

‘What Do I Do Now?’: Encountering ourselves in music memoir

Jon Stewart, Louise Wener and
Benjamin Halligan

Jon Stewart and Louise Wener founded what eventually became platinum-selling Britpop band Sleeper while at the University of Manchester. After graduating they moved to London and signed to Indolent Records, part of BMG/RCA, in 1993. Their ‘Delicious’ EP reached #1 on the UK indie singles chart in 1994. Sleeper’s 1995 breakthrough UK Top 20 hit single ‘Inbetweeners’ was followed by the gold-selling album *Smart* and the hit single ‘What Do I Do Now?’ (see Figure 16.1). 1996 saw platinum-selling album *The It Girl* and three additional hit singles: ‘Sale of the Century’, ‘Nice Guy Eddie’ and ‘Statuesque’. Sleeper’s version of Blondie’s ‘Atomic’ also appeared in Danny Boyle’s *Trainspotting* movie that year. 1997’s *Pleased to Meet You* entered the UK charts at #7, accompanied by two more UK Top 40 singles, although Sleeper broke up the following year. In 2002 Wener featured prominently in the feature documentary *Live Forever: The Rise and Fall of Britpop* (John Dower). She is also a published novelist, having authored *Goodnight Steve McQueen* (2002), *The Big Blind* (2003), *The Half Life of Stars* (2006) and *Worldwide Adventures in Love* (2008) for Hodder & Stoughton. She has also taught creative writing.

Wener’s memoir was published as *Different for Girls: My True-Life Adventures in Pop* in 2010, and *Just for One Day: Adventures in Britpop* in 2011, by Ebury/Random House. The book was one of the first insider accounts of Britpop and is still one the best-received works in this genre. The *New Statesman* described it as a ‘riveting memoir of that time’, about ‘a period full of promise which slowly expired’ and a ‘clear-eyed examination of the realities of fame’ (Rogers 2010). Stewart, as Sleeper’s co-founder and guitarist, is also one of the key figures in her story. Now widely published as an academic in his own right, Stewart interviewed Wener and discussed their shared experience of memoir



Figure 16.1 Sleeper receive British Phonographic Industry gold discs awards for certified sales of 100,000 copies of their debut album, *Smart* in 1995 (Jon Stewart far left, next to Louise Wener). Credit: Andy Willsher: <http://www.andywillsher.com/>.

and memory in January 2018 – shortly after Sleeper's twentieth anniversary sell-out reunion show at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire the previous month (see Figures 16.2 and 16.3). Halligan, who attended that concert, assembled a series of provocations in relation to the memoirs to structure the anticipated conversation, which now form parts of the commentary below.

Different for Girls, with its near-neon cover colours and celebrity endorsement, was presented as aimed at a young adult fiction or even 'chick lit' audience. The title referenced Joe Jackson's 1979 single 'It's Different for Girls'. On the back cover an image of a bespectacled twelve-year-old Wener ('I wasn't the coolest of 12 year olds. If I had been, I wouldn't have grown up to be a pop star' runs the blurb) is contrasted to an attitude-heavy image of Wener in the mid-1990s, as a Britpop 'ladette'. *Just for One Day*, with a black and white cover image of a half-loaded Sleeper tour van, signalled to a different constituency altogether. This audience would have been those whose youth had been coloured by Britpop, and with the book presented as providing an opportunity to revisit that period via the perspective of someone who was at its epicentre. That title recalls the lyrics of David Bowie's "Heroes" (1977), suggesting a nascent canonical impulse: the time for a reassessment of cultural artefacts, and critical acclaim.

