised by original artists as their songs interact with industry and audience. Brewer and Roccas, in Table 8.1, define the original model of individuals activating self-representations on distinct levels.

*Table 8.1 Model of individuals activating self-representations of identity (Brewer and Roccas, 2001)*

Opposing drives and levels of self-representation		
Motivation		
Levels of self representation	Assimilation	Separation
Individual	Similarity	Uniqueness
Relational	Intimacy/interdependence	Autonomy
Collective	Inclusion/belonging	Differentiation

This thesis proposes to adapt this model (Table 8.2) and transpose the concept into a framework that imports the concept of self-representation and maps it to three key identical levels upon which the original artist must interact effectively in order to generate commerciality and cultural impact. Consistent across the two models are ODT's equilibriums of similarity and difference, framed here as active on individual, relational and collective levels.

*Table 8.2 Model #2 (adapted from Brewer and Roccas, 2001)*

<b>Optimality and the original artist</b>		
Expression		
<i>Levels of original artist identity</i>	<i>Belonging</i>	<i>Distinctiveness</i>
Artist in relation to peers and predecessors	Genre	Idiolect
Artist in relation to audience	Representativeness	Vocation
Artist in relation to gatekeepers	Canonicity	Invention

What can now be examined is the way in which optimal distinctiveness principles play out within the portfolio's observed public interactions. Reception data in combination with practitioner observation is deployed in what follows in order to inform analysis of portfolio artists' interactions on these levels.

### **8.1.1 Carl Barât: levels of identity activation**

#### **8.1.1.1 Peers and predecessors**

##### **8.1.1.1.1 Belonging to genre**

Operations of identity are played out in public, and journalists often announce original artists as they write their first draft of music history. One of the primary roles a music journalist fulfils, as ODT would predict, is explaining new music in terms of existing music. Journalists are public figures that resemble brands in that they seek to establish their own identity equilibrium by balancing the policy of their publication with the distinctiveness of their tastes and preferences. Table 8.3 contains the peers and precedents named by music journalists as they contextualize Carl Barât's songs for their readers. These are identifying markers of familiarity, deployed by journalists to both display the critic's cultural knowledge and to deploy this in describing new music in terms their readers might comprehend. These artists are demonstrated in Table 8.3 in a manner corresponding with AllMusic.com style types. Attempting to convey the similarity part of ODT's equilibrium, journalists described Barât's albums to their readers as resembling the following:

Table 8.3: Similar artist extracted from reviews and sorted into AllMusic styles

Chamber Pop	Britpop	Garage Punk
Scott Walker	Morrissey	Iggy Pop
The Tindersticks	The Jam	The Clash
Jacques Brel	Kevin Rowland	
The Divine Comedy	Oasis	
The Last Shadow Puppets	Madness	

This set of peers and predecessors varies in terms of eras, yet the artists again correlate consistently with AllMusic.com’s style typography. Within Barât’s native Alternative Rock/Indie Rock the broad extent of this range of comparisons reflects the multiple stylistic elements that combine and re-combine across Barât’s albums.

#### 8.1.1.1.2 Distinctive idiolect

For many, the sound of Barât’s vocal echoes his Libertines heritage. His portfolio albums are infused with their singer’s history and at times he reflects his own public image back into his song lyrics. Yet the most distinctive impression of Barât is communicated by the unique sound of his voice. He is an untrained, instinctive and characterful singer, and this immediately flags his music’s alternative qualities by drawing attention to the lyric. To nuance the qualities of difference Barât brings to his album formulae, review journalists below supply qualitative data with which to describe the finer qualities of Barât’s idiolect as represented by the albums:

#### **Carl Barât eponymous**

- His tunes are appealingly self-deprecating and their romantic moodiness teases out his soulful quality.  
(Halder, 2010) *Metro*
- ...an album with a strong sense of culture and heritage... that marvels at the youthful capacity for dissolution.  
(Gill, 2010) *The Independent*
- ...an album that tries hard so hard to uphold his rakish persona it comes across like the soundtrack to a West End musical about a womanizing Victorian bounder.  
(Harrison, 2010) *Mojo*
- ...sad chords and sadder cellos are stained with Serge Gainsbourg’s cigarette smoke.  
(Aston 2010) *BBC Music*
- ...it has a haunting air of romantic intent, but there are unfortunate moments of confusion.  
(Lewis, 2010) *Uncut*
- ...the air of the romantic poet wasting away in some Whitechapel garret, wracked with depression and picturing himself as some kind of Dickensian Serge Gainsbourg.

(Haynes, 2010) *New Musical Express*

A vivid picture of this album's distinctiveness forms from this data. The album is moody, haunting and romantic, with self-deprecating lyrics marveling at youthful dissolution. It presents Barât as an antiquated poetic romantic yet one wracked and depressively rueful. The Libertines' love of English tradition and heritage culture pervades this music, albeit setting the stage for what appeared to be songs set in another century. However 2015's album abandoned ballads and song characters and re-assembled Barât's idiolect. The dimensions of difference that make this second album distinctive are described as:

### **Let it reign**

- Barât sings of brotherhood in noble causes like a man mistaking punk rock for national service.  
(Sullivan, 2015) *The Guardian*
- ...as much of a guitar feast as you could wish for.  
*XFM* (2015)
- Suave, jacked-up Clash pop dusted with wartime imagery, music hall harrumph and hints of the theatricality...Barât has evolved his pubby narc-rock to embrace a down-at-heels largesse.  
(Beaumont, 2010) *The Guardian* (live review)
- ...he's part Fagin, part Iggy, part punk rock warrior leading his noble band of brothers into a battle against seemingly insurmountable odds.... As always, The Clash and the ideals of wartime British backbone are his trademarks.  
(Beaumont, 2015) *New Musical Express*
- While the gung-ho, colonial themes sound familiar, The Jackals are loose and louche without falling apart.  
(Valentish, 2015) *Rolling Stone*

What survives the transition from Libertine to Barât solo through to Carl Barât and The Jackals, is a fascination for heritage British themes and the romance of militant resistance. There is a theatricality to this blend, although the album's 'feast' of guitars, and a 'loose and louche' band are observed animating Barât's songs with a Punk aesthetic. Representing himself as a Punk Rock warrior leading the charge on behalf of a romantic revolution was demonstrably effective, and these dimensions of difference were evidently key to the task restoring and re-aligning Barât's identity on this second album.

