



Brown, A.R. (2007) "'Everything louder than everything else": the contemporary metal music magazine and its cultural appeal', *Journalism Studies*, 8 (4), pp. 642-655.

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in *Journalism Studies* on 2/7/07 available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700701412209>

ResearchSPAce

<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/>

This pre-published version is made available in accordance with publisher policies.

Please cite only the published version using the reference above.

Your access and use of this document is based on your acceptance of the ResearchSPAce Metadata and Data Policies, as well as applicable law:-

<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/policies.html>

Unless you accept the terms of these Policies in full, you do not have permission to download this document.

This cover sheet may not be removed from the document.

Please scroll down to view the document.

‘EVERYTHING LOUDER THAN EVERYTHING ELSE’

The Contemporary Metal Music Magazine and its Cultural Appeal

Andy R Brown

Abstract

Within contemporary metal culture the apparently ludicrous request ‘can we have everything louder than everything else?’ has come to acquire something of touchstone status, in epitomising the desire to find a way of increasing the volume of individual elements within the limitations of overall volume excess. Metal music culture, both in the past and in its current variants, has always prided itself on being the loudest and most intense-sounding of all genres.

What this paper seeks to do is map contemporary metal magazine culture in the UK. It does so against current contradictory critical and academic debates about music culture and magazine culture, involving the apparent decline of ‘critical rock journalism’ and the rise of consumer-oriented lifestyle magazines. Drawing on recent debates about the ‘circuit of magazine culture’ (Jackson et al 2001: 19) and a return to a closer examination of the content and features of the ‘magazine’ itself (as well as the ‘interpretative repertoires’ of readers) I report on my current research into this neglected area of current youth consumption.

Introduction

This paper draws on current research into the role of the UK based metal magazines – *Kerrang!*, *Metal Hammer* and *Terrorizer* – in sustaining metal youth culture(s) in an increasingly niche oriented music market. Unlike previous accounts of heavy metal culture, which argue that magazines and media are secondary and confirmatory sources of information and communication (Weinstein 2000: 193-7), I argue that such media are central in constituting a sense of what it is to be a global member of metal-oriented youth culture as well as providing a means of public confirmation of various kinds of youth identities as actual and would be participants in music scenes and as conduits for the markets and commerce that sustain the niche categories around which

contemporary metal music is packaged as a *commodified* experience (Brown forthcoming).

Although the economics of metal magazine production and consumption is considered later, the main focus of this paper will be on trying to comprehend the content of the respective magazines in terms of their relationship to their audience and the wider metal-oriented youth culture they help to reproduce. It was my hunch at the outset of the research that the three titles would exhibit features of a form of 'critical rock journalism' (despite its widely reported demise) but also that they would announce themselves, in their textual organisation and editorial strategies, as lifestyle magazines, rather than old-style music papers. But I also anticipated that they would exhibit a greater or lesser amount of these qualities depending upon their market share and position relative to the mainstream of metal youth consumption. Thus, a magazine like *Terrorizer*, which offers a much narrower and more specific focus on particular sub-genres within metal music culture, is less obviously a 'lifestyle magazine' in its textual organisation and editorialising than *Metal Hammer* or *Kerrang!*, which have a much broader but less specific focus.

However, it is important to emphasise that the model of a lifestyle magazine is one measured against those examples to be found in research into contemporary women's magazines (Hermes 1995; Gough-Yates 2003) and, more recently, men's magazines (Jackson et al 2001). Clearly these sorts of fashion and lifestyle magazines are aimed at maximum market share of the available audience and therefore offer a bright and busy package of 'little bits' of information, advice and insight which allow a variety of consumer identifications, across a range of products, services and choices, whereas a magazine dedicated to a particular activity, such as extreme sport or dirt biking, is clearly aimed at supporting a particular choice of leisure pursuit. While this distinction is therefore extremely useful as an analytic framework it was also clear to me that metal youth magazines would not simply map across this distinction. This is because notions of youth lifestyles and musical consumption must also be considered in relation to debates about youth subcultures and fandom.

While contemporary debates about post-subculture (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003; Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004) doubt the existence of the coherent, bounded, hegemonically resistant groups imagined by the classic CCCS accounts, clearly youth music magazines and their readers share or inhabit a set of discourses in which such value distinctions do circulate (involving ideas about undergrounds, authenticity, mainstreams, radical, conformist, etc). This has led some theorists (Thornton 1995)

to speak of 'youth ideologies' and others, to advocate the recognition and study of 'bottom-up' accounts of subculture, as they exist in youth discourses themselves (Bennett 2003: 171-2). The implications of this for understanding how youth markets are shaped and negotiated within the circuit of metal magazine culture means that such a market segment will not aspire to mainstream share but also that the definition of mainstream will be subject to a considerable amount of discursive expansion or contraction depending upon the magazine and its particular editorial strategy.