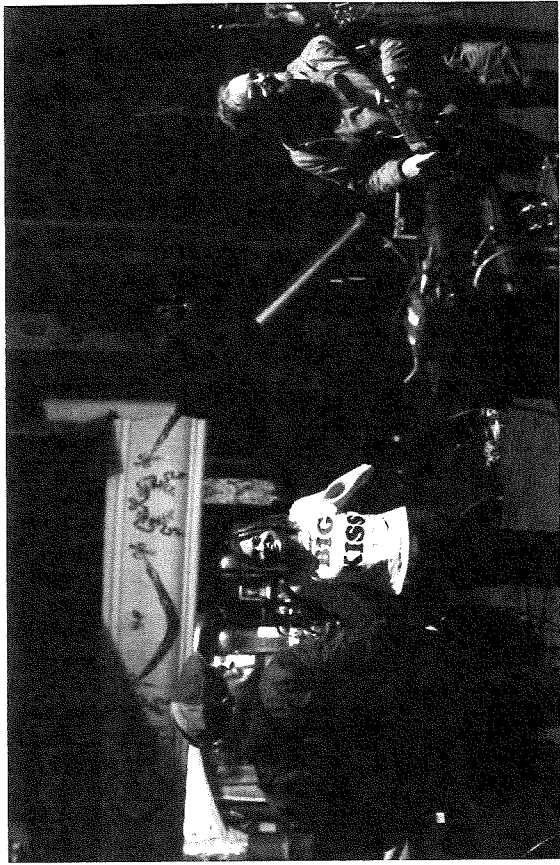


Figure 16.2 Louise Wener (centre) and Jon Stewart (right) on stage at the London Shepherd's Bush Empire sound check, 2 December 2017. Credit: Thomas Brooker: <http://www.tlbrooker.com>.

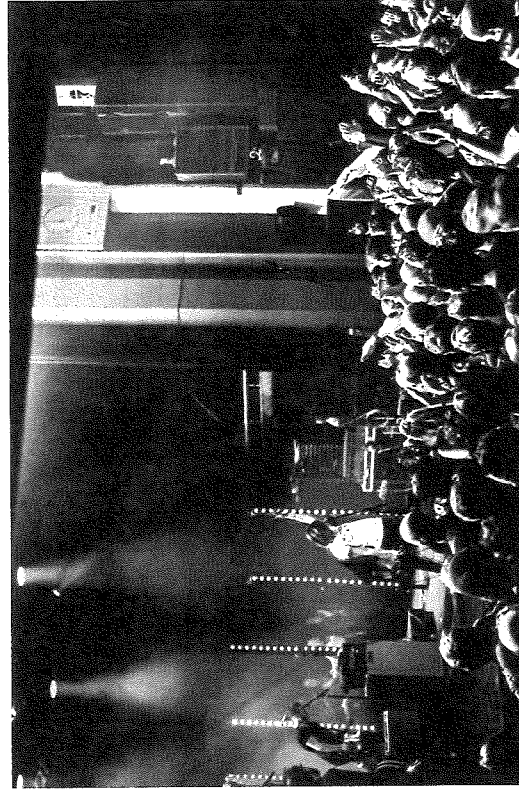


Figure 16.3 Sleeper reunion gig, London Shepherd's Bush Empire, 2 December 2017. Credit: Thomas Brooker: <http://www.tlbrooker.com>.

The book consists of short chapters. At times, like vignettes, these are structured around individual anecdotes or punchlines and elsewhere assembling a series of snapshots that could be read as indicative of Wener's journey. Part

One covers teenage life in a lower middle-class family in the Essex suburb of Gants Hill – the book opens on a ‘typical Sunday teatime in the spring of ’79’ (Wener 2010: 3). This is followed by an escape to Manchester University, and thereafter an increasingly dispiriting period in London in the early 1990s, with Wener and Stewart trying to gain traction with their band. Part Two begins with the early days of the steep ascent into pop stardom, and the recording of the first album, *Smart* (1995) – opening with ‘[i]t’s not time to move to Hawaii just yet ...’ (2010: 149). The picaresque ups and downs of Sleeper, professional and personal, follow – up to the dissolution of Britpop and, with it, the band itself, in 1997/8. A short epilogue returns the reader to the present, noting repaired relationships, and a phase of domesticity and parenthood – opening with ‘“Damn, the babysitter’s cancelled”’ (2010: 309) – and casting the moment of Britpop and Sleeper, and by extension the contents of the memoir, as a story that can now be told. And it is this perspective that then allows for a particular take on the subject matter. For the fame years, the rush and adventure and the sense of a long-held dream coming true is tempered by a consideration of the hubristic and cynical nature of the pop scene of the time with its associates and media hangers-on and the beginnings of damage inflicted on members of the band.