### **8.1.1.2 Audience**

#### **8.1.1.2.1 Representativeness**

Wall (2013) Hibbett (2005) and Machin (2010) believe popular songs are artefacts freighted with the discourses of the cultures from which they emerge. Carl Barât is a highly visible figure associated with UK Indie Rock, and as ODT would predict, in his visual, musical and textual messages he nurtures mutuality with his audience through the values

expressed in his songs. Discourse in this culture is broadly metropolitan, educated, literate, liberal, artistic, critical and leftist. Barât's songs speak to this discourse with a romantic, witty, hedonistic, acerbic, overtly poetic, humanist blend of lyrical signals. His solo album experiment was an attempt to translate these qualities for an audience that had matured and possibly mellowed into family lives or careers with different priorities, and the romantic qualities of The Libertines were reprised in songs such as 'Carve my name' and 'Shadows fall'. 'Run with the boys' may have engaged the Rabelaisian tastes of Libertines fans, but the song's unreliable narrator limited the song's potential to engage empathetic response. Indie Rock is a cosmopolitan and progressive discourse, and my sense is that the unsympathetic and unreliable song characters in 'Carve my name', 'Run with the boys', 'This is The Song (Irony of Love)' and 'Death fires burn at night' may have been too controversial or too ambivalent for that audience. The confusion that *Uncut* magazine noticed (Lewis, 2010) is most active in this dimension, as Barât's licence to explore unusual positions in song stretched his audience problematically. Barât's representativeness in relation to his core audience rests on his ability to speak to their sense of him as an honest and approachable romantic poet, speaking to the liberal anti-corporate politics of Indie discourse.



Figure 8.1 The keyboard player's perspective, Carl Barât, Vienna, 2011

In 2011 across UK, Ireland and Austria I observed at close hand the interaction between Barât and his audience whilst touring as his live keyboard player. I witnessed a strong disparity between audience reaction to newer material and their reactions to Libertines' songs. Audiences responded in a visibly energized manner to Libertines' songs partly because these songs are familiar and cherished, and partly because their tempos and energy levels were fast-paced and their delivery chaotic. These live audiences reacted less energetically to the new album's material, although this may have been appropriate to the



melancholy, down-tempo qualities of the music. The career choice to change and evolve seems too have been too different from the similarity required by his audience.

The connections that form bonds between artists and their public are normally understood categorically through delineations of demographics, genre, sub-genre and style as explored above. However, Internet music providers increasingly identify and profile both audience and artist in a lateral sense, where journalists tag ‘mood’ descriptions to artists. Aggregators, algorithms and recommendation engines each use these indicators as a way of describing and predicting audience and potential audiences’ tastes. A tag-based set of descriptions is a set of tastes and investments that link audience and artist in an aggregate of identity-forming aesthetic values. This is an alternative resource by which to know audiences through their tastes, ethical and aesthetic preferences:

*Table 8.4 AllMusic.com’s Carl Barât moods (AllMusic.com, 2019c)*

Carl Barât	boisterous, exuberant, freewheeling, passionate, energetic, lively, rousing, volatile, aggressive, cheerful, irreverent, whimsical, witty, brash, earnest, literate, dramatic, theatrical, cheerful
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The above adjectival descriptions build a two-way mirror reflecting both the identity of Carl Barât’s solo work and the predilections of his audience. Representativeness, then, can be read as embodied in a two-way articulation of commonalities of taste. AllMusic.com’s ‘moods’ are reliable market-driven devices optimizing consumer-orientated retail, and popular music consumers who self-define as partial to these qualities are likely to find Carl Barât’s solo albums appealing.

8.1.1.2.2 Vocation

Carl Barât is different from his audience simply because he is a full-time original song artist. The career of a professionalized original singer is one that differentiates the artist from the audience they represent on a variety of practical and cultural levels. The privileged opportunity to work and live as a commercially viable artist is one that allows a musician to indulge a reflective perspective from within a separate world of travel, creativity, performance, visibility and esteem. He was and remains a professional artist, and this vocation makes his identity fundamentally different from those of his audience. The artist’s challenge is to maintain their representativeness in relation to their audience

whilst maintaining a career rendering the artist separate from the lives of that audience. This is a much-discussed, perennial issue in the world of popular music, and questions abound about how relevant to the world of their audience an artist can continue to be when they prosper and separate from the people they sing for.

### **8.1.1.3 Gatekeepers**

#### **8.1.1.3.1 Canonicity and invention**

Popular music gatekeepers operate across three key areas as they determine access to the circulation of popular culture. These areas are: journalism (reviewers, editors, bloggers and feature writers), broadcast (radio editors, television editors, streaming services) and live performance (promoters and live agents). Field agents working in these media are required to operate in a manner compatible with (or similar to) the identified genre identity of their outlet. This outlet will favour its own balance of familiarity/uniqueness, as it seeks to balance brand aspects of an outlet's policy expectations. There exists a requirement for songs to cohere with format, and they need to sound like, or relate to, contemporaneous and/or heritage material. If songs are perceived as being too different, then they will likely be rejected as unfit. Barât's first solo album was witnessed achieving broad inclusion at mainstream radio and press. This level of mainstream access is valuable, and was arguably facilitated by the exuberant arrangement features of 'Run with the boys' and the song's tuneful qualities, each of which developed Barât's Libertines identity to commercial effect. And so inventiveness was evident in the way he reconstituted aspects of the Libertines whilst sounding redolent of canonical Britpop and Northern Soul.

This level of mainstream visibility vindicated much of Barât's stylistic re-invention. Yet while mainstream reach expanded, Barât's core critical support indicated disapproval. *NME* and AllMusic.com's influential critiques seemed to articulate the ambivalence of his established fanbase. Barât's presence as a canonical figure in UK pop exerted an unusual set of expectations, as evidenced in these responses:

- Try as he might, Barat might run to Europe and beyond, but he will always find it hard to hide from his past. (Aston, 2010) BBC Online
- It can't be easy to find your place in the world after your career peaked to a generational moment in your early twenties. But perhaps a little more honesty might go a long way towards resolving that. (Haynes, 2010) New Musical Express

The first solo album explored artistic expression more than it did reinforce Barât's established, canonical Libertines traits. Optimality was, therefore, imbalanced by too much distinctiveness. Later, Barât's return album's identity restored continuity with his Libertines work. So, while *Let it reign* was less mainstream and less commercially successful, it nevertheless consolidated his standing with the sub-cultural discourse foundational to his enduring appeal:

- Let It Reign is a storming album showing a revitalized Barât backed by a pack of young Jackals with plenty of bite.  
(Dowden 2015) *Music OMH*
- If Carl Barât's 2010 solo LP was battle weary, Let it Reign is a call to arms.  
(Valentish 2015) *Rolling Stone*

*Let it reign* has no amatory dimensions, and its modality is much closer aligned to Barât's public image. Canonicity was pronounced in the album's punk rock aesthetics and rebel gang ethics; these are perennial Indie gestures. Invention was expressed in Orwellian themes, satire and romantic wartime themes, all of which formed a consistency with his Libertines work. Access to a more tightly defined segment of culture was granted to this follow-up album by the following gatekeeper responses:

- 8/10 *NME*
- 4-stars *The Guardian*
- 4-stars *Rolling Stone*
- XFM Album of The Week
- 4-stars All Music
- All Music Editor's Choice

Neither of these two albums were sizable hits, but nevertheless they provide a rich vein of insight into the operations of identity mobilized by contemporary artists in the process of maintaining ongoing careers. As of December 2019, Carl Barât and the Jackals remain a successful global brand with an increasing international fanbase.