One of the ironies of 'critical rock journalism' (see Frith 1981), which I explore below, is that it operated in a hegemonic fashion across the popular music market in the period of its pomp, wilfully obscuring its actual commercial dynamics and its cultural and institutional role in shaping the rock canon and the rock audience (Hesmondhalgh 1996: 195-6; McLeod 2001). The irony of this is that such journalism consistently characterised heavy metal music and youth culture as wholly commodified, politically reactionary and socially inauthentic: it was the unthinking other against which *Rolling Stone* defined its values, post 1970. The decline of the 'rock formation' in the wake of punk and the end of the industry long boom inevitably revealed the conjunctural dynamics that had actually underpinned the relationship of rock and the youthful aspirations of the counter culture. Despite the return of rock more recently, such trends pastiche a myth of the past which coheres only one of a number of market logics, scenes and styles which circulate in a global market with no culturally dominant centre (Straw 1991; Grossberg 1994; Laing 1997).

The value of the sparse work done on contemporary rock journalism (Thornton 1990; Toynbee 1993; Atton 2001; McLeod 2001) is how it has sought to extend Hirsch's (1990) notion of the music press as an institutional regulator by arguing that, in the face of a fluctuating relationship between markets and consumer tastes, itself a cause and consequence of the decline of the cultural hegemony of rock, the music press has become 'sponsors or initiators' of musical trends and styles rather than simply acting as filters for them. This is because in a post-rock market environment, characterised by a patchwork of youth musical styles the role of 'the rock press in both guiding and excluding communities of taste' has become a survival strategy (Toynbee 1993: 282). It is Toynbee's argument that the impact of punk was to 'collapse' musical taste into subculture and thereby fuse fandom with lifestyle (1993: 291). One of the things we clearly see, post-punk, is the rise of the style bibles, such as *Face* and *ID*, whose strategy is to blend a style of rock journalism with a fashion magazine format. But it is doubtful if such style magazines achieved the increasing

cooptation of subcultural 'street style' by instantly mediating it, as some postmodernist arguments would have it (McRobbie 1993). Rather, what we have seen is an accelerating tendency within media culture industries, particularly the youth music press, to incite or predict youth (music) cultures – much of it unsuccessful.

Thornton (1995) has offered useful insights into how the music and style press 'discover' new movements in popular taste, shaping them through description and categorisation, marking their 'core' and 'reify[ing] their borders' (1995: 160). But Thornton doesn't actually identify the editorial strategies and textual processes that achieve this. Toynebee, also drawing on Bourdieu's arguments about classification and distinction, describes how journalistic strategies bring 'discursive productivity' to the recognition of new music styles:

First generic order is established, particular artists are set up as *exempla*, and aesthetic and axiological criteria are defined. The period (scene) receives a name. Then, at a point which often depends on imperatives appearing elsewhere in the industry-audience circuit, the order is perceived as unstable. Now journalists move quickly to initiate collapse, by roundly condemning previously paradigmatic artists/texts, and at the same time disciplining recalcitrant readers who cleave to the old order (2001: 297).

If this description seems particularly apt in describing the series of volte face attempted by the NME in recent years, it tends to over emphasise the radical effectivity of music journalism (over its readers) at the expense of a more mundane strategy, characteristic of the magazine format, to balance content and build alliances between trends and antecedents. The difficulty of sustainability for a music magazine in difficult times is to retain readership that was recruited during periods of apparently dramatic change.

Come on feel the noise? From sonic vocabulary to textual strategy

The idea of 'everything louder than everything else' offers, I would argue, a trope that can take us from the sonic vocabulary of metal music culture to metal print culture, as, for example, it has been modelled in the career of Kerrang!, from headbanger's bible launched in the 1980s from the failing, formerly 'progressive' weekly Sounds to the Emap financed, magazine style, market leader and champion of Nu-metal, Emo

and Gothic-pop crossover styles, such as Slipknot, Linkin Park, Limp Bizkit, and female-fronted, Evanescence and Lacuna Coil.

The oft-quoted phrase, now somewhat apocryphal, probably has its origins in between-song discussion captured on the classic Deep Purple live album, *Made in Japan*. But it is also the title of a recently released live album from Motorhead. What unites these instances is the search for ultimate musical loudness. It is a well-known story that Deep Purple became the officially loudest group on record when it was reported that three fans had been knocked unconscious by their sheer volume. Black Sabbath's 1970 US tour was touted by promoters as 'even louder than Led Zeppelin'. Not surprising then that the title chosen for the launch of the first UK heavy metal dedicated weekly was *Ker-rang!* – apparently the sound of a power chord being played at extreme volume. As musicologist, Robert Walser explains, the power chord is 'produced by playing the music interval of a perfect fourth or fifth on a heavily amplified and distorted electric guitar' (1993: 2). It is a surprisingly 'complex sound made up of resultant tones and overtones, constantly renewed and energised by feedback. It is at once the musical basis for heavy metal and an apt metaphor for it' (op cit). Extreme levels of feedback are achieved by overdriving amplification equipment beyond its capacity to reproduce sound cleanly. Electronically produced distortion, once considered an error of malfunctioning equipment becomes, by the end of the 1960s, the central component in an 'emergent musical discourse' that will soon come to divide critics and consumers. As maverick music critic, Lester Bangs argued in a 1974 *Rolling Stone* piece:

heavy metal rock music is nothing more than a bunch of noise; it is not music, it's distortion – and that is precisely why its adherents find it so appealing[...] its noise is created by electric guitars, filtered through an array of warping devices [...] cranked several decibels past the pain threshold, loud enough to rebound off the walls of the biggest arenas anywhere (Bangs 1974/1992: 302).