Wener’s experience of pop stardom was, in some ways, one of frustration, disappointment and displacement. Our narrator seems to fear that she has spawned an enhanced doppelgänger over which she has limited control and against which she feels herself judged and found wanting: ‘[t]he me in pictures is better looking’ (2010: 274). Across the years before this turn of events, a fondness for 1980s pop culture endures and a thankfulness for the presence of key pop icons in her young life, such as Bowie and Kate Bush, and the music associated with the New Romantic movement and after. But, at times, entwined emotions of sadness and anger surface. Perhaps the key passage of Part One, which seems momentarily to allow the fusing of a seventeen-year-old’s empathy for her sixth-form contemporaries with her future contempt for the machinations of the music and media industries, is one that anticipates a point of a departure from the ‘dull Essex suburb ... whose main attraction is its Wimpy Bar’ (2010: 5, 29), and describes a silent, condemnatory ‘farewell to all that’. This passage concludes a chapter that, with a title referencing Frankie Goes to Hollywood (‘Two Tribes’, 1984), charts the absolute division and then breaking points of inter-gang tensions and outbursts. But it is the cool kids (who dance at parties) who seem doomed to turn into their parents and remain in those suburbs. The

outsiders (who, isolated, draw up exam revision plans in their bedrooms) will break loose and find that aspirations are available and ambitions are achievable.

Someone puts on ‘Perfect Skin’ by Lloyd Cole and the Commotions [1984], and the perfect-skin girls, with cheekbones like geometry, get up to dance. But their sheen is fading too. When the summer’s over the Donnas and the Haileys are off to work behind the counter in Gants Hill supermarkets. Or local hairdressing salons. Or forget to take the pill and get pregnant. There are four of us going to university from this sixth form. Despite spending half my time drafting and redrafting revision timetables with a multitude of pens and coloured pencils, my results will all come good. And I’ll be one of them. (2010: 104–5)

In this respect, the autobiography also hints at what could have been had it not been different for this girl or no Britpop adventure ensued: another suburban life and pinched or diminished expectations within the orbit of Gants Hill and the Essex/London hinterlands. But at the same time, Wener sees this life as noble and dignified. This is exemplified by her parents’ lives and is thrown into painfully sharp focus by the early death of her hard-working father. Here, her sense of displacement and rootlessness seems to parallel the experiences of Richard Hoggart’s ‘scholarship boy’ (1957). This figure, plucked from the crowd by dint of intelligence, suddenly finds himself between social classes. He is neither at home in the mostly privately educated strata in which he now finds himself at university and thereafter in the upper quartiles of white-collar professions. Nor is he at ease in his old haunts, where the habits of his school friends and family grate.

The triumph of *Different for Girls/Just for One Day* lies in its articulations of profound distaste for the media experience and media circus surrounding pop stardom: that ‘quixotic equation in which fantasy situations become strangely ordinary’ (Wener 2010: 251–2) and that ‘[f]ame is a field of wank’ (2010: 278), respectively. This pop life contrasts sharply with the ordinary struggles of the life explored in Part One. So the ending of the Britpop era offers the chance for escape, and a new life in which the writer is no longer stalked by her doppelgänger but can, some years later and for these memoirs, grapple with the mythology and rewrite it on her own terms.

Jon Stewart: Who is this memoir addressing? The 1980s and 1990s are history now. What does the book teach us about culture and class from that period?

Louise Wener: As a writer, even when you’re writing fiction, you don’t particularly think about who you’re addressing. It stymies creativity if you

think too much about your audience. You can become self-aware or self-conscious in a way that inhibits your writing. You just can't think about it too much.

But, I can say it's *not* really for the kind of people who are obsessed with details about B-sides and that kind of thing. I wanted to write something more inclusive. It's much more of a broad-brush commentary about that time, growing up in the 1980s, for people with a general sense of cultural history rather than a detailed analysis of Britpop.

When my Mum goes shopping in Ilford the following weekend,

'Inbetweeners' is playing on the stereo in Clarks' [shoe shop]. Mum is overcome with pride and tells the shop assistant that it's her daughter singing on the radio. The assistant had seen us on the television. She's so impressed, so offers my Mum a free pack of innersoles.

The innersole moment feels significant and in the light of our debut appearance on *Top of the Pops*, our relationships with our families are subtly changing. My Mum has stopped reminding me that I have useful retail experience from my days working at Mothercare and Jon's Dad is no longer asking him if he's thought about getting a job on a cruise ship. (Wener 2010: 191)

Jon: I could see lots of contrasting themes, what you might call binary opposites: self-doubt and self-confidence, artifice and reality, comedy and sadness, future ambitions and the passage of time, everyday problems and the romance of celebrity, innersoles and glamour. Your cultural reference points are much like that: *popular* and *particular*. Quite precise observations are contrasted with generalized cultural touchpoints that anyone of our age would remember – like *Top of the Pops* on TV or Clarks' shoes and Mothercare in the High Street. Was it constructed that way, or was this just how it came out according to your recollections?