### **8.1.2 CousteauX: levels of identity activation**

The portfolio's second half is a reminder of the degree of variation permissible within the Pop Rock genre, as CousteauX make music for older rock audiences with alternative tastes.

### 8.1.2.1 Peers and predecessors

#### 8.1.2.1.1 Belonging to genre

The range of artists to whom CousteauX were compared in 2017 is notable for the number of different acts in the list. As a matrix of peers and precedents, this is an indicative inventory of artists who speak to similar demographics and similar aesthetic preferences. Table 8.5 is a list of peers and precedents named by journalists to describe CousteauX, and arranged to conform to AllMusic.com's style descriptors:

*Table 8.5 Comparisons made in 2017 CousteauX reviews categorized into AllMusic.com styles*

<b>Chamber Pop</b>	<b>Alternative/Indie Rock</b>	<b>Sadcore</b>
Scott Walker	Nick Cave	Leonard Cohen
David Bowie	Mark Lanegan	Chet Baker
Burt Bacharach	Elvis Costello	Lou Reed
Marc Almond	Richard Hawley	Of Monsters and Men
The Tindersticks	Lee Hazlewood	
Lana Del Rey	The Smiths	
Dusty Springfield		

Artists in this list span fifty years of popular music, reflecting perhaps, CousteauX's members' ages, and the 35+ age demographic of the band's audience. The overwhelming majority of the artists mentioned in Table 8.5 operate within the singer-songwriter tradition. These comparisons may point to singer-songwriter tendencies to foreground linguistic and vocal dimension of song. The spacious, emotionally intense, orchestrated and soundtrack-like aspects of Scott Walker, David Bowie, Marc Almond and Lana Del Rey are salient qualities of CousteauX's Chamber Pop. This style's harmonic complexity echoes the work of Burt Bacharach and there is an intimacy similar to that of The Tindersticks. The menacing, overdriven guitar-based qualities of Nick Cave and Mark Lanegan are typically Alt-Rock and Indie, and are located in 'The innermost light' and 'Thin red lines'. 'Portobello serenade' stretches the alternative formula into Jazz-Rock stylings. Sadcore may be an editorial flourish to describe the overall tone of the album, but its 'slow, fragile and gut-wrenching' qualities (AllMusic.com) are present in 'Shelter' and 'F\*\*king in joy and sorrow' for both their mellow arrangements, but also for the intimacy and overt melancholia present in the lyrics. There is an overall quality to CousteauX that blends 'classic' eras of popular music, thus:

songs that at first glance certainly remind you of something, but which then suddenly turn to another genre, another mood, another color register  
(Trapani, 2017) *L'officielitalia.com*

it takes a bit from the 60s, and, in a journey that covers four decades, everything with sounds that refer to indie, trip-hop and even cool jazz  
(Sardiello, 2017) *hardsounds.it*

It may be the case that this set of influences reflects fifty plus years of enculturation and music absorption, as this band enjoys many of the above artists. Some similarity, as ODT would predict, is inevitable, and the list of comparisons is edifying for its revered artists.

#### 8.1.2.1.2 Distinctive idiolect

Describing the music in terms of its unique, idiolectic qualities, journalists generated voluminous qualitative impressions of CousteauX's album. These select descriptions below speak to those aspects of the CousteauX brand that differentiate it from its peers and precedents, and sum together as an aggregate qualitative impression of what makes this band different from its peers and predecessors.

- feel-the-quality songs of emotional masochism  
(Harrison, 2017) *Mojo Music Magazine*
- majestic darkness  
(KCRW 2017) *Radio KCRW, Los Angeles*
- sexy, dark, elegant and decadent  
(Thurek, 2017) *AllMusic.com*
- haunting, moody, spiritual, cinematic, gorgeous  
(Redley, 2017) *Music Republic Magazine*
- deep, nocturnal, pre-winter  
(Accio, 2017) *iyezine.com Italy*
- haunting, involving, tuneful and suffused with quiet bite  
(Sargeant, 2017) *justlistentothis.co.uk*
- like something Nick Cave would enjoy at a Soho cabaret  
(Pomeroy, 2017) *Ink19.com*
- blending adult pop urges and moodier motivations  
(Allen, 2017) *culturesonar.com*
- another beautiful, unique album... of triumph and despair  
(Butcher, 2017) *Record Collector*

- ...timeless, evocative, reflective and richly romantic to regretful compositions distinguished by McKahey's smoothly rueful to deeply brooding baritone vocals. (Viva Le Rock, 2017)

From this data a picture forms of CousteauX as an identity creating emotional, haunting, moody and cinematic musical experiences. The music shifts between influences and styles, maintaining as it does, a nocturnal, pre-winter atmosphere. There is an evocative quality to the songs, and at the same time there is a 'quiet bite' (Sargeant, 2017) and a picaresque quality one might expect in a sleazy Soho cabaret. Overall there is rawness to the lyrics' emotionality that has a masochistic quality; celebrating and accentuating a pervading melancholy like torch-songs do. Liam McKahey's distinctive vocal, the consistency of instruments in the cinematic arrangements, and the material's overt efforts to create moments of songfulness are each aspects of CousteauX's identity. This is recipe for the distinctiveness that sets this band apart from other stylists in this genre.

#### **8.1.2.2 Audience**

##### **8.2.2.2.1 Representativeness**

CousteauX's two members broadly mirror the demographics of their audience; both being middle-aged, Western music fans that grew up on a diet of David Bowie, Leonard Cohen, Scott Walker, and recently John Grant, Father John Misty and Richard Hawley music. We favour baritone vocal tones and torch songs with a delicacy constructed around sophisticated Jazz-tinged harmony arranged with Rock instrumentation. Live performance brought the band into close proximity with some of our audience, and this offered insight into the characteristics of our paying public. In May 2016, then September, October and November of 2017, CousteauX played four sold-out concerts in 300-350 seat venues in Milan, London and Porto.