Yet, as Deena Weinstein argues, loudness in heavy metal

is meant to overwhelm, to sweep the listener into the sound, and then to lend the listener the sense of power that the sound provides [...] The kind of power that loudness gives is a shot of youthful vitality, a power to withstand

the onslaught of sound and to expand one's energy to respond to it with a physical and emotional thrust of one's own. Heavy metal's loudness is not deafening, irritating, or painful [...] but empowering (2000: 23).

Clearly then the style of the UK's metal magazines owes something to an attempt to translate the defining aesthetics of the genre into a sympathetic textual strategy. This obviously starts with the *Kerrang!* title and is continued with *Metal Hammer*, launched in 1986 and *Terrorizer*, in 1993. This sense of youthful energy, volume and pushing the sonic envelope is echoed in the textual dynamics of pictures of performing musicians and sweaty, ecstatic crowds; the prominence given to album and live reviews and to interviews of bands and artists that emphasise the detail and textures of life on the road, performing to expectant fans and above all, living the metal life style – to the limit.

Yet comprehending all of this leaves out of the picture elements that are highly significant in understanding the actual textual strategies of the contemporary metal magazine. The first is that *Kerrang!*, for example, despite being the oldest title, is not in any simple sense a contemporary translation of a sensibility that stretches back to a pristine heavy metal culture from which it derives. Indeed, in some senses, its relationship to that past is problematic and has been subject to a range of editorial re-positionings over the years. This is because *Kerrang!* covers a variety of popular music journalism whose *raison d'être* is to reflect and represent the latest and best of the 'happening' bands and to recruit and maintain an audience through a sense of being in touch with what is happening or is about to.

Although we will have cause to question this self-designation later it is useful at this point in underlining the sense in which the rise and fall of titles in the UK music paper/magazine market is closely tied to their perceived sense of connection to the life cycle of popular genre or sub-genre styles. No surprise then that *Kerrang!* was originally launched on the back of the popularity of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (1979-84; see Brown 2001; Macmillan 2001), a term which its parent paper (*Sounds*) had helped to coin; *Metal Hammer* on the widespread success of heavy metal in the 1980s and *Terrorizer*, on the niche success of death and black metal in the early 90s.

However, sustaining a title also depends upon building up a sizeable readership when the initial popularity of sub-genre style or set of bands identified with that moment begins to fade. Such a strategy requires broadening the coverage while trying

to retain the core readers. This editorial strategy can be clearly seen in Metal Hammer's editorial line:

Metal Hammer is Britain's only monthly music magazine which covers both traditional and nu-metal bands, punk, hardcore and gothic rock. Reporting on the burgeoning British scene as well as all the happening bands Stateside and around the world, *Metal Hammer's* aim is to satisfy fans of established, traditional metal bands as well as to break new bands, and to keep its readers informed of everything happening in the world of metal (Editorial statement 2002).

The second issue is that Britain's three metal titles are as much lifestyle magazines as they are music journalism; that is they are promoting a metal life style as part and parcel of the way that they address their readership and justify their coverage to corporate owners and advertising sponsors. Metal Hammer's readership profile data is instructive here. It believes its audience to be roughly two-thirds male (64%); approximately one third (36%) female, with an average age of 19 years, 3 months. Readers have been with the magazine for at least a year and a quarter and have an average household income of £22, 093 p.a. The readership report states:

Adverts in Metal Hammer are shown to be a significant influence on readers purchasing, with 59% having bought products and/or services advertised in Metal Hammer and 54% having discussed an article or feature with another person. 44% tune into Metal Hammer Riot for an average of 2 hours and 46 minutes a week. 46% play the guitar. The majority [...] play for pleasure at home (45%)

(www. Future Publishing/Metal Hammer/readersurvey 2002).

Understanding the changing relationship between music journalism, the music magazine format and youth lifestyle demographics and culture, as reflected here, is key to making sense of the success of the contemporary metal magazine.

Beyond the whiff of Spandex: the rise of Kerrang! and the K generation

Given my preceding remarks it is hugely ironic that it is has been the 'head banger's bible' Kerrang! that has successfully achieved the position of youth music magazine market leader through its championing of nu-metal in recent years, although it took a while for culture commentators to notice this. In September, 2000, Sam Taylor in a piece headlined 'Goodbye Oasis...', spoke of the rise to popularity of nu-metal as a 'watershed' moment. Referring to the previous weekends' Reading and Leeds festivals, headlined by Oasis, Stereophonics and Pulp, Taylor describes how 'hordes of kids in baggy shorts moshed to Slipknot and Limp Bizkit and booed every mention of Oasis's name. One merchandise salesman revealed that, on Monday in Leeds, he had sold 14 Oasis t-shirts and 2,500 Slipknot t-shirts' (Observer, Sept 2000). At the close of the piece, a hastily cobbled together style guide is offered to the reader. The fashion is thus said to be: 'multiple piercing, sometimes with chains. Tattoos and body paint. Baggy shorts. Trainers. No leather, Spandex or long hair' (op cit).