Louise: I think the key to good storytelling is to find commonality. You find things to draw people in, moments that people can identify with. But you can't know what those things are in advance. It's hard to construct them because you don't necessarily know what those things are until after the fact. That section about taping the Top 40 as a child – to me, I felt I was the only person who did that. You imagine it's your own unique experience when every kid in the country was doing it. So, I think, all you can do is write about things you care about. If you're lucky you'll find other people have had those experiences as well, and that will resonate. It's the same if you're writing fiction, or lyrics or whatever. It's finding those moments that resonate.

I didn't overthink it. I didn't go, 'Let's go back and find the things that were culturally relevant at that time.' I suppose I just picked things that mattered to me.

I also grew up with some less general reference points. Marx Brothers' films that my Dad loved. *Paper Moon* [Bogdanovich 1973] was a seminal film in my childhood. It probably wasn't to a lot of people. I said, 'God, this child actor [Tatum O'Neal], she's amazing, and you could be something like that.' I obsessed about that film quite a lot. But it's not the specific film that matters, it's the intention. That's what you try to uncover. It's not the reference points in themselves that count, it's that shared desire or ambition.

Jon: I honestly thought you might have Googled some of the history, to research popular culture in the 1980s.

Louise: I didn't Google anything. It's not contrived in that way. I didn't think about any of that stuff because I think you can't be natural about it if it's not real. You can't make it up. If you did you'd be grafting it on. If you graft those things together, people will read it without really feeling it. If it's not true, I don't think you can expect it to have any forward motion.

I get people saying, 'I'm exactly the same age as you. I recognise everything.' They feel it quite strongly. There's something about allowing other people's input. One of the things I took from teaching writing is that reading is not a passive experience. You don't read fiction, or read a biography even, and do nothing. You have input. You, as a reader, visualize what's going on. You imagine what happens afterwards.

It's a two-way process. It's important to imagine writing as a dialogue, rather than: 'I am just presenting my story to you and you are reading it passively.' It doesn't really work like that. People are inputting their own images at the same time as you're inputting yours. They're creating pictures above and beyond what you're giving them.

We're on *Top of the Pops* again. We're on *This Morning* with Richard and Judy. We're on kids Saturday morning television and in *Smash Hits*, and we're on *The Big Breakfast* being interviewed by two sarcastic glove puppets called Zig and Zag. We go straight from the Zig and Zag interview to the recording studio. Jon lights a restorative spliff. You can see why he'd want to. Sarcastic glove puppets can have that kind of effect on people. They can give you cause to question everything you thought you knew about yourself.

(2010: 243)

Jon: How's it different when you're actually in that picture?

Louise: I almost had to imagine myself as a character to make that work. It's told as a first-person, but in the first-person present. So, it's told as if it's actually

happening. I thought if I put myself back at the beginning of my story, and stepped through it, it would reveal itself to me in a way that maybe even I wasn't expecting. I separated it into the periods that were important to me, and stories that left their mark on me in some way.

Jon: That makes it so immediate, as a reader, because you're also living through it with the writer. You become part of it as the audience. It also allows for moments when you step outside of the narrative and fast-forward, then you step back into it. That creates quite an emotional shift.

Louise: Yes. It's nice that you say that. They were almost like short stories. Vignettes that you don't entirely finish, and you sometimes leave hanging. It just sort of flavours things, so other people can layer their own experience over it. Rather than, like, every 'i' is dotted and every 't' is crossed. It's not like that. It's more like you just give a flavour of things, and that allows people to be pulled into the story.

I think the reason that people warm to those things is because they find truths in them. People are very dismissive of 'chick lit' and young adult fiction – of which some is brilliant, and it's a very hard thing to do well, I think. Those things work because they resonate with an audience who put themselves into the characters.

Someone else is injured. Diid [Sleeper's bass player] has blood spilling out of his head. He has fallen over into a glass table after too much vodka. I am hoping it wasn't rectally administered. Our number one fan, the girl who lives in her car and comes to every single gig we ever do, is sitting alone by the bar with a giant red cake on her lap. The cake is an exact replica of our album cover. It has disturbing little marzipan effigies of the four of us on top of it. We are too scared to eat it. (2010: 258)

Jon: How did it feel to reveal so many personal things? The fruity touring stories, our inter-relationships within the band. It's quite intimate at times.