Figure 8.2 The Blue Note, Milan



Figure 8.3 The 100 Club, London



Figure 8.4 Arcos De Valdavez, Porto



Figure 8.5 Serraglio, Milan

Limited to a handful of key dates across three key territories, CousteauX's album launch received an enthusiastic welcome from each of its capacity audiences, with encores and significant merchandise sales. Typical audiences observed at the above live shows were educated European professionals, metropolitan Generation X, Generation Y and Baby Boomers, between 35-55 years of age. Observation would indicate that our audience share age-range, musical education, taste and preference with the band members, often including a connoisseur's appetite for romantic and overtly emotional music. The following characteristics roundly define the CousteauX audience we encountered:

- Age 35+, international, metropolitan, professional, literate and educated to college level
- Fans of the torch-song and melancholy literature, cinema and art
- Fans of performers with dramatic, moody music and stylish visual qualities such as Scott Walker, David Bowie, Richard Hawley and Nick Cave
- Music aficionados and collectors
- Fans of baritones and dramatic voices
- People who pay attention to lyrics

The key to understanding our audience may be in its combination of age and tastes, as this audience are older and more internationally distributed. My sense is that what is common across these individuals is an appetite for delicacy, an appreciation of finessed, technical vocal delivery, classic-era instrumentation and a sensory quality to song lyric. What we witness in the relation between CousteauX and its audience is a symbiotic relationship where the mutuality of material, performer and audience is in a creative, generative alignment. Again, we can refer to AllMusic.com's moods descriptor to help form a link between tastes and preferences common to CousteauX and audience:

Table 8.6 AllMusic.com's CousteauX moods (2019h)

CousteauX	autumnal, atmospheric, nocturnal, graceful, sophisticated, sensual, virile, warm, cosmopolitan, elegant, lyrical, reflective, romantic, literate, melancholy, bittersweet, angst-ridden, sexual, uncompromising, hungry
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This set of adjectives is a two-way articulation of both the identity of CousteauX represented through songs, and also the audience anticipated in a manner defined by those aesthetic tastes. This kind of consumer profiling may increasingly become preferred as a way of knowing music audiences. Moods span genres and styles and are not confined to genre or style constraints, and they speak to audience and band preferences at an informative, granular level; of the kind values and choices people might self-describe if discussing identity.

#### 8.1.2.2.2 Vocation

The *CousteauX* album was ultimately unable to generate enough financial and cultural capital to sustain full-time careers as original artists. And so, the dimension of difference the musician aspires to in the opportunity to professionalize their art was not substantially forthcoming for this project. The privileged situation of being a professional original artist is one an audience values for its otherness, however there is little difference between the lives of CousteauX's audience and the lives of the band. We remain representative of the audience as discussed above, but the ecology of original song demands substantial commercial traction in order to support full-time careers in original music. Carl Barât's albums saw him maintain his ongoing vocation, yet CousteauX's album, whilst the beneficiary of substantial praise, failed to generate vocations for its members. What this is, however, is a strong example of the model in action, as other parts of this ecological formula engaged optimally, and the formula may have prospered if it were to have enjoyed more reach, exposure and support. Gatekeeper approval and support, despite the DIY Internet era, remains imperative for prosperous careers in original song.

#### 8.1.2.3 Gatekeepers

##### 8.1.2.3.1 Canonicity and invention

Published by Blue Mountain Music/Primary Wave, CousteauX were the beneficiaries of a publishing advance sufficient to hire press agents in each of the album's primary release



territories. These territories (UK, USA and Italy) saw CousteauX selected for editorial recommendation and included within the ranks of mainstream and respected artists across a range of publications and webzines. The canonicity and invention combined in this project was readily detected and celebrated by journalists and editors. However, unlike the Carl Barat albums, CousteauX's campaign stalled at radio and expired its promotional budget. CousteauX were arguably too distinctive for radio. We can infer from this that CousteauX's only single was not similar enough to the stations' current program material. And so CousteauX's drive for optimality failed to establish a functioning equilibrium at this level. Radio producers are crucial gatekeepers with the power to permit reach and visibility, and in its interaction with this part of the field, the CousteauX project was less than optimal. There may be political dimensions to editorial choices at radio, and radio plugging is a competitive field in which high-investment interests routinely exert influence. Nevertheless, between press and radio this thesis witnessed the operations of optimal distinctiveness at variance between differing kinds of gatekeeper. What the CousteauX album failed to achieve was substantial support at radio. This may be a confirmation that this particular Adult Alternative Rock doesn't fulfil current policy at mainstream radio. It may also be the case that the very qualities that saw a swathe of journalists and writers respond passionately in support of the album might also exclude it from radio. Radio programmers and journalists work to different specific broadcast and publisher agendas, and this research witnessed two key parts of the promotional industry in action. At each radio, press and webzine level, gatekeepers evaluating this music maintained their outlet's own editorial equilibrium somewhere between what they knew to be familiar and what thought might be a gamble.

## **8.2 Dimension 2: ODT and original song**

The second dimension of this model distils the variables explored in Chapters Six and Seven into a conceptual framework anatomizing the inner workings of songs within the Pop Rock genre. The first of this thesis' research questions asks:

*What variables do songwriting artists deploy when constructing public-facing identity in original songs?*

Figure 8.6 is a pictorial representation of Chapter Six and seven's identifying variables, anatomized by ODT's structural principle:

difference

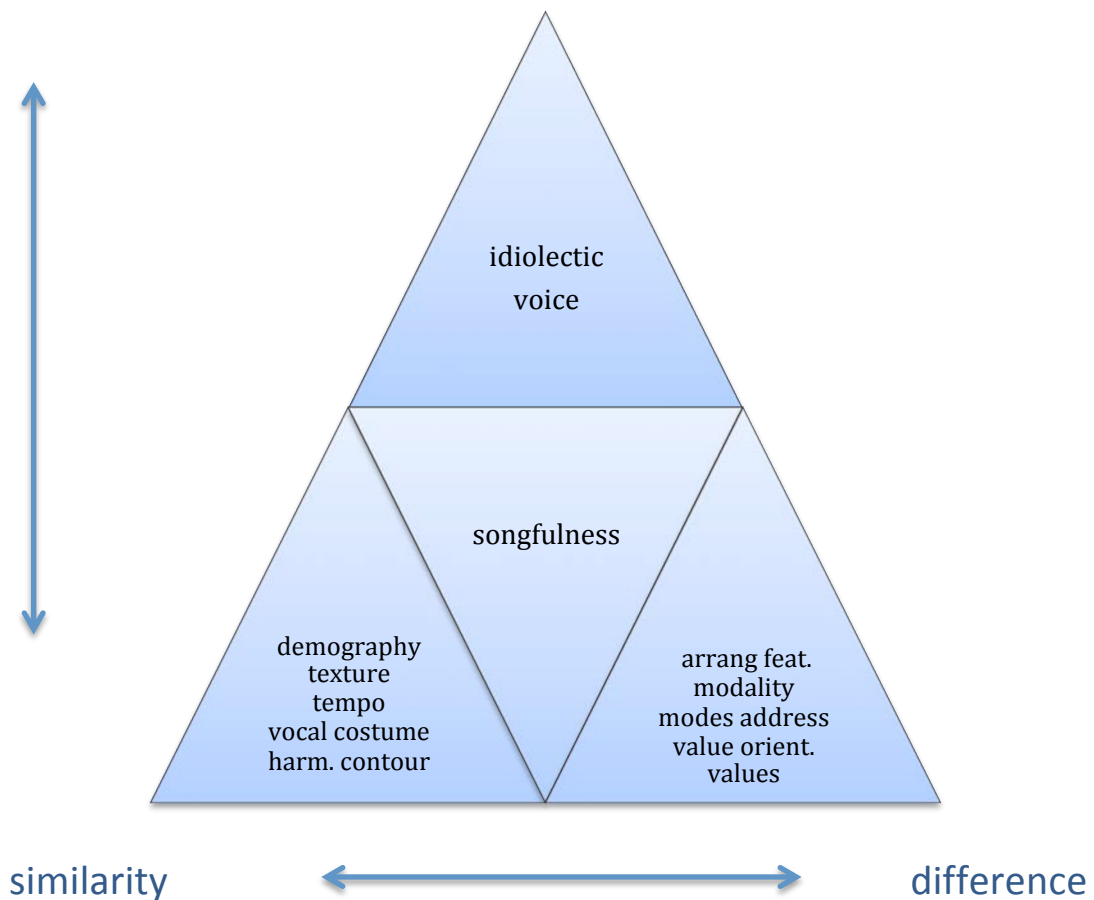


Figure 8.6 Optimal distinctiveness and original song

This model condenses previous analysis into dimensions of similarity and difference active on vertical and horizontal dimensions. It expresses the thesis's proposition that a singer's voice is a song's super-ordinate identifying factor; governing the experience of other variables. In this model, the voice is the leading edge of identity: the most intimate, and most powerful identifying activator present in popular song. The music in the voice, or the voluptuousness of the voice's sound is proposed as the prime element of popular song bridging song text with the phenomenological experience of listening. Vocalists such as CousteauX's are performance athletes with the unique ability to make an attractive sound, and a songwriter's challenge is to help them sound appealing as they animate reservoirs of songfulness built into the songwriting. The quality of songfulness is what the songwriting process aspires to as it attempts to provide potential for extraordinary performance in order to bring out the most appealing parts of the singer's voice.

### 8.3 Optimality and the original artist

This chapter first documented the way in which portfolio songs interacted with peers, gatekeepers and audiences. Then it modelled original song identity anatomized into identifying song variables. Combining both these ecological dimensions, Figure 8.7 locates song variables at the centre of a model of the ecology within which original songs operate in public. In this combined model, song materials interact with artist, audience and gatekeepers in an intersubjective system of cultural production, powered by drives for similarity and difference seeking optimality in each context. Below is a holistic model of self, song and other at play in song: the overarching conceptual finding of this thesis.

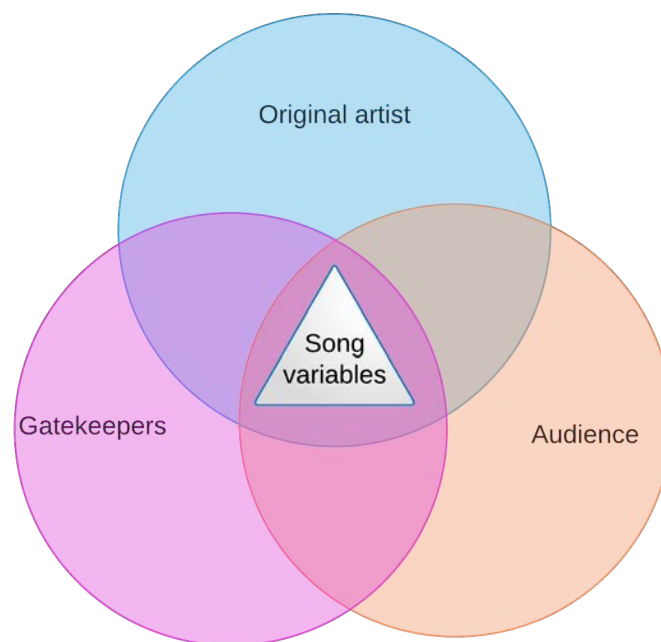


Figure 8.7 Optimality and the original artist

Future songwriting students might be encouraged by this model to consider songs as part expression, part representations of the intended audience and part gatekeeper anticipation. Gatekeeping impacts profoundly upon an artist's contact with potential listeners. At worst, this channel is obstructed, as witnessed in CousteauX album's bid to be supported by BBC or XFM broadcast radio. At best, identity is endorsed and amplified by

media support as witnessed with the first Barât album. Tastemakers, influencers and critics are in the business of re-interpreting the artist's work to critique for audiences that subscribe to the outlet. Artists thus supply music with inherent levels of similarity and distinctiveness that are subsequently critiqued, re-interpreted and signposted by tastemakers and critics on their way to the audience. The resulting impression audiences receive is therefore a composite of impressions calibrated by cultural mediators. Recently social media often bridges artist and audience and recently various YouTube phenomena have emerged without the early intervention of gatekeepers. However, gatekeepers such as record labels, live agents and management are likely to eventually intercede to get involved with an artist in order to permit access to reach and more impact beyond the capacity of DIY promotion. The relationship between artists, their media and their audiences is a symbiotic one within this model's productive ecology.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

### 9.1 Optimal distinctiveness and identity in song

The aim of this thesis is to develop a model with which to discuss original artist identity whilst avoiding controversies of identity politics and authenticity debates. The thesis has demonstrated that optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) offers a flexible model for both anatomizing the identifying parts of song and for configuring a view of the original artist's socio-economic ecology. The theory is serviceable because it provides a neutral, non-essentialist framework with which to grasp the subtle variations in self-representation deployed by artists. Certain aspects of the theory required adaption for its translation into a musical context without altering the fundamental concepts ODT offers. The ODT framework proposed in this thesis embraces recent extensions of the principles of similarity and difference developed by designers, sociologists, market researchers and product analysts. This thesis demonstrated that original artists themselves blend typicality and novelty in their public image and their songs can be deconstructed for those aspects that constitute identity.