This was typical of the coverage in the quality press Sunday supplements and culture guides throughout 2000-2, culminating in John Harris's piece 'Now that's what we call muzik' claiming the full emergence of a new youth subculture (Independent, 11 December, 2001 p. 1).¹ However by February 2002 the leader writers had made the connection between nu-metal and the rising profile and sales of Kerrang! That month the magazine had recorded an 'unprecedented rise in circulation of 63.5 per cent, to 76,841 copies a week'. A rise apparently at the expense of former Brit pop and Madchester champion NME, which was down to 70, 465 copies (Plunkett, Independent, 2002: p.1).

Kerrang!'s 34-year-old editor, Paul Rees, was quoted as claiming that the 'rock and nu-metal magazine[...] has been driving this market for three or four years. We have been writing features about Marilyn Manson and Slipknot since long before anyone else. We put Linkin Park on the front cover last January, before they had sold any records anywhere' (Quoted in Plunkett 2002). Rees goes on to claim that the readers Kerrang! attracts are 'much more media-savvy these days'. As part of the successful Emap stable, the Kerrang! brand extends across a number of platforms, including a music channel (with a weekly reach of 1.9 million), club nights, a website and the Kerrang! awards ceremony (run on Channel 5) (see fig. 4).

The idea of the K generation as a new teen, media literate and potentially cynical and resistant audience, looking for something 'real' in a period dominated by the metaphor of the 'implosion of the social into the media' is a persuasive one for those

who argue that corporate media's ability to communicate something meaningful to youth audiences requires the cultural mediation of knowing cultural workers or 'cool hunters' able to anticipate emergent trends (Delaney 2005: 4-6; Osgerby 2004: 1-6). Recent debates taking place over the significance of cultural intermediaries (Negus 2002) are certainly relevant here, building as they do on the 'circuit of culture' models developed by Du Gay and others (1997). Gough-Yates (2003) has also attempted to apply these ideas specifically to the women's magazine industry, focusing in particular on marketing discourses about the relationship between magazines and reader's lifestyle. It seems an obvious step to argue, in the case of the music magazine in the UK context, that magazines themselves have increasingly played the role of such intermediaries in the post-punk market instability, developed editorial strategies and magazine formats that can anticipate and accommodate new demographics of audiences and 'lifestyles'.

If we examine the discourses surrounding the self-presentation of Kerrang! and its branding within the Emap Performance franchise, we can quite clearly see these kinds of arguments being made to potential advertisers and corporate sponsors. In 2001 Kerrang! undertook some 'brand essence' work with Sparkler (an agency known for its development work with Kiss, Tesco and Ikea) into the 'world of the teenage rebel':

Our research painted a clear picture of a world where it doesn't matter what colour you are, what your background is, what you wear, what your sexuality is. A world defined by its attitude to life. In Generation K!, credibility was found to be the key. Its value system was based around concepts of reality and authenticity and it rejected anything tainted by the whiff of hype. It wore its emotions on its sleeve, was quick to express deeply felt opinions, and both its music and style was intentionally loud and challenging. Most of this was about living an extreme lifestyle. For millions of kids [...] there was a basic need to go out and make an outspoken statement about what you want to be, not who everyone else wants you to be (Marketing Society Awards 2004; accessed 12.09.05).

http://www-marketing-society.org.uk/downloads/awards/Kerrang_Entry.pdf).

For Emap and Kerrang! it was clear that they needed to stop thinking in terms of a magazine and think instead of brand development. Agreeing on ‘Life is Loud’ as a brand mantra and ‘Music with Attitude’ as a way of leaving behind the ‘residual whiff of Spandex’, which had prevented the expansion of readership and market loyalty, prior to 1999.

In the early days Kerrang! as the only dedicated heavy metal magazine in the market, carved out a niche by appealing to and reinforcing an anti-fashion stance that ‘suited its readers perfectly’. But when the grunge-look became the height of fashion and appeared on the catwalks it was felt the magazine had to ‘change or die’. Yet Kerrang! argue that they had always believed there was ‘a huge untapped market for this type of music and lifestyle’ if only it could be accessed. This market is what the magazine franchise cannily terms the ‘alternative mainstream’. In typical cool hunter style rhetoric, Kerrang! claim that only they can ‘market to the unmarketable’ – that is attract ‘media savvy, marketing-averse but active consumers’ – is by extending out credible ‘positive, inclusive messages’. The way this has been done is by expanding across a number of platforms to which Emap’s group resources have enabled access.