Louise: I think I could have been much more personal so it doesn't feel that exposing to me. I didn't want to write that sort of book. I was more interested in the notion of this kid from Gants Hill, who came from an environment that didn't lend itself at all to the things we did, and her journey. I thought that was pretty interesting in itself and also probably something that people could identify with.

Jon: That's another one of those binary opposites. From Gants Hill to the West End [of London]. That chapter where you go to the Wag Club, and it's a disappointment, reminded me of *Saturday Night Fever* [John Badham 1977], where they look over at Manhattan from Brooklyn.

Louise: It was a disappointment, it was also like a foreign territory. I didn't have access to it, and when you got there, it was a bit shit. So I was kind of unimpressed. I think I took with me, right through what we did, that sort of refusal to be impressed by the people who thought they were cooler than us. I never bought into that. I think that's part of the narrative of the book as well.

Jon: The other thing I think comes over effectively is that we are trying to break through into that world and come up against all these gatekeeper figures who have to be overcome. We get tiny little glimpses, but then the door slams in our face. Then, finally, we find it, the golden key, and the gate opens ... and what you realize is that everyone on the inside is just as sad and screwed up as everyone on the outside.

Louise: It's weird, because if you are lower middle class and aspirational you sort of get the feeling that you don't belong anywhere or deserve anything. Everyone else is special. 'I can't be the sort of person that could be in a band or write a book. I can't be that sort of person. That's not the people that I know.'

It was so far away, wasn't it? It felt like it was impossible. It would never happen. Then you realize that there isn't any special secret, there is no golden key. There are advantages if you've grown up with arty parents that kind of indulged you. It's helpful, but there's no special secret.

Everyone's on an equal plane, once you get there. That revelation is pleasing ... but also, it's like: 'God, why didn't I do stuff like that earlier? Why didn't I know that, and why don't I necessarily have the confidence that those people have got?' Theirs seemed, sort of, inbuilt – in a way that mine wasn't.

It's an odd mixture. There was this idea that 'it'll never happen, I'll never get there' ... but another sort of feeling of, 'well, why not?'. There was also that incredible confidence that comes with being young, that means you have the guts, nevertheless, to keep knocking at that door. Someone else has done it – they've done it, why not? I'm as good as that person. You have this powerful mixture of, like, 'it's impossible' and 'well, why not?'

Jon: That's another one of those opposites. The personal drive set against the reality of the clock ticking and time passing. You're able to demonstrate that sense of desperation very well, alongside the humour. Being confident enough to be self-deprecating in your memoir is, I think, one of its great achievements.

Louise: The humour was very important. I couldn't look at it humorously until a certain point, so although I got offers to write a memoir earlier, I waited until I could look back at it fondly. Generally, you don't want to see people air their grievances for three hundred pages, so what's the point of that?

The moments that have stayed with me are, generally, the most colourful. So they might also be interesting for other people to read. The things that are the strongest moments, the craziness – like that guy in Boston, Oedipus, with his pet wolf [Edward Hyson, US radio personality, at that time Vice President of Programming for WBCN]. They all represent something, and they stay in your own filing cabinet as memories.

One afternoon I break my curfew and go to buy a packet of biscuits at my local Spar. A boy is buying the paper with my face on the front. He sees me standing next to him in the queue and he just sort of stares and looks confused.

‘What are you doing here?’ he says finally, when he works up the courage to speak. ‘What are you doing, you know ... in *the Spar*?’ (2010: 194)

Jon: As events outpace your control you have a touching encounter with someone who represents yourself from the past. You run into a girl who idolizes you. She cries when you talk to her and you realize this is you when you were younger.

Louise: I think those are the moments when you become very self-conscious because, suddenly, you realize you’ve now got something to live up to. You’re just going about your day and you cross over into this realm where there are these expectations of you. You represent something to someone else, which isn’t at all to do with who you really are.

It has actually to do with them. It’s to do with their narrative. It’s not to do with yours. You’ve then got this weird sort of crossover. How do you break down that barrier? You realize, at that point, that other people’s reactions to you are about their own stories and not yours.

Jon: It’s almost Freudian. You’re writing a memoir while being on the couch. You’re recognizing other people in yourself.