Musicians have long been instinctively aware of optimal distinctiveness. Popular music invariably references heritage and contemporaneous artists. Yet copycat songs, or overtly referential projects rarely thrive. At the other extreme, with occasional exception, original artists can prove too strange, quirky and distinctive to survive selection within the competitive Darwinism of the struggle for market share. Some artists break this mould, however even artists as gifted as The Beatles established their brand by mixing established genre tropes with their own distinctive invention. So what was previously instinctive, tacit knowledge amongst musicians has been systematically articulated in this thesis.

Throughout popular music history successful bands and singers have emerged from sub-cultures, movements and scenes, reflecting signature aspects of their sub-culture whilst imbuing their songs with something quintessentially theirs. The consumer-product model of ODT suggested by Zuckerman (2016) bridges social psychology and product design in a manner with powerful utility for songwriters. Products in the marketplace simultaneously address two audiences. For category inclusion, a product must demonstrate competencies commensurate with the expectations of that category. Yet simultaneously that product must also communicate dimensions of difference such that the product stands out from its competitors. Category inclusion and dimensions of difference are the countervailing

imperatives seeking equilibrium in optimal product identity. For this thesis, this take on ODT contributes a robust framework with which to grasp the way artists configure and communicate identity through their songs.

## **9.2 A portfolio with perspective on identity**

The thesis draws upon four key data points: eighteen songs, their songwriting processes, gatekeeper reception and audience observation. The undertaking seeks not only to advance scholarly understanding about the operation of identity in the songwriting process, but equally it seeks to elucidate guiding principles for application and adaption in the field of songwriting pedagogy and practice. This thesis's main contribution is in the conceptual domain. In the attention economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, consumers are saturated with culture, and artists more than ever must project vibrant identity. The above chapters structure a conceptual framework that offers an analytical lens to songwriters as they prepare their materials and brands for marketplace. The study took advantage of privileged song creation situations and exploited these as sites from which to address a gap in current songwriting discourse. Yet these professional opportunities sat alongside other projects that failed to achieve substantive impact. And so, by rejecting material that failed to make discernable public impact, a methodological filter was imposed on the research that ensured only visible projects with evident identity esteem were examined.

The creative projects undertaken for the thesis then allowed for an ecological view of the subject to be undertaken, and these yielded sufficiently dense data across creative processes, critical reception, gatekeeper and audience responses. The utility of the practitioner-embedded approach to enquiry, combined with the analytical autoethnographic method, becomes clear in light of its aim to gain a full view of how artist identity, through similarity and difference in song, is constructed. This is documented from the point of origin in the songwriting and production process, through marketing, via critics and broadcast gatekeepers to audiences. The advantage of making work in which I was an author/producer the site for analysis is that it affords access to all stages of the original song process. The thesis also clearly demonstrates how various aspects of this process are directly within the control of the authors, and others are acted upon by a range of industry mediators. We witnessed above how these mediators can exert significant influence on how an artist or particular work is perceived and positioned with the broader field of practice.

### 9.3 Identifying variables active in portfolio songs

The adopted strategy of atomizing song materials into a range of constituent elements allowed for investigations of identity, similarity and difference to be explored at the granular level of song materials. This addressed the methodological concern that prior studies of popular songwriting were mostly reception focused. The atomization of song variables allowed for a discussion to unfold that encompassed the creative process, creative decision-making, and artist/songwriter intent whilst holding industrial responses in view for reference. Such an ecological approach is needed in order to fully understand the complexities of identity, similarity and difference operating within the music industry. It is my contention that this approach offers something substantially new to the field of scholarship.

This thesis proposes that when musical materials are atomized into key constituent elements, then particular elements can be identified that serve to associate an artist or song to a particular genre and style, whilst others work to differentiate an artist or song *from* that genre field. The thesis therefore proposes that particular elements of song can be argued as performing specific functions in respect of similarity and difference, and that creative teams work these elements into their recorded productions. The thesis draws out and makes explicit these intuitive practitioner understandings and offers perspective how they operate in respect of the overall effort to distinguish work for market. The three album projects explored in the above chapters yielded professional observations indicating inflection points in the song creation process, and these were collated and sorted into recurring variables. Together they form an anatomy of functioning identifiers with which, it is argued, Pop Rock artists make their identities known through song. A model emerged from observations of practice with the power to structure an anatomy of creative variables within an original Pop Rock artist's control.

### 9.4 Dimensions of similarity in song

Sonic and temporal aspects of original song productions are argued as the most prominent indicators of genre and style. Corresponding to the demographics of market audience, texture and tempo are audio indicators of a song's mood and energy. Rhythm is constructed by texture and tempo in combination. Slow tempos universally signal relaxation and reflection just as fast tempos key excitement and action. At the energetic level, something fundamental is declared about an artist's identity by the tempo of their songs. The CousteauX album was largely slow and reflective, which contributed to its identifiable mood and atmosphere. At the other end of the spectrum Carl Barât increased

his tempos in order to re-energize his brand on his second album's punky, upbeat songs. This served to re-assert his trademark qualities after the down-tempo experimentation of his first solo album. Texture, or the synchronic dimension, is a term that might be interchanged with 'arrangement' or 'sound palette'. It is the sound of the backing track that differentiates Metal from Indie, Hip Hop from Jazz, R&B from Folk. An original artist's textural qualities, in conjunction with tempo, signal to the tribes of music fans what kind of music this is and where it belongs.

Harmonic contours, or the complexity and length of chord sequences are capable of communicating non-linguistic affective narratives in the music. Longer, more complex chord sequences allow the music's harmonic structure exert a palpable emotionality from the song's structural base. Alternatively, high contour, fast-repeating chord loops see harmony functioning more as background to an emotionality expressed elsewhere in elements such as groove, topline, arrangement features or performance. The difference between two polarities of contour types can be characterized as the difference between Tin Pan Alley ballads and James Brown's funk: chords can act as either emotional narrative or as texture, depending on their contour. Low contour harmonic constructions are capable of communicating narrative and emotionality pre-verbally or instrumentally, yet high contour, fast repeating chords are limited in that regard. And so harmonic contours declare something powerful about the focus of the song's compelling elements, and what parts of the music are communicating feeling. Then a song will soon reveal its singer as the song's dominant identifying presence. With occasional exception, vocal costuming immediately activates as an indexical semiotic signalling associatively towards specific genres and styles. These elements are identifying variables that have been demonstrated to communicate genre and style similarities. They are, to a greater extent, the musical, sonic facets of original songs.