2002-2003	
*Kerrang! magazine	70,361 (ABC)
*Kerrang TV	1.2m weekly reach (BARB)
Kerrang! Digital radio	864,000 (RAJAR)
Kerrang! 105.2 radio	across the W Midlands from 2004
Game On event	27,000 attendance
Kerrang! Weekenders	6,000 attendance
Kerrang! Club Tour	20,000 attendance
*Kerrang! Awards	243,500 average reach/show (2 repeats)
Kerrang Legends	25,000 average circulation
Kerrang! Posterbook	25,000 average circulation
Kerrang! Ticket Shop	100,000 tickets sold

Fig. 1. Kerrang! brand extension into new markets (Source: Marketing Society Awards 2004).

Kerrang! digital TV is clearly a significant access for youth music consumers and this TV profile was extended by moving the Kerrang! awards show to Channel 4 (as part of T4 youth coverage). Also significant is the merging of extreme sports events, such as Snickers’ Game On (launched June 2003) with live bands. This has allowed Kerrang! to claim that it is a market leader in embracing skate culture as part of an alternative lifestyle brand. Clearly the expansion into radio is likely to grow as Emap

attempts to move into more of these markets (Martinson 2005: 23). But it is also important to note that the Kerrang! Legends and Kerrang! Poster book point to attempts to recruit and retain specifically targeted age entry and exit consumers. The Poster book (launched January 2002) is aimed at the younger reader more familiar with the TV channel and 'more interested in how a band looks'. The poster book allows these consumers access on a 'perfectly acceptable superficial level'. By contrast, the 'one shot' Kerrang! Legends issues, covering bands like Iron Maiden and Red Hot Chilli Peppers, are aimed at retaining the older fan within the Kerrang! franchise.

These latter initiatives are intended to improve market stabilisation and readership retention and arise out of a concern about what is delightfully described as market 'churn' as the magazine shifted to a younger readership. This suggests that extending onto different media platforms is an attempt to broaden and deepen youth markets rather than champion a new cohort at the expense of the older ones. The trick is to retain at each end of the age range. The problem Kerrang!'s rival, NME, has is that their median age range (27 years) is rising, whereas Kerrang!, with a media age range of 20 has new recruits into it of 12 years or younger!² But also market leaders of new trends, such as Kerrang! and the NME, have as many misses as hits and the circuit of magazine culture, as the 'soft meshing' by which the regimes of production meet those of changing consumption patterns, is still a massively leaky system.

It is my contention that despite the rhetoric and the platform expansion strategies pursued by Kerrang! and its market rival Metal Hammer, the actual lifestyle content of the magazines is an 'add-on' element, particularly in terms of merchandising or as support for the youth leisure culture to which the magazine content refers, as the most likely context in which to play the 'life is loud' soundtrack.

It is my argument that the UK's three metal magazine titles can most productively be explored through understanding how they combine a youth-oriented, lifestyle journalism with that of varieties of music journalism – from mainstream to niche. What I wanted to do in my analysis of the twelve-month, continuous sample I had collected was to identify how this editorial and style combination was achieved and what the tensions and contradictions involved in such a strategy were.

In order to do this I need to usefully establish how each of these types of journalism have been defined and in what ways they have been seen to combine. From this analysis it will be possible to derive a framework that is able to highlight features occurring in the typical organisation of the magazines that illustrate their

strategic values and logic. One of the things that I am going to argue is that contemporary metal magazine culture is a genre that both defines itself in terms of its relationship to a broadly 'received' heavy metal music culture but constructs particular editorial and consumer strategies in how it mediates and reconfigures that culture for its perceived audience demographic.

Exploring the metal magazine format: youth demographics, consumption and rock journalism

Current data clearly demonstrates that Kerrang! is far and away the market leader in the metal magazine niche market. This is even more remarkable given that the magazine is produced weekly. Kerrang! claim that their 'solus' readership is 71% (which even compares favourably with NME, estimated to be 55% (Emap advertising 2005)). However, the data comparisons with Metal Hammer suggest that there is a great deal of overlap of reader demographics in terms of age, gender and ABC market share. Terrorizer, an independent with no ties to any corporate media has recently increased its frequency from 10 to 13 issues. Terrorizer's further expansion problems clearly lie in its unfavourable gender ratio compared to the other titles. Having said this, NME has a gender ratio of 74: 26% (of which the median age is 27 years). This is comparable to other male-readership titles, such as Mojo, Mixmag and Q.³ This suggests that it is the more specific focus on particular sub-genre styles that is the key to the dedicated readership of the title but also its inability to expand.⁴

	<u>Kerrang!</u>	<u>Metal Hammer</u>	<u>Terrorizer</u>
<i>Launched</i>	1981	1986	1993
<i>Circulation</i>	64, 554	40, 236	15, 000 ⁵
<i>Readership</i>	404, 000	101, 361	45, 000
<i>Frequency:</i>	weekly	13 issues	13 issues
<i>Cover</i>	£1.99	£3.75	£3.20
<u><i>Readership Profile</i></u>			
<i>AB Profile</i>	24%	No data ⁶	No data ⁷
<i>ABC1</i>	59%	No data	No data
<i>Male</i>	64%	64%	85%
<i>Female</i>	36%	36%	15%
<i>Average Age</i>	19 years	22 yrs 3 m	No data
<i>Household income</i>	19, 000	27, 778 pa	No data
<i>Ownership</i>	Emap	Future Pub.	P. Yardley

Fig. 2: A demographic and market comparison of the three titles.