Louise: I think that’s true. Absolutely true. Fiction as well. You look to fiction to illuminate truths for you. Quite often, when you’re writing you don’t recognize what part of yourself you’ve put into the characters until after a book is complete. I think of reality television in the same way because people are looking for, ‘Oh God, she’s doing that, I wouldn’t do that in that situation ... or maybe I would.’ Or, ‘I feel her pain.’ Or whatever it is. That is all about communication and looking for truth, and illuminating the world in some small way, I think.

Jon: Is there a challenge in writing a memoir in terms of which ‘Louise’ you’re writing about?

Louise: When I’m writing I’m much more interested in whether I’ve made a nice sentence, or something humorous. ... something that’s going to communicate

Spend ten seconds in a room with any of the bands poised on the starting line in the early days of Britpop ... They are all of them, every man jack of them, committed to being famous, desperate to get to number one. They would all sell their grannies to get a higher chart position than the other and while they’re all skulking around in their leathers and Adidas, archly pretending ‘the music’s all there is, man’, a thousand backroom deals and deceptions are taking place. (2010: 163)

Jon: It would be extremely churlish to read that book and not enjoy the humour. However, as an insider, I can also see certain accounts being settled.

Louise: But what you have to remember is, everyone has that kind of hassle in regular everyday life. There’s really nothing special about it. People go to work and they hate their bosses, and life is difficult ...

Jon: You’ve been through an experience that not everybody gets to live through. Did you feel also a responsibility to portray that reality? This book is clearly not a celebrity memoir.

Louise: When you’re standing in front of a huge crowd and singing, playing your music and seeing people respond to it, being in a studio seeing a record take shape, they’re extraordinary things. You step utterly outside of your regular existence. However, a lot of what was around it was striking in its ordinariness too. That was one of the things that really surprised me. The music industry is very conservative, traditional in lots of ways that I hadn’t expected. The desperation to put people in packages and boxes.

Jon: There is one memorable section when you methodically lay things out about the supposedly rebellious anti-establishment popular music world. The race for media attention.

Louise: Yes. I just say in careful order some things that need to be said. It’s another of the contradictions: you weren’t allowed to admit or say that you wanted to be commercially successful, even though that desperation was everywhere around you. It was literally seeping out of people’s pores but you couldn’t address it.

Jon: My favourite chapter is the one about being on tour. It’s so well constructed; the reality of the pure chaos that occurs when everything is finally happening.

Louise: I wanted to represent that chaos: that feeling like those days are just coming at you. And there’s barely time to digest them. And touring, it becomes this strange state, the very ordinary repetitiveness is mixed with these exceptional episodes. Drug taking. Bad behaviour. This sensation that you can behave like children and there’s always someone there to clear things up.

with people. I'm not thinking 'who am I writing this as?'. This is my story. All I want is to put it down on paper and make it sing in some way.

After publication people would say to me, 'I was interested you wrote that ...' or 'I was surprised that you admitted to that ...'. I knew, then, they were viewing it through the prism of 'that girl in the Britpop band' rather than me as a writer now.

The only time that you consciously construct an artifice is when you do it as a form of protection. You're doing certain interviews or in certain situations and you need to protect your real self, your private self, because that's not something you want to reveal. That doesn't belong to the journalist concerned, so you need to build a layer of protection.

Jon: But that's also what anybody would do if they're in, say, a job interview rather than a magazine interview. We all behave differently in private and in public.

Louise: Exactly. We're all picking and choosing how we want to be represented all the time. We all conduct ourselves differently in different situations. So, absolutely, it's just a more acute version of what we all do in everyday life.

Jon: This binary of reality and fantasy, everyday life and fame, it seems to be the crux of the book. Everything turns on the sliding doors moment when we get a major label record contract and the point of view is inverted. For the first half you're postulating what it might be like to be successful. Then we become successful and realize it's essentially just the same old nonsense.

Louise: Yes. I also thought it would solve things. I felt it would resolve insecurities that I had, and help me find confidences that I didn't have. Whereas in fact [laughing], it makes them worse. It amplifies all of that stuff rather than helping with it. I was a really shy kid. I thought, being a pop star would change that ... but it doesn't. It makes you more self-conscious and self-aware than you ever wanted to be. I think it's just a more extreme version of most people's journeys. I think if you have this critical interior monologue you look for ways to escape it. Everyone feels that at times. I think mine was a fairly acute version of that.

How does it feel to be a sex symbol? How does it feel to know boys are masturbating over your photograph? Hmmmm. These aren't questions I ask myself all that much. They are questions male music journalists ask me.