## **9.5 Dimensions of difference in song**

Whilst typicality is being established, an original song concurrently activates its foremost identifying qualities in its lead vocal and arrangement features. Arrangement features are instrumental, vocal and textural parts that occupy the lead role when lead singing is absent. These then perform a vocal-like function as they occupy the foreground as lead melodies and melodic hooks. There are some bands where ensemble playing becomes an arrangement feature, others that possess standout instrumentalists in their ensemble. Original bands are sometimes distinctive for their expressive non-vocal flourishes. Yet it is axiomatic that lead singers will project the leading edge of the song's identity. They do this



by making an attractive sound with their voice as it activates in song. Pop Rock is a genre where heterogeneity is a premium, and distinctive, idiolectic voices are prized. And so, the songwriter's challenge is to tease out the most attractive vocal sounds the performer can make by supplying songs with the potential for being inhabited by a singer who can blend words and voice in an empathetic relationship to the music. This then activates the experience of songfulness. Songfulness is the quality that audiences cherish: when idiolectic voice and song combine synergistically. These are all emotive elements of sound and music powerful enough to be appreciated by foreigners who don't speak the lyric's language. Music and the sound of singers in music telegraph powerful identifying signals that can be understood pre-verbally.

When language engages through the lyrical dimension, a profound set of identifying vectors comes into play. Language then engages the listener with its own identifying properties. The lyric's mode of address structures an implied, inferred relationship with its audience, and can communicate whether the song is introspective, romantic, story-like or ideological. Whilst exceptions exist, generally the lyric, dramatic, narrative and political modes of address indicate what kind of experience the song will convey in its words. This structures the inferred relationship to the audience adopted by the song character. In a broad sense, the lyric mode signals solitary, reflective first-person expression – occasionally about love and romance – although invariably private and revelatory. The dramatic mode telegraphs urgencies often of love and desire, and implies that the audience is present in or near the drama with its present tense, 2<sup>nd</sup> person language. In the case of CousteauX, almost every song is in the dramatic mode, and there is some indication here that consistency can become an identifying quality, although I am critical of that view. The narrative mode is the storyteller's device that declares 'let me tell you a story' to an audience, as it details third-person accounts of other people and their lives. It is noteworthy that none of the portfolio songs were written in this mode. Rarest of the four modes, but evident in Barât's second album, is the political mode, which is the mode where singer and audience are one vocal entity. This is the mode of massed voices, protest, rallies and communality. It is less common, possibly because popular songs are rarely overtly ideological and love songs are far more common. Some acts such as CousteauX trade only in love songs. Modes of address often, but not always, cohere with value orientations in lyric. Value orientations are a way of categorizing the focus of human investment within which the lyric operates. These will generally be private, relational or collective. This communicates the level of human contact and activity engaged by the lyric. The range

spans private soliloquies of internal-thought, through intimate romantic mutuality, to larger collective, societal and social themes.

Modes of address and value orientation can be combined in different ways. A man singing a song of private reflection in the lyric mode about a woman he loves mixes the lyric mode with a relational value orientation. Some protest songs express their collective, political value orientation through a conversation with, say, a politician in the dramatic mode of address. Some story songs are sung in the lyric mode. Each of these linguistic devices communicates subtle shades of identity. Ultimately the original artist's identity is most revealed by what they are passionate about, by what they are invested in, desire, aspire to, cherish and hope for. Popular music singers communicate through commitment, energy and dynamism, and so it is natural for an audience to assume the artist is, as indicated by this commitment, invested in something important to them. With the occasional artful exception, song lyrics can be seen as freighted with impressions suggesting preferences, predilections, worldview and values held by the artist. Sexuality, romance, rebellion, autonomy, power, freedom, community and pleasure-seeking are values common to popular music, and each of these correspond with universal human values. Listeners know their original artists best by knowing about the things for which they care.

## **9.6 Socio-economic dimensions of similarity and difference**

With its internal variables combining to constitute artist identity *within* song, a song must then make its passage beyond the artist to compete in the competitive market ecology. Popular music requires economies of scale in order to function, and original artists need to come to the attention of a number of people so that a fraction of that number might become ongoing consumers of their music. Professionalization, the ambition of most original artists, will only occur when an audience has been reached so that their song might make an impression. This may occur independent of media and industry structures, as is the case with artists who self-publish their way to their audience via YouTube. But even so, eventually tastemakers, critics, pundits, influencers, editors, directors, publishers and producers will likely evaluate artist identity for inclusion within popular culture. Increased reach, visibility and circulation in the bloodstream of culture are perennially sought in popular music. The identity of the artist, represented in song, is required then to establish symbiotic optimality with two audiences: both fans and gatekeepers. And so, an expanded social model of optimal distinctiveness, where self-representation is active on three intersubjective levels, allows us to configure these interactions. An individual, or an original act, will first blend similarity and difference to construct distinctiveness in relation

to their peers and precedents in popular music. Access to audiences is generally facilitated and enabled by field-agent gatekeepers who describe, contextualize, program, support and promote artists towards broader reach and impact. Once in contact with the act's audience, songs and original materials must then speak to that audience's lives and experience, whilst the artist pursues a vocation and perspective essentially different from the lifestyles of that audience. Popular music audiences are quick to mythologize, and would prefer their artists to inhabit another way of living; this is the stuff of popular music legend. Like any relationship, mutuality is vital because audiences supply the capital upon which artists survive. Optimal distinctiveness has been demonstrated in this thesis as operational within these three social contexts.

### **9.7 Applicability of this model**

The Pop Rock genre in which this entire portfolio is situated must be acknowledged as a constraint on the generalizability of this model's detail. For other genres and styles, the optimal distinctiveness model may still apply, even if specific song anatomies differ. Future scholars might be encouraged to develop and elaborate from this starting point. Original artist identity, as a balance of similarity and difference, is a powerful and adaptable lens through which to anatomize song's gestalt of working parts. Brewer's later model of distinctiveness as structured across three social levels provides an elegant model for the understanding of an artist's song materials in interaction with vital socio-economic contexts. Student artists and songwriters might benefit from discourse that considered these three domains of self-representation existing in symbiosis within the song production system.

### **9.8 Areas for further investigation**

Themes emerging from this thesis warrant further enquiry and focus. It may be instructive to document taxonomies of popular vocal characteristics, as vocal tone sits so squarely at the centre of an artist's identity. The concept of vocal costuming is useful for this thesis's purposes, yet the range of vocal characteristics in popular music is vast. Vocal tones create powerful meaning and identity, and the vocal production techniques that produce them are worthy of further investigation.