Turning to a systematic comparison of the content and layout of the magazines (fig. 3) it is clear that all three titles conform to a ‘traditional’ music paper format, emphasising news, album and live reviews, band features and studio reports as the core of the magazine coverage. All the titles exhibited this format, differing only in the relative amount of column space and pages they gave to each section and the graphic and titles used to indicate them. However, within this core it was clear that each magazine also extended the reviews section to take in other media forms, such as DVD releases, horror film coverage and internet sites. These elements could be seen to point to a wider sense of consumer lifestyles beyond metal music consumption but connected to it (significantly it was horror culture that got coverage). In fact, out of all the titles surveyed, the only specific lifestyle feature I could find was Metal Hammer’s regular coverage of body modification (Tatts Life). This suggests that if there is a consumer lifestyle being carried in the magazines it is one concerned with informing and supporting readers in their active pursuit of music consumption through buying albums, attending concerts and contributions to the letters page.

Significant here was the editorial prominence given to reader's opinions and to captioned shots of fans attending gigs or posing for photos with bands.

	<u>Kerrang!</u>	<u>Metal Hammer</u>	<u>Terrorizer</u>
<u>Sections</u>	<u>This Week</u>	<u>Every Month</u>	<u>Regulars</u>
<i>News</i>	Scanner	The Pit	News
<i>Reviews</i>	<i>Albums</i> Rated: Albums	Reviews	Selected & Dissected
	<i>Live</i> Rated: Live	Lives	Stagefright
	<i>Films</i> Rated: Culture	Slasherama/DVDs	Neuro-vision
	<i>DVDs, etc.</i>	Art of Darkness...	Neuro-vision Extra
<i>Gig Guide</i>	Volume		Be there or fuck off
		The Story	
<i>Classic Albums</i>		Behind...	Special feature
	Where to start		
<i>Classic Bands</i>	with..	Metal Detector	History of...
<i>Artist/Genre</i>	Morat Meets...	My Life Story	Power Metal, etc.
<i>Letters</i>	Feedback	Shut it	Letters
<i>Competitions</i>	Hot Stuff	Blag It	Win...'
<i>Classifieds</i>	Classifieds	Classifieds	Classifieds
<i>Poster(s)</i>	K! Icons		Poster
<i>Lifestyle</i>		Tatts Life	
	<u>Features</u>	<u>This Month</u>	<u>Features</u>
<i>Band Reports</i>	Breakers	Upcoming	Breaking Faces
	Studio Report!	Subterranea	Studio Reports
		Hardware	
<i>Band features</i>	Band features	Band features	Band features
<i>Special feature</i>	Kerrang Awards	Golden Gods	Terrorizer Poll
	World According		
<i>Novelty</i>	to..	Spanish Inquisition	Hard of Hearing
	Breaker	13 Questions	Bar-barian Wrath
	100 Greatest....	Top Ten	
	Anthems		
	Songs that.....		

Before they were..

Parting Shot

Fig. 3: A comparison of the layout and content of the magazines

Where the titles differed was over the type of visual coverage they gave to performers and how this was presented and captioned. Although both Terrorizer and Kerrang! gave away 'free' posters, the former were clearly in the style of homage to classic bands and line-ups, whereas Kerrang! concentrated on those artists that were seen to be 'desirable' in some way as pin-ups (this was consistent with their stance towards younger readers who are more attracted to 'image').⁸ If there was a feature that indicated a greater concession to magazine formatting it was what I have termed 'novelty' or 'fun' features. Here the comparison showed that while all the titles tried to run regular 'novelty' features, Kerrang! had by far the most of these. Given its overall size this is significant. Here it was possible to see magazine formats, such as list features, captioned photo exposes and lifestyle questionnaires given to particular performers as clear magazine imports. This is not to say that the other titles didn't also have these types of features (lists and lifestyle vignettes) but Kerrang! had far more of them.

Having noted this clear difference it was evident from the content of the comparison that the 'lifestyle' conceived was one that took place very much around the music, rather than across a range of leisure sites. The one area where this sense of support for an active music consuming lifestyle was featured was as commercial add-ons (fig. 4). Thus a clear part of the package that was offered to readers were the 'sampler' cover mounts and multi-media DVD formats (these were usually sponsored or a spin-off from another platform, such as Kerrang! TV, Kerrang! Awards or Metal Hammer's XFM/Riot and Golden Gods awards). The growing media visibility of the Kerrang! awards and the comparable presentation formats adopted by Metal Hammer, further suggest celebrity style coverage – a clear borrow from the current magazine culture. Here performers were presented as new or old 'icons' rather than 'bands'. There is also a clear focus on particular members of bands. The other sorts of add-ons carried with the titles were deals with particular chain stores and niche clothing companies.

<i>Product 'add-ons'</i>	<u>Kerrang!</u>	<u>Metal Hammer</u>	<u>Terrorizer</u>
<i>Samplers</i>	Quarterly CD+DVD	Monthly CD+DVD	Monthly CD
<i>Multi-media</i>	Kerrang! TV	XFM/Riot	Fear Candy TV
	Ring tones		
	K! Awards	Golden Gods	Readers Poll
	Website	Website	Website
<u>Merchandise:</u>			
<i>Chain store tie-in:</i>	Virgin	HMV	MVC
<i>Clothes catalogue:</i>	Joe Brown	Attitude Clothing Co.	Grindstore Com.
		Attitude Clothing Co.	Grindstore Com. Plastic Head Com
<i>Mobile phones:</i>	Orange	Orange	Orange
	Vodafone	Vodafone	

Fig. 4. A comparison of merchandising and multi-media add-ons.

In terms of my explicit analytical framework of whether the contemporary UK metal titles conform to a magazine or music paper format, the remaining novelty features are ones that employ novelty to support a more traditional ‘pedagogic’ readership strategy (Toynbee 1993: 297). A particular favourite of mine is Terrorizer’s ‘Hard of hearing’ feature, which each week sets up hapless victims by inviting them in to listen to and identify blind selected tracks that are revealed to the reader as classic or relevant influences in the metal canon and therefore should be known by that week's invited guests. This is clearly a credibility quiz that can make or break a musician's reputation. The respondents’ scores are totalled at the end of the feature and comments amended as to the validity and accuracy of their ‘knowledge’.⁹

In attempting to pull together this comparative survey it is important to mention that a significant feature of all the titles was a particular editorial strategy that emphasised the connection of contemporary metal music making and bands to a revered tradition of metal history. This ‘pedagogic’ strategy was evident in a number of features of the magazines. For example, all the magazines ran features on classic albums or guides to classic bands, detailing particular albums as landmark contributions to the metal genre or a sub-field (Kerrang!’s ‘Where to start with...’; Metal Hammer's ‘The story behind..’ or ‘Metal Detector’). Terrorizer was the most explicit in this respect in running special

features detailing the history of a particular genre or sub-genre, such as Black Metal (February 2005) and Power Metal (September 2005) – both running over two issues. Another notable example of this guiding and orienting of the metal music fan was how reviews would attempt to place a particular band or album within a genre or sub-genre field by appending notable influences (recommending titles) or similar sounding bands that preceded the one under review.

Conclusions

While there is clearly a great deal more to say about the comparison of the content and textual organisation of the three titles that constitute the UK metal music magazine sector, a number of generalisations can be derived from the analysis I have conducted in this preliminary survey. Firstly, the market leadership of Kerrang! is clearly due to a number of interrelated factors, not least of which is the expansion of the magazine across a number of media platforms which is, in part, due to an editorial strategy developed through the capital and resources of Emap Performance. Without the resources and access to sectors of media, such as digital television and radio offered by this media player, it is doubtful that Kerrang! could have transformed itself into the multi-media brand it has become. Having said this it is also clear that without the emergence and championing of the nu-metal demographic, Kerrang! would not have been able to work with a considerable new share of the music consumption market, displacing the NME title in the process.

Having said this, my analysis of the content and organisation of the three titles suggests that there is still a considerable role for traditional music journalism values in the way that metal culture and music is mediated to readers, even though the way that this is done is often in a covert or novel way. This strategy of wider inclusivity, whereby respective titles feature new bands and attitudes but also older and more established ones, is a common strategy of attempting to maintain a wider readership demographic as possible in the pursuit of a commercial strategy that can gain sponsorship while retaining youth credibility. What is most astounding, and probably galling to titles like NME, is that the metal magazine is currently at the forefront of youth cultural politics and lifestyle choices in a way that it was never considered to be in the past.

Bibliography

- Atton, Chris (2001) "Living in the Past?": value discourses in progressive rock fanzines' *Popular Music* 20(1): 29-46.
- Bangs, Lester (1992/1974) 'Heavy Metal' in A. De Curtis, J. Henke and H. George-Warren (eds.) *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* London: Plexus, pp. 459-64 .
- Bennett, Andy (1999) 'Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship Between Youth, Style and Musical Taste' *Sociology* 33(3): 599-617.
- Bennett, Andy and Kahn-Harris, Keith (eds.) *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bennett, Andy (2005) 'Virtual Subculture? Youth, Identity and the Internet' in A. Bennett and K. Kahn-Harris (eds.) *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 162-172.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Brown, Andy R. (2001) 'Punk and Metal: Antithesis, Synthesis or Prosthetic?' *No Future? Punk 2001* University of Wolverhampton and Lighthouse, September 21-23rd, 2001.
- Brown, Andy R. (2003) 'Heavy Metal and Subcultural Theory: A paradigmatic case of neglect', in D. Muggleton and R. Weinzierl (eds) *The Post-Subcultures Reader* Oxford and New York: Berg, pp. 305-26.
- Brown, Andy R. (in press) 'Rethinking the subcultural commodity: exploring heavy metal t-shirt culture(s)' in Hodkinson, P. and Deicke, W. (eds.) *Youth Culture: Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes* London: Routledge.
- Delaney, Sam (2005) 'Making a fortune from the future: Cool-hunters predict what's next in entertainment' *The Guardian Guide*, Saturday September 3rd, pp. 4-6.
- Du Gay, Paul (1997) (ed.) *Culture of Production/Production of Culture* Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Frith, Simon (1983) *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* London: Constable.
- Grossberg, Lawrence (1994) 'Is anybody listening? Does anybody care? On talking about "the state of rock"' in A. Ross and T. Rose (eds.) *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 41-58.

- Gough-Yates, Anna (2003) *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readerships* Routledge: London and New York.
- Harris, John (2001) 'Now that's what we call muzik' *The Independent*, Tuesday 11th September, pp. 1 and 7.
- Harris, Keith (2000) "Roots'?: The Relationship Between the Global and the Local Within the Global Extreme Metal Scene' *Popular Music* 19(1): 13-30.
- Hermes, Joke (1995) *Reading Women's Magazines* Cambridge: Polity.
- Hesmondhalgh, David (1996) 'Rethinking Popular Music after Rock and Soul' in J. Curran, D. Morley and V. Walkerdine (eds.) *Cultural Studies and Communications* London: Arnold, pp. 195-212.
- Hirsch, Paul (1990/1972) 'Processing fad and fashions: an organisational-set analysis of cultural industry systems' in S. Frith and A. Goodwin (eds.) *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 127-39.
- Jackson, Peter, Stevenson, Nick and Brooks, Kate (2001) *Making Sense of Men's Magazines* Cambridge: Polity.
- Laing, Dave (1997) 'Rock anxieties and new music networks' in A. McRobbie (ed.) *Back to Reality: Social Experience and Cultural Studies* London: Routledge, pp. 116-132.
- Macmillan, Malc (2001) *The New Wave of British Heavy Metal Encyclopedia* IP Verlag: Germany.
- Martinson, Jane (2005) 'Emap's £375m bid for Scottish Radio rejected' *Guardian* June 2nd, p. 23.
- McLeod, Kembrow (2001) "'*1/2': a critique of rock criticism in North America' *Popular Music* 20(1): 47-60.
- McRobbie, Angela (1994), *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Muggleton, David and Weinzierl, Rupert (eds) *The Post-Subcultures Reader* Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Negus, Kieth (2002) 'The work of cultural intermediaries and the enduring distance between production and consumption' *Cultural Studies* 16(4): 501-15.
- Nixon, Sean (1997) 'Circulating Culture' in P. Du Gay (ed.) *Production of Culture/ Cultures of Production* London: Sage, pp. 177-220.
- Osgerby, Bill (2004) *Youth Media* Routledge: London and New York.
- Plunkett, John (2002) 'It's music to their ears..' *The Independent*, 19th February.
- Straw, Will (1991) 'Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music' *Cultural Studies* 5 (3): 368-388.

- Taylor, Sam (2000) 'Goodbye Oasis...' *Observer*, Sunday, September 3rd.
- Thornton, Sarah (1990) 'Strategies for reconstructing the popular past' *Popular Music* 9(1): 87-95.
- Thornton, Sarah (1995), *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Toynbee, Jason (1993) 'Policing Bohemia, pinning up grunge: the music press and generic change in British pop and rock' *Popular Music* 12(3): 289-300.
- Walser, Robert (1993) *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.
- Weinstein, Deena (1991/2000), *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, Chicago, IL: De Capo Press.

Notes

¹ This piece also carried an equally ludicrous 'Older person's guide to the mosher subculture', claiming that Kurt Cobain was the mosher's John Lennon and that black hoodies gave moshers a 'grim reaper-like appearance'.

² Kerrang!'s web page request to register personal details, has a entry age click for those that are '12 or under' (www.Kerrang).

³ Classic Rock, a popular Future Publishing title, has an even more extreme gender bias to males of 88% (with a median age of 37 years six months).

⁴ During my interview with Terrorizer boss, Pete Yardley, he accused rivals Metal Hammer of trying to attract a larger female audience with coverage of poster friendly artists like HIM front man, Ville Valo (see for example, October 2005 issue). But at one point in the interview he asked me if I had any ideas of how they could increase their female readership without losing their core male 'regulars'!

⁵ This is Pete Yardley's (owner of Terrorizer magazine) estimate of readership. Readership figures 'readers per copy' are calculated by comparing circulation data with data derived from readership in certain targeted areas by independent survey organisations. See also note 3.

⁶ Metal Hammer does not subscribe to market research in this area but, like Terrorizer, run their own readership survey. However, their data does not easily lend itself to the AB ABC1 (Interview with Denise Winter, Future Publishing, 13.09.05).

⁷ Although Terrorizer did not collect ABC data about its readership, owner Pete Yardley estimated, from current readership survey data (2004/5) that while 50% were 'unemployed' over 70% of readers were graduates or in higher education (personal interview 12.09.05).

⁸ Although Metal Hammer didn't run posters as a regular 'add on' it did recruit photogenic or image driven artists to write regular features or columns such as Dani Filth (Cradle of Filth) and the aforementioned Ville Valo (HIM).

⁹ A notable recent example featured Motley Crue who were unable to recognise their own support band on their recent UK tour!