All the time ... I don't think they're asking Liam [Gallagher, of Oasis] and Damon [Albarn, of Blur] this kind of question. And I'm pretty sure people are masturbating over their pictures too. (2010: 197)

Jon: You were pretty good at staying level-headed among the chaos and the nonsense and the self-doubt.

Louise: I was quite committed to all of that. That's part of the reason that I didn't lose myself in amongst the drink and the drugs and all that stuff. I felt like I couldn't, like I needed to be at the helm of it and make some rational moves. I felt I was holding on to all these strings at the same time, and if I let go it would all fall apart. Maybe that's because I'm a bit of a control freak [laughs].

Jon: One of the things I've reflected on, in hindsight, is how nasty the music business is. You see people get into serious trouble with drug habits and other issues.

Louise: People die, people have lost their lives.

Jon: Losing money, getting ripped off ... I thought you were remarkably good at holding it all together. Very mature. That's why it's not a misery memoir.

Louise: I think I had this sensation of being at war with everyone at that time. Like I had something to prove. I was very conscious of not letting it – whatever 'it' was – get the better of me. That's also why I needed the distance to write about it.

Jon: How does it feel now that you've got some distance from the memoir itself?

Louise: Actually, I really love it. It's like when you've written songs. In time you forget what you've written. Then you get some distance from it, and go back to it, and you can almost read it like someone else's work. That's really nice. It makes you smile, it makes you feel sad. It actually affects you. You are now the observer, one person away from the experience. It's not something that belongs to you. It's something that you've put out there and now you can let it affect you too which is a nice thing.

I think that's what I like about it. It wasn't thought about too much. I wrote those things just as they came out. They came ready-formed. They do represent to me actually how I felt at that moment. It all came together in a very organic way. I had to trust it, and let it be, and not overthink it.

I'm also proud of it because I wasn't sure if I could do it. In a way, I'm prouder of it than I am of the fiction that I've written. I think memoir is harder to write. In fiction, you can inhabit anything you like and go anywhere it takes you. The memoir is truthful; it's not indulgent. It represents who I am and it's got my personality in there.

Jon: Now, of course, we're another generation on. Have you thought about this at all? 'Here, kids, this is your Mom.'

Louise: I'm really glad it's there, because they can read it – rather than going online and reading other people's approximations of us. I think that is part of the joy of writing. I think that's why I turned to writing after the band, because you spend so much time being written about, with people having views on you and sort of creating you. The idea that you could push all that away by saying: 'Here's the reality.' You get control of it, of every part. It belongs to you

in a way that is very real, in a way that none of that other stuff does, because – essentially – all that other stuff is other people's narratives, not yours. It's very important to have your own narrative put down in the way that you recognize. To find the important little bits and pieces you want to underline. I read old interviews and I don't see myself in those interviews. I just don't recognize myself. Whereas I read that book, and I recognize myself. That's who I am.

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Exploding the myth

Tom Hingley

The initial drive to compose *Carpet Burns* was to set down a record of the most rewarding, artistically successful and publicly lived year of my life in written form; to recount just how it felt to be part of that iconic nineties ensemble who contributed a great deal to popular culture. To construct an understanding of what happened in those pop days and to arrive at a state of emotional control that was lost in the 'fame years' and the come downs that followed the highs and lows of both the band's initial demise in 1995, and then my expulsion from its reformed iteration in 2011. A motivation to create the memoir was, that by creating a written log of those pop years, I might draw a line under that epoch and allow both me and the band's fans to comprehend what actually happened, seal it in a box and get on with the rest of our lives.

Writing the memoir was also driven by a desire to change the way in which fans viewed Inspirational Carpets and myself within it. True, we had already provided a soundtrack to their lives, but now we owed them so much more in the form of a book of explanation of the phenomenon. You see, no band belongs to its members solely: the fan base is equally entitled to share a sense of ownership over the artist, too. For they were the acolytes, the early adopters of the band ethic, catchphrase and zeitgeist, it was them who got beaten up behind the bike sheds at school for having the psychedelic bowl haircut and derided for their underdog music choice. After all these years I owed them an honest evaluation of what our music and band was about.

Another aim of my book was to show by implication how much the internet has changed pop music and fandom through the creation of a new aesthetic reality. It is a study of the old ways pop music functioned for its exponents before technology gave over to new consciousnesses and methods of consuming the arts. It is a potted history of a small piece of fabric of the past in its dying analogue age. It provides a map and critique of memory for those who 'measured out their