The concept of songfulness is also a valuable one, whilst itself a subjective portmanteau term encompassing prosody, vocal tone, empathetic expression, interpretation and character amongst others. If songfulness is not present in every moment in a vocal performance, then we must also be able to define its absence. Perhaps songfulness is an

intensity that is cyclical or tidal within a song: its push and pull might afford its own contrasting dynamic in performance. The subjectivity of this idea is problematic: perhaps songfulness can only ever be considered a phenomenological impression known through hermeneutic means. Nevertheless, the concept expresses my intuitive sense of what my songwriting intuition aims to serve.

The role of video in all its evolving forms (such as vines, memes and internet messaging) will likely influence public impressions of song and artist identity to an even greater degree in the upcoming decades. Contemporary critics view the relationship between video and original song inverting to the point where YouTube videos are the primary vehicles of artist identity and mastered songs perform a soundtrack function. ODT applied to video culture may potentially model similarity and difference in a visual sense, perhaps in conjunction with the songs that soundtrack them.

The single defining contribution of this thesis might be the way it frames original songs as amalgams of variables attempting to balance optimality. An original artist's public-facing impression will likely balance artistic flair with cultural reference and social context. In doing so, artist, media and marketplace interact to engage the productive cycle of optimality from which popular music stars emerge.

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## Links to portfolio songs:

[Carl Barat on Spotify](#)

[Carl Barât & the Jackals on Spotify](#)

[CousteauX on Spotify](#)

## Discography (portfolio)

- Barât, C. (2010) Shadows fall, *Carl Barât* [CD]. London: Arcady Records/PIAS
- Barât, C. (2010) Carve my name, *Carl Barât* [CD]. London: Arcady Records/PIAS
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- CousteauX (2017) Seasons of you, *CousteauX* [CD]. London: Silent X/Edel
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- CousteauX (2017) Maybe you, *CousteauX* [CD]. London: Silent X/Edel
- CousteauX (2017) Portobello serenade, *CousteauX* [CD]. London: Silent X/Edel
- CousteauX (2017) The innermost light, *CousteauX* [CD]. London: Silent X/Edel
- CousteauX (2017) Thin red lines, *CousteauX* [CD]. London: Silent X/Edel
- CousteauX (2017) Memory is a weapon, *CousteauX* [CD]. London: Silent X/Edel
- CousteauX (2017) Shelter, *CousteauX* [CD]. London: Silent X/Edel
- CousteauX (2017) F\*\*king in joy and sorrow, *CousteauX* [CD]. London: Silent X/Edel

## Discography (general)

### Chapter Five

- The Libertines (2002) Time for heroes, *Up The Bracket* [CD] London: Rough Trade
- The Libertines (2002) Horror show, *Up The Bracket* [CD] London: Rough Trade
- The Libertines (2004) Can't stand me now, *The Libertines* [CD] London: Rough Trade
- The Libertines (2004) What became of the likely lads? *The Libertines* [CD] London: Rough Trade
- The Libertines (2004) The Ha Ha Wall, *The Libertines* [CD] London: Rough Trade
- The Libertines (2007) The Delaney, *The Best of The Libertines* [CD] London: Rough Trade



Cousteau (2000) The last good day of the year, *Cousteau* [CD] London: Palm Pictures,

## Chapter Six

The Beatles (1968) Blackbird, *The Beatles* [vinyl] EMI/Parlaphone

The Beatles (1968) Helter skelter, *The Beatles* [vinyl] EMI/Parlaphone

Nirvana (1991) Smells like Teen Spirit, *Nevermind* [CD]. Seattle: Sub Pop

Jessie J (2011) *Price Tag* [CD] London: Lava/Island Records

Dylan, B. (1968) All along The Watchtower, *John Wesley Hardy*, Los Angeles: Columbia Records

The Beatles (1965) Yesterday, *Help!* [vinyl] London: EMI/Parlaphone

Cohen, L. (1984) Hallelujah, *Various Positions* [CD] Los Angeles: Columbia Records (1984)

Campbell, G. (1968) Wichita lineman, *Wichita Lineman* [vinyl] Los Angeles: Capital Records

## Chapter Seven

Green Day (2004) Boulevard of broken dreams, *American Idiot* [CD] Los Angeles: Reprise

Drake, N. (1971) Northern sky, *Bryter Layter* [vinyl] London: Island Records (1971)

The Righteous Brothers (1964) You've lost that loving feeling, *You've Lost That Loving Feeling* [vinyl] Los Angeles: Moonglow Records

Lavato, D. (2016) Stone cold, *Confident* [CD] Los Angeles: Hollywood Records

Brown eyed girl – (Van Morrison), performed by Van Morrison, Bang Records (1967)

Plain White Tees (2006) Hey there Delilah, *All That We Needed* [CD] Los Angeles: Hollywood Records

Lightfoot, G. (1976) The wreck of The Edmond Fitzgerald, *Summertime Dream* [vinyl] Los Angeles: Reprise

Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds (1994) Red right hand, *Let Love In* [CD] London: Mute Records

Plastic Ono Band (1969) Give peace a chance, [vinyl] London: Apple Records

Public Enemy (1989) Fight the power, *Do The Right Thing Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* [CD] Los Angeles: Motown

Queen (1977) We are the champions, *News of The World* [vinyl] EMI/Electra

The Beatles (1967) She's leaving home, *Sargeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* [vinyl] London: EMI/Parlaphone

The Kinks (1967) Waterloo sunset, *Something Else By The Kinks* London: Pye/Reprise

Joel, B. (1977) She's always a woman, *The Stranger* (Billy Joel) Los Angeles: CBS Records

Drake, N. (1969) The thoughts of Mary Jane, *Five Leaves Left* [vinyl] London: Island Records

Lennon, J. (1971) Imagine, *Imagine* [vinyl] London: Apple Records

Taylor S. (2014) Shake it off, *1989* [CD], Los Angeles: Machine Records (2014)

The Band (1969) The night they drove Old Dixie down, *The Band* [vinyl] Los Angeles, Capitol Records

Holliday, B. (1939) *Strange Fruit*, New York: Commodore Records

Mitchell, J. (1974) Amelia, *Hejira* [vinyl] Los Angeles: Asylum Records

The Smiths (1983) *This charming man* [vinyl] London: Rough Trade

Wham! Careless whisper, *Make It Big*, [vinyl] London: Epic/Sony (1984)